

PROTECTING THE EMPIRE'S FRONTIER

*Officers of the 18th (Royal Irish)
Regiment of Foot during Its
North American Service,
1767–1776*

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Introduction

Britain's redcoated soldier is often portrayed as one of the greatest villains in American history. However, just as the years have worn away the edges of the few buildings and monuments that the British left in America, time has ravaged the memory of the individuals who served with King George III's army. A few examples remain notable, such as Earl Cornwallis, who is remembered for surrendering at Yorktown (Virginia) but not for his later successes in India; one of the Howe brothers, Admiral Richard or General William; or even Banastre Tarleton, the dashing but ruthless cavalry commander.

However, unlike soldiers from wars both earlier and later, few if any individual soldiers or regimental officers from the American Revolution have made it into the flow of history. Unfortunately, the caricature that results from obscurity and the fog of time is not favorable, to either the British regular soldier or his American opponent. To appreciate the hurdles that the founders of the United States faced, it is important to view the British Army in terms of the professional career officers and solid brave soldiers of which it was mainly composed. On the whole, the officers were neither the blindly dogmatic martinets nor the foppish wastrels popularly portrayed in American literature and film. These individual officers and men deserve to be more fully included in the annals of history.

In this study, we will look at the officer corps of the British Army through the example of the 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment of Foot. Historian Richard Kohn argued in 1981 that in order to make progress in military

2 history, historians need to do three things. First, they have to seek the “true identity of soldiers” by grounding them in the communities and times from which they came. Second, they have to reconstruct military life at a “greater level of depth and detail.” Third, they should pay more attention to the interaction between the military and the rest of society.¹ This book will follow Kohn’s directives for social historians by providing biographies of each of the officers of the 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment of Foot, including not only their military service but also their lives before and after their military service.

In conducting a review of the officers of the British Army of the period, one must consider the effect of the emerging regimental system. The eighteenth-century British Army was based on the regimental system, which had been established in the 1680s and was further solidified by the numbering of the regiments in 1751. After 1751, a marching regiment (which is what a regular regiment was called) was no longer known only by its colonel’s name; instead, it had an identity that transcended its commanding officer. By the end of the French and Indian War (1755–1763), the regiments were almost uniformly known by their numbers and addressed as such in correspondence, both official and unofficial.

I have chosen the 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment of Foot for a number of reasons. First, elements of the regiment served throughout more of British North America than most other regiments did before the start of hostilities in 1775. Second, most of the surviving common soldiers of the regiment were drafted (i.e., transferred to other regiments) in December 1775, whereas the cadre of officers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and drummers went home; thus the stories of the men who had served in the Royal Irish help tell the stories of many other regiments that continued to serve in America. Third, the records of the regiment are remarkably intact. Unlike many of the regiments that served in America before and during the American Revolution, nearly all of the regimental muster returns and many other documents are extant. The large number of general courts-martial involving the regiment provide additional primary source materials that provide insight into the officers and men of the regiment. Fourth, the regiment has been virtually ignored by historians since 1922, when the regiment was disbanded upon the establishment of the Irish Free State.

The Early History of the Regiment

The 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment of Foot was among the oldest regiments in the British Army when it embarked for America in May 1767 from

Cork Harbor, Ireland. The title “Royal Regiment of Ireland” dates back to 1660, when King Charles II formed it as a regiment of foot guards. The 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment of Foot traced its history to the regiment raised in Ireland on 1 April 1684 under the command of Arthur Earl of Granard. The regiment was initially formed from existing Irish independent companies of pikemen and musketeers. The regiment, at that time called the Earl of Granard’s Regiment, arrived in England in June 1685 and participated in the overthrow of the rebel army at the Battle of Sedgemoor on 6 July 1685. This period in English history was filled with tension between the Protestant English and the primarily Catholic Irish.

The regiment soon returned to Ireland, where in 1686 the Earl of Granard was replaced by his son, Arthur Lord Forbes, as colonel. In 1687, the regiment was encamped on the Curragh at Kildare, where the men were inspected in detail. Any men in the regiment who had relatives who had served in Oliver Cromwell’s forces were discharged at this time. The large majority of Protestant officers and soldiers were also dismissed, and the regiment was brought up to strength with Roman Catholics.

In 1688, the regiment was ordered back to England to protect the Stuart monarchy against the Prince of Orange; it landed at Chester and marched to London. At the direction of Lord Forbes, and in a reverse of the orders of 1687, the Roman Catholics of the regiment were disbanded while the Protestants remained in service. The Roman Catholic soldiers of the regiment were sent to the Isle of Wight as prisoners. Afterward they were transferred to the service of the German emperor. The remaining Protestants, numbering 150, were nearly attacked by a mob until they amazed a local vicar with the perfection of their responses to the Church of England liturgy.²

In May 1689, the regiment marched into Wales and returned to Ireland in the same year as part of the mission to drive King James II from that island. At Boyne, Ireland, on 1 July 1690, the regiment had the honor of serving under the eye of King William III. The Royal Irish continued to fight against the insurgents through the spring of 1692.

In 1692, with Protestant succession to the throne ensured, the regiment was ordered to Flanders (present-day Belgium). Landing at Ostend, the Royal Irish participated in the capture of Furnes and Dixmunde in present-day Belgium. At the end of the year, the Royal Irish reembarked for England. In 1693, the regiment saw action as marines in the fleet. In 1694, the regiment was back in Flanders; it was present at the Siege of Huy and then wintered at Ghent.

The regiment was present at the Siege of Namur (present-day Belgium) in 1695, where the soldiers stormed the walls of the Castle of Namur in the presence of King William III. Since this was the only regiment to reach the top of the castle walls, King William conferred on the regiment the title of “Royal Regiment of Foot of Ireland.” Before that point, the regiment had been known by the name of its colonel. The king also gave it the privilege of bearing his own arms, the Lion of Nassau, upon its colours with the motto *Virtutis Namurcensis Premium* (“the Reward for Valor at Namur”).³ These badges replaced the Cross of St. Patrick that had been previously displayed.⁴

Historian Charles Messenger recounts the participation of the Irish at Namur as follows:

Then, the Irishmen of the later 18th Foot hurled themselves on the defenses with a wild yell. Their king, watching the action through his spyglass, could see little red dots forever going upwards through the gaps in the smoke until at last they gained

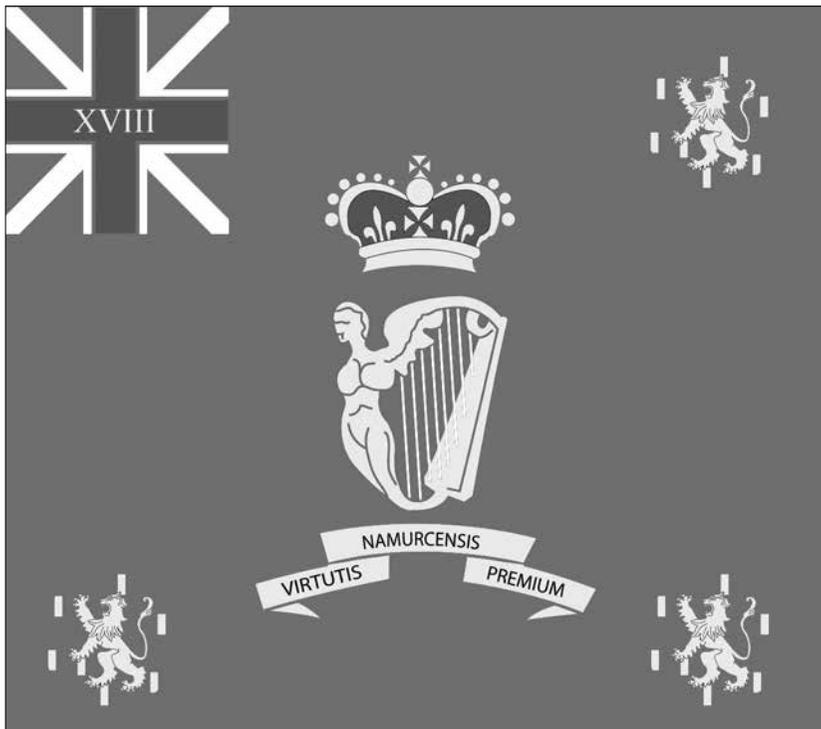


FIGURE I.1 King's colour, 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment, 1751–1801.

Courtesy of Ryan Gale

the summit, only to be knocked off it. Two further days of fierce fighting ensued before the Citadel was finally secured. It was a notable triumph, the first gained by the new British Army in the Cockpit of Europe, and a stark signal to the French that no longer could they take little account of the novices from across the English Channel.⁵

The regiment returned again to Cork, Ireland, in 1697. In 1701, with the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession, the Royal Irish was sent to Holland. In 1702, the Royal Irish stole the limelight in storming the fortress guarding Venlo (modern Venlo, the Netherlands) and driving the defenders over a drawbridge and up a sheer rampart that could only be scaled by clutching onto pieces of grass sticking out of its surface. The French were so amazed by the actions of the Royal Irish that they promptly surrendered.⁶ The Royal Irish fought on the Continent for the next several years, participating in the 1703 Sieges at Huy and Limburg and the battles of Schellenberg (in modern Germany) in 1704, Blenheim (in modern Germany) in 1704, and Ramilies (in modern Belgium) in 1706, among others. In 1709 at Malplaquet (France), the Royal Irish faced a regiment in French service that was also called the Royal Regiment of Ireland. The Royal Irish bested its French rival in extremely heavy and close fighting.⁷

In 1713, the rank of the Royal Irish among the marching regiments of foot was set at 18, taken from the date of its arrival in England in 1688. Though ranked eighteenth, the regiment was truly senior to all but the first six regiments. The regiment's 1685 service in England and its service in Ireland were ignored when setting the ranks of the regiments in order to give preference to English regiments.

In 1718 the regiment embarked for the island of Minorca. The Royal Irish remained there until it was called to help lift the Siege of Gibraltar in 1727 under the leadership of Colonel Sir William Cosby. The Royal Irish returned to Minorca after the siege was lifted and remained there for an additional fifteen years, until 1742.⁸

The Royal Irish returned to England and disembarked at Portsmouth and Southampton in September 1742. The regiment marched to Taunton, and it spent the winter of 1742–1743 dispersed between Taunton and the surrounding towns. In the spring of 1743, the regiment was sent to Exeter and Plymouth. In the spring of 1744, the regiment marched to Richmond and its surrounds. The Royal Irish was reviewed that year by the Duke of

6 Cumberland. Later that year, it was moved to Fareham, where it was responsible for guarding French and Spanish prisoners at Portchester Castle.

Historian John Houlding shows the Royal Irish as marching or being dispersed for 94 percent of the time from 1742 to 1743 and being in four or more grand divisions for 6 percent of the time. Of the twenty-four examples in Houlding's sample, only three regiments—the 21st, 28th, and 36th Regiments of Foot—were dispersed more often.⁹

After the Battle of Fontenoy (in modern Belgium) in May 1745, the regiment was ordered to Flanders along with the 14th Regiment of Foot and a detachment of foot guards. The Royal Irish embarked from Gravesend (England) and disembarked at Ostend. It joined the army under the Duke of Cumberland at Lessines in May. The Royal Irish was then sent to reinforce the fortress at Ostend via Antwerp. Ostend was surrendered, but the garrison was returned to the Allied Army as one of the terms of capitulation. The Royal Irish, along with the rest of the garrison, marched to Mons, where it remained for several weeks opposite a large body of French troops. The French retired upon the arrival of additional allied troops, and the Royal Irish shortly removed to Brussels.

In the fall of 1745, the return of the Jacobite pretender to the throne caused the Royal Irish to be ordered to Williamstadt (modern Willemstad, the Netherlands), where it then embarked for England. The Royal Irish arrived at Gravesend on 5 November 1745 and marched to the main camp at Dartford. The conditions of the camp at Dartford cost the Royal Irish the lives of its surgeon and several other men from disease and exposure.

The Royal Irish embarked at Gravesend again in March 1746, along with the 12th, 16th, and 24th Regiments of Foot. The regiments arrived in Scotland, at Leith, on 19 April 1746, as news of the victory at Culloden reached them. The length of the trip was extended out of a concern about French warships being in the area. The transports were diverted into the Humber, a tidal estuary on the east coast of northern England, until it was determined the report of French warships had been in error. The Royal Irish remained at Leith only briefly before being ordered to Nairn. The regiment landed at Nairn on 1 May 1746 and remained there for three weeks, until it moved to Inverness. It remained with the army at Inverness until ordered to winter quarters around Nairn and Elgin. In the summer of 1747, the regiment marched to Fort Augustus and encamped in the mountains around the fort. It marched to Edinburgh Castle and Stirling for winter quarters in October 1747. During its time in the Scottish

Highlands, the Royal Irish spent its summers building military roads for the movement of troops.

In the spring of 1748, the Royal Irish marched south into England and was stationed at Berwick, Carlisle, and Newcastle. When news of the peace treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle reached England, the Royal Irish was ordered to march to Glasgow, where it embarked for Ireland on 18 February 1749.¹⁰

Upon arriving in Ireland, the Royal Irish were posted to Enniskillen and Ballyshannon for twelve months. Besides the change of location, peace caused a reduction in the Royal Irish's strength to 2 sergeants, 2 corporals, 1 drummer, and 29 private men (the eighteenth-century term for privates) in each of the ten companies. This was a significant reduction of 2 NCOs, 1 drummer, and 41 private men per company. Overall, the Royal Irish was reduced from a strength of 780 other ranks to 340 men, but keeping regiments in Ireland on a lower establishment saved the Crown money.

In the eighteenth-century British Army, *establishment* could mean a couple of different things. Each regiment was assigned to either the British Establishment (troops in England, Scotland, or Wales) or the Irish Establishment (troops in Ireland). Rates of pay differed slightly, and the number of men in a regiment varied depending upon the establishment, with Irish strengths generally lower. The Irish government in Dublin paid for those troops on the Irish Establishment. Those troops on the British Establishment and overseas were paid for by the English, Scots, and Welsh government in London.

The other meaning of *establishment* was the authorized strength of a regiment. Each regiment was made up of a designated number of companies and specific numbers of officers, NCOs, and private men per company. It was not uncommon for two regiments on the British Establishment, for instance, to each have a different authorized strength or establishment that varied from the de facto standard. Briefly around 1770, troops in America were given a unique organizational structure, which reverted to the British Establishment's troop strength in 1771.

In 1750, the regiment was removed to Kinsale, and all ten companies were listed as being quartered at Charles Fort. In 1751, the regiment was removed to Cork. Six companies remained in Cork, and two each were posted to Roscommon and Inchageela. The regiment marched to Waterford in 1752 and to Dublin in 1753. While part of the Dublin garrison, the Royal Irish received new colours. This would have been the first time that the Royal Irish was part of a large force since it reached Scotland in 1746. The other regiments in the Dublin garrison of 1753 consisted of the 1st Horse

8 and the 16th, 25th, and 28th Regiments of Foot. In 1754, the regiment was back at Ballyshannon, with a portion of the regiment at Londonderry.¹¹

In 1755, the war with France began in North America, and the Royal Irish was shipped to England. It landed at Liverpool on 3 April 1755, which was Easter Sunday that year. The regiment was ordered to march to Berwick and to recruit up to the wartime British Establishment of 70 private men per company. Two additional companies were added to the Royal Irish that summer, and the officers' commissions were dated from 12 October 1755.

This huge increase took a toll on the effectiveness of the Royal Irish. The regiment did receive all new drums, firelocks, bayonets, and cartridge boxes in 1755, but it was short 450 swords, 20 waistbelts, and 33 match cases when the regiment was inspected in mid-October while posted near Newcastle, Berwick, and Carlisle. Major General James Stuart inspected the regiment and wrote the following:

Evolutions not so well ~ March and Wheel pretty well ~ Carry their Arms well but are not quite Steady ~ which I apprehend is owing to the great number of new Men, and the few Officers left at Quarters to discipline them ~ the Regiment having had sixteen Parties constantly out Recruiting, And the Companies being separated in different Garrisons.

The Royal Irish listed 2 captains, 1 captain lieutenant, 5 lieutenants, and 7 ensigns as absent recruiting. Captain Robert Walsh and 4 ensigns had been gone on recruiting service for at least a year;¹² 15 sergeants, 15 corporals, 2 drummers, and 22 private men were listed as on recruiting service when the Royal Irish was inspected in October 1755. The regiment had gathered 232 new men but was still 129 men wanting to complete the British Establishment.¹³ (When a regiment was either missing equipment or short of manpower, the number of items or men needed was included on returns as the number wanting.)

Sometime between April and November 1755, the Royal Irish was ordered to assist the civil power, according to historian John Houlding. The nature of the assignment is not clear, but it was most likely to suppress a potential riot or strike. The regiment was ordered to Edinburgh in late 1755, arrived in November, and remained throughout the winter. In February 1756, the two additional companies were incorporated into the newly raised 56th Regiment of Foot along with two extra companies from the 36th Foot.¹⁴ In May 1756, the Royal Irish was reviewed by

Lieutenant General Humphrey Bland and then sent to Fort William with detachments at various highland posts. The regiment was ordered to proceed to Ireland in February 1757. According to *The Quarters of the Army in Ireland*, all ten companies were stationed at Galway in western Ireland, along with three companies of the 26th Foot by August 1757.¹⁵

The Royal Irish remained in Ireland until called to North America in 1767. It was stationed in Dublin by 1766. During its service in Ireland, the Royal Irish was involved in the normal peacetime activities of marching regiments in the British Isles. The regular army was charged with supporting the civil powers in putting down civil unrest and supporting antismuggling efforts along the Irish coasts. However, much of that work was done by dragoon and horse regiments. The Royal Irish's experience in Ireland was most likely similar to its experience in England, where it spent the vast majority of its time dispersed in small detachments. However, the Royal Irish seems to have been situated in larger posts in Ireland than it was in England. While the Royal Irish was stationed in Dublin, it would have had the rare chance to drill as a battalion and in larger formations at Phoenix Park.¹⁶

After the hostilities of the French and Indian War concluded and the Indian uprisings in America were at least calmed to some extent, the British government began to rotate fresh regiments to North America to protect its hard-won colonial gains from France and Spain. Before the French and Indian War, only a few independent companies of soldiers had been stationed in New York and South Carolina. Because of the huge territories gained by the British, including all of Canada and the Ohio Valley, such a small token force would no longer be sufficient to protect the colonists from either foreign invasion or the Indians, who were not content to simply move west and make way for colonial settlement.

General Thomas Gage was appointed to remain in America as the Crown's commander in chief in 1764. His command spanned an immense area, from northern Canada to Florida (recently ceded by the Spanish) and from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi River. To garrison this area, support the civil authorities, protect settlers from Indian attacks, and prohibit unlawful settlement in the lands west of the Appalachians, Gage had approximately five thousand men at his disposal, in the form of ten regiments of foot and a battalion of the Royal Artillery. In late 1766, the War Office determined that the regiments worn out by American service would be replaced by fresh regiments from Ireland, including the Royal Irish, which was then stationed in Dublin.

In January 1767, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland was instructed that the Royal Irish was one of five regiments to be sent to America. The other four were the 10th, 14th, 16th, and 26th Regiments of Foot. The 17th, 27th (Inniskilling), 28th, 42nd (Royal Highland), and 46th Regiments of Foot were rotated home in 1767. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* of 4 June 1767 listed the 16th and 26th Regiments as being sent to New York, the 10th to Canada, and the Royal Irish to Philadelphia.¹⁷

This was part of a broad rotation of forces to bring home the regiments that had fought in America during the French and Indian War and Pontiac's Rebellion and replace them with fresh regiments to garrison the British Crown's expanded North American empire. Four regiments—the 29th, 31st, 52nd, and 59th—had been sent to America in 1766. The 8th (King's), 64th, and 65th Regiments of Foot would be sent to America in 1768. Specifically, in 1767, the Royal Irish was to relieve the 42nd (Royal Highland) Regiment, whereas the 10th, 16th, and 26th Regiments were to relieve the 27th, 28th, and 46th, respectively.¹⁸

The rotation of regiments was introduced in 1749 by the Duke of Cumberland with a focus on the Mediterranean garrisons at Gibraltar and Minorca. His system functioned until the advent of the Seven Years' War (1755–1763) caused it to break down. Part of the reason for the rotation was the negative effect on both officers and men of being left for decades on overseas stations. An extreme example was the 38th Foot, which was posted to the West Indies in 1716 and did not return to Ireland until 1765. Because of the lack of a rotation system, the Royal Irish spent nearly twenty-four years at Minorca before returning to England in 1742. According to military historian John Houlding, regiments serving abroad for long periods suffered from a variety of maladies, including mismanagement, disease, privation, and a dearth of recruits. The Duke of Cumberland's system of rotation was meant to ameliorate these concerns.¹⁹

In 1764, Secretary of War Welbore Ellis outlined a plan for a general fixed rotation between the British Isles and North America. A similar plan was put in place for the Caribbean Islands as well. The rotation plan for America was to replace thirteen regiments from 1765 through 1768. This would leave only two of the wartime regiments still in American after the rotations were complete.

For example, in 1773, two regiments of foot were moved from North America to the West Indies along with a regiment from Ireland. Then a regiment from Scotland was sent to Ireland, and another regiment was

sent from Ireland to America. A regiment from England was also sent to America, and two from America returned to England. Scotland had two regiments of horse and two of foot go to England in exchange for four regiments of horse and two of foot. Gibraltar and Minorca's garrisons saw no transition in 1773, but Gibraltar had rotated a regiment back to England in 1772. Minorca would send two regiments back to England in 1775.

However, the rotation system broke down again by 1775 as a result of the hostilities in America. In 1774, four more regiments of foot were sent to America, but because of the looming crisis, the four regiments originally planned to be rotated home remained in America. In 1775, an additional ten regiments of foot and one of light dragoons were sent from Ireland to North America. In 1776, fourteen more regiments of foot were sent from Ireland to America, three regiments of foot embarked from Scotland, and three of foot and one of light dragoons embarked for America from England.²⁰

As early as the mid-1760s, when a regiment was rotated home, its men were allowed to volunteer to remain in America or were sometimes transferred to regiments that remained in America. Many of the men in the regiments sent home from America in 1775 were drafted to other regiments rather than being sent home. This process of transferring men from one regiment to another was known as *drafting*, and the individuals transferred were referred to as *draughts*. Although officers, NCOs, and drummers benefited from the rotation system, private men generally did not; those still fit for active service were transferred into regiments remaining in America. This process was decidedly unpopular with the private men, so the established strength of the regiments on the British and Irish Establishments was standardized in 1770, which helped to somewhat decrease the need to draft. The Royal Irish received a large group of draughts in this fashion from the 9th Regiment of Foot in 1773 when that regiment stopped in Philadelphia on its way home from being rotated out of the West Indies.²¹

When the 8th (King's) Regiment of Foot was rotated to England from Canada in 1786, the men still fit for service were drafted into the 31st Foot, which was to remain in Canada. Several of those men, including one named Richard McDead, had originally come to America with the Royal Irish in 1767. They were then drafted into the 8th Foot at Detroit when the Royal Irish's Illinois detachment was rotated to England in July 1776. Some of the same men were drafted into the 31st Foot in 1785, when the 8th (King's) Foot was rotated to Britain from Canada. McDead was finally returned home by the 31st Regiment of Foot and

12 discharged in May 1788 at Portsmouth. McDead had served overseas for just over twenty-one years.²²

An annual rotation plan was put back in place in 1787 for Britain, Gibraltar, Ireland, the West Indies, and Canada. Despite the rotation plan, however, the Royal Irish was left at Gibraltar for ten years, from 1783 through 1793, when it embarked for Toulon, France.

While in Ireland, regiments were placed on the Irish Establishment rather than the British Establishment, which consisted of troops in England and Scotland. As a cost-saving measure, regiments on the Irish Establishment were smaller in the number of private men per company. This allowed the Crown to keep more regiments available for service while still moderating the cost. In Ireland in the 1760s, regiments of foot were limited to twenty-eight private men per company. When a regiment was ordered on foreign service or returned to Britain, the number of private men per company was increased to forty-five.

In 1767, this meant that the Royal Irish needed to find another 153 private men. To bring the Royal Irish up to full strength on the American Establishment, it used two methods: transfers from regiments not ordered overseas, and the recruitment of new men. The Royal Irish and the other three regiments bound for America received transfers of men from other regiments, including forty-nine private men from the 50th Regiment of Foot. Drafting from regiments in this manner caused many problems for the drafted regiments. The major of the 93rd Foot, which was raised in 1760 and disbanded in 1763, experienced drafting several times as the regiment was “turned out into the Barrack Yard, and all the Best men picked out of it.”²³ The Royal Irish also sent out recruiting parties across Ireland to help fill up the regiment. The regiment marched from Dublin to Cork Harbor. In addition to the officers and men of the regiment, an unrecorded number of women and children also embarked with it.

The regiment, consisting of nine companies, left Irish soil on 19 May 1767 aboard the transports *AmityBenediction*, *AmityAdmonition*, and *Liberty*.²⁴ The Royal Irish arrived in Philadelphia on 10 July 1767 and disembarked at five o'clock in the evening on 11 July after the men had been examined by the harbor master for signs of ill health. The regiment was temporarily quartered in the Second Street Barracks upon its arrival.²⁵

The barracks, also known as the North Liberties Barracks, were completed in approximately 1756, a short distance north of Philadelphia proper. The barracks occupied a large block from Second to Third Streets

and from St. Tamany Street to Green Street. The barracks were two stories high and were made of brick, with a portico on the inside of the square. The barracks themselves formed a C shape, with the opening on the Second Street side, which was closed off by a palisade fence. The middle of the C was occupied by a large three-story brick officers' quarters that faced Third Street, on the west side of the property, and had a cellar underneath. A large parade ground filled the center of the grounds.

According to secondary sources, the barracks were designed to be occupied by three thousand men. Historian John Jackson was uncertain that the barracks could hold that many soldiers. He identified St. Tamany Street as Tammany Street. The St. Tamany Street side is also identified as Noble Street or Bloody Lane by other secondary sources. Some portion of the Royal Irish remained posted in these barracks from July 1767 until the regiment left Philadelphia in September 1774. After the American Revolution began, the barracks were often referred to as the British Barracks. The barracks were torn down in 1789, but the officers' quarters remained until 1869. That building was used as a police station and mayor's office before becoming the Commissioners Hall for the Northern Liberties. It was torn down in approximately 1869 to make way for the Northern Liberties Grammar School.²⁶

In July 1774, Major Isaac Hamilton wrote to the Pennsylvania Assembly about the need for inspection and repairs to the barracks:

Sirs:

I take the liberty to inform you that his Majesty's troops under my command stand much in need of the aid of the Legislature of this Province; their bedding, utensils, and apartments require inspection and repairs. I have had the pleasure of knowing this Barrack these seven years, and shall always be happy in declaring that no troops have been better supplied, nor any applications from commanding officers more politely attended to that here; from which I am encouraged to hope, that the House of Assemble will, during this sitting, order the necessary inspection, and afford such a supply as their generosity and judgment shall dictate. I have the honour to be, with great respect,

Your most obedient humble servant,

Isaac Hamilton²⁷

14 In October 1767, the regiment was inspected by General Thomas Gage, and, among other tactics, the regiment “represented a Bush Fight, which gave great Satisfaction to some Thousands of Spectators,” foreshadowing of the regiment’s assignment to the western frontier. According to George Buttricke, the regiment’s quartermaster, while in Philadelphia, the officers spent their evenings in the company of Madeira and women. The regimental band played at the commencement ceremonies of Philadelphia College in 1767, and the officers mingled with colonial society.²⁸

The splendid days at Philadelphia were soon at an end. Gage wrote the following to Lieutenant Colonel John Wilkins of the Royal Irish on 5 May 1768:

Great Regulations are wanted to be made at the Illinois, nothing seems to be on a proper footing, and some sensible and discreet Officer is absolutely necessary for that Post to put the King’s Affairs in order.

Your Regiment will be divided between Ft. Pitt and Fort Chartres, Which would you choose for yourself? The Illinois was one of the Governments talked of, tho’ I find the Affair on some account on those was postponed. If you like it, your friends may have time to solicit such a thing for you. I shall recommend very strongly that the Officer Commanding may be appointed Governor, with some Judiciary power. Let me know your sentiments If you determine on that post for your command I shall have a great deal to communicate to you on the Subject.²⁹

The Royal Irish were given formal orders to relieve the 34th Regiment of Foot in the far western garrisons at Fort Pitt in western Pennsylvania and in Illinois on 21 May 1768.

Seven companies, approximately 371 officers and men, of the Royal Irish began a journey from Philadelphia to Fort Chartres. Hostile frontiersmen hid their horses and carts from the soldiers in need of cartage on the first leg of the journey that took the Royal Irish to Fort Pitt. Some of the teamsters who did hire out to the Royal Irish were still appealing to the Pennsylvania Colonial Assembly several years later to receive the wages they were owed.³⁰

When the regiment reached Fort Pitt, it prepared for the trip down the Ohio River to Illinois and stopped there long enough to hold several courts-martial for desertion and theft. Several soldiers of the 34th Foot,

the regiment then stationed in the Illinois Country and at Fort Pitt, were found guilty, as was Patrick Brannon of General John Sebright's Company of the Royal Irish. Because of the serious nature of Brannon's crimes, he was sentenced to death. General Gage endorsed the sentence and ordered a platoon of the Royal Irish to carry out the sentence.³¹

In late 1767, a cadre of officers, NCOs, and soldiers had been sent to Fort Pitt under Captain Charles Edmonstone, the Royal Irish's senior captain, with a company of recruits for the 34th Foot.³² Edmonstone's detachment of the Royal Irish at Fort Pitt numbered approximately 40 before July 1768 and 103 after Lieutenant Colonel Wilkins passed through in late July 1768.³³ Ensign Thomas Batt, along with Sergeant Edmond Sutton and Corporal Charles Insley, moved a squad of recruits for the 34th Regiment to Fort Pitt in the late summer of 1767, leaving Philadelphia on August 26. They also appear to have escorted a cache of provincial arms that were to remain in store at the post. Additional soldiers of the Royal Irish served at Fort Pitt before the arrival of the main body of the regiment under Lieutenant Colonel Wilkins.³⁴

Upon arrival at Fort Pitt, five companies, including the grenadier company of the Royal Irish, prepared to descend the Ohio River for the thousand-mile trip to Fort Chartres. The five companies departed on 20 July 1768, leaving two companies in garrison at Fort Pitt under the command of Captain Edmonstone. Major Hamilton remained in garrison at Philadelphia with the remaining two companies.

The five companies traveled down the Ohio River to its junction with the Mississippi River. They fought nature, inexperience, and hostile Indians before arriving at Fort Chartres. The British Army had experienced some difficulties in trying to enforce its sovereignty over the Illinois Country. The Illinois Country was gained by victory over the French and Spanish in the French and Indian War, but it took several attempts to reach the French settlements in Illinois and take actual control of Fort Chartres and the surrounding villages. The 22nd Foot had attempted to reach the Illinois Country by going upriver from Louisiana, but it was turned back by Indians near Natchez. Troops were not sent down the Ohio River until the Indian agents of the British were able to negotiate safe passage in 1765. The primary reasons for establishing a British troop presence in the Illinois Country were to control the fur trade and ensure that the furs reached London and not a French or a Spanish port, maintain favor with the Indian tribes in the Illinois Country who were protecting their

16 hunting lands, and deter the French or the Spanish from trying to retake the Illinois Country.³⁵

The strong current of the Mississippi River forced Wilkins to send to Fort Chartres for empty bateaus (shallow draft canoes like the vessels favored by French traders in the Illinois Country) to help lighten the load of the boats going upstream. The companies arrived at the once-French fort on 5 September 1768. The 34th Regiment of Foot had renamed the French fort

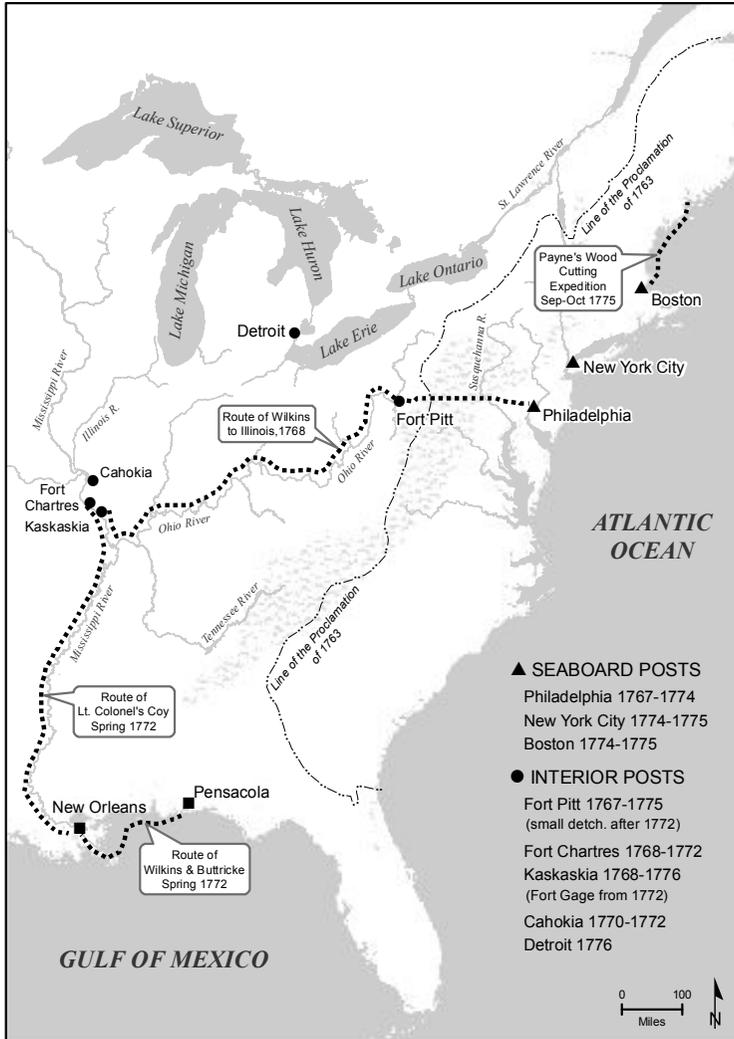


FIGURE I.2 Postings of the Royal Irish Regiment, 1767–1776.

Map prepared by Brian Edward Balsley, GISP

Fort Cavendish after its colonel, but throughout the time it was garrisoned by the Royal Irish, it was known as Fort Chartres. The Royal Irish formally relieved the 34th Foot on 7 September 1768.³⁶

Immediately, the Royal Irish began fighting the unforgiving enemy of disease. Fever struck the garrison at Fort Chartres in late September 1768. By the end of October, three officers, twenty-five private men, twelve women, and fifteen children had died. At one point, the garrison, over 250 strong, had only a corporal and six private men for guard duty. According to Quartermaster Buttricke, by February 1769, fifteen more men and “almost all of the Women and thirty Seven Children” were buried in Illinois.³⁷

In January 1770, Gage wrote to the Earl of Hillsborough, secretary of state for the colonies, that the troops at Fort Chartres were again sick, although only one officer had died that year. The weakened garrison gave Indians the opportunity to cross to the eastern bank of the Mississippi and alarm the English settlers.³⁸

The Royal Irish faced a growing hostility from the Indians. A band of warriors killed three whites near Cahokia, requiring Wilkins to dispatch a detachment from Fort Chartres to that village.³⁹ Incursions by the Indians continued. The Kickapoos killed three or four more whites in Illinois, and that was followed by the destruction of a plantation within six miles of Fort Chartres in which two men, one white and one black, were murdered. Another white man was taken prisoner.⁴⁰ A grenadier, John Knight, was killed in March 1772 within sight of the detachment at Cahokia while tending fields.⁴¹

Besides being threatened by the Indians, the remote garrison at Fort Chartres had to contend with the Spanish. Gage wrote to Hillsborough that another company of the Royal Irish arrived safely at Fort Chartres in August 1770. This company was sent to reinforce the garrison against a potential Spanish threat. The British command ordered the Royal Irish in Illinois to train to fight in the woods in anticipation of a Spanish attack. The Spanish commander at St. Louis was rumored to be bringing three hundred Spanish soldiers upriver from New Orleans in 1770; although the Spanish soldiers never arrived, the Royal Irish continued to anticipate their arrival throughout its posting at Fort Chartres.⁴²

The Royal Irish regiment was augmented in 1770 by an additional battalion company when the regiments in America were asked to increase their recruiting efforts because of the anticipation of hostilities with Spain as a result of the Falkland Island Crisis. The Royal Irish appears to have

18 taken this direction to form an additional company simply as a means of managing the recruits or as a misunderstanding of orders. At least a portion of the recruits for the Royal Irish were gathered from Maryland. The 26th, 29th, and 31st regiments and the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 60th regiment also increased their recruiting efforts in North America at the time. According to Gage, both the Royal Irish and the 26th Foot were able to recruit quite a few Americas at the time.⁴³

By 1771, some of the tension between the Spanish and the British had dissipated. Don Piernas, the Spanish commander at St. Louis, visited Fort Chartres on 5 June 1771 as Lieutenant Colonel Wilkins's guest. He was received with a cannon salute that used twenty-eight pounds of powder.⁴⁴ The Spanish garrison at St. Louis appears to have numbered around fifty soldiers throughout the period.⁴⁵

In the spring of 1771, the ad hoc 10th company became the light infantry company when light companies were added to all the marching regiments. According to historian Tony Hayter, the reestablishment of the light companies was done partially in response to the Falkland Island Crisis with Spain. The light company was to consist of one captain, two lieutenants, two sergeants, one drummer, three corporals, and thirty-eight private men in common with the other companies of the regiment. In order to cover the cost of the light infantry company, the other companies of the regiment were reduced from forty-five to thirty-eight private men each.⁴⁶ The regimental agent paid the War Office one pound and one shilling on 31 May 1771 for the warrant to raise the light company. This company spent the winter of 1771 at Fort Pitt. In the spring of 1772, the light infantry company, along with Major Hamilton, who had been ordered to take command at Fort Chartres the previous year, went down the Ohio River to Illinois. The company arrived at Fort Chartres in April.⁴⁷

It is unclear why Major Hamilton marched the newly formed light company to Fort Pitt instead of taking his own more seasoned company. According to Captain Benjamin Chapman's letter to General Gage, Major Hamilton took the light company, which was made up nearly entirely of new recruits, and marched them west without arms. Major Hamilton planned to arm the company with the stores that were at Fort Pitt for potential provincial use. However, Gage had ordered that the weapons stored for provincial use were not to be used by the Royal Irish. Captain Chapman explained the arms situation to Gage in the following report from his post at Philadelphia:

With respect to your Excellency's remarks on Major Hamilton's marching from this place with your Arms, & c. I am to observe that he could not muster more than 11 stand without disarming his own company here, he therefore proposed furnishing himself if possible at Ft. Pitt. This I am since informed he has done out of the store at that place, but that those Arms are much out of Order & want Bayonets. They are I presume the Provincial Arms that were brought there by Lieut. Batt in March 1768 for I know of none other at least belonging to the 18th Regt.⁴⁸

Sensing the need for more seasoned soldiers in Illinois, Hamilton orchestrated a wholesale transfer of men between the companies at Fort Pitt and the new light company before he went down the Ohio River. The recruits were for the most part left at Fort Pitt, and men from Edmonstone's and Johnson's companies became light infantry.

Captain Hugh Lord's Detachment in Illinois

On 1 December 1771, the British cabinet concluded that Fort Chartres should be abandoned. General Gage, the British commander in chief in North America, received this news in New York in February 1772.⁴⁹ This information was sent by General Gage to Fort Pitt to be forwarded to Lieutenant Colonel Wilkins, the commander of the Royal Irish in Illinois. It did not arrive in time to stop Major Hamilton's embarking for Illinois via the Ohio River on 28 February 1772.⁵⁰ Major Hamilton and Captain Hugh Lord arrived at Fort Chartres only in time to see its abandonment by British authorities.

Gage ordered Wilkins to "raise Ft. Chartres without delay in the cheapest and most effectual manner."⁵¹ A small temporary garrison was to be left at Kaskaskia, the largest village in the Illinois Country, consisting of a captain, three subalterns (ensigns and lieutenants), two sergeants, and fifty rank and file. The surgeon or his mate was to be left with the detachment, along with the artillery and stores absolutely necessary for the defense of Kaskaskia, while the rest of the troops, artillery, and stores were to be sent away. The troops would receive orders when they arrived at Fort Pitt.

Lieutenant Colonel Wilkins left for New York via New Orleans, leaving Major Hamilton to carry out these orders. Hamilton left Captain Lord in command of the Kaskaskia garrison, where he had under

20 his command the Royal Irish's light company, which had only recently arrived in Illinois, and half of the lieutenant colonel's company, which had been in Illinois since September 1768. The other half of Wilkins's company went downriver with Wilkins and Quartermaster Buttricke as an escort. The regiment's surgeon, Thomas Thomasson, remained with the Illinois garrison.

Lord's Indian problems began before the rest of the regiment had even departed, so when the remainder of Wilkins's company returned to Kaskaskia from New Orleans, it was added to the garrison instead of continuing on to Fort Pitt.

While Major Hamilton was preparing the majority of the Royal Irish to return to Fort Pitt, unfriendly Indians engaged Lord's men. Lord's detachment killed one of the chiefs and wounded two braves.⁵² A band of Chickasaw attacked the house of James Rumsey, a Kaskaskia trader, in May 1772. Rumsey, a British subject and former army officer, called upon Lord for assistance. Lord sent an officer with a platoon of men to chase the Indians away, but the Indians soon returned and killed the trader's slave. At that point, the Royal Irish returned fire, killing several of the braves and taking a prisoner. A corporal and six men were left to guard the store.⁵³

One of Captain Lord's immediate problems was inadequate defensive works. Before Hamilton had started back to Fort Pitt, Lord had utilized soldier labor to start to repair the defenses at Kaskaskia. Although Kaskaskia had been garrisoned by the British since the 34th Foot had been in Illinois, the fort was in a state of disrepair. The defenses, in Lord's words, were "no better than those of every other house in the Village."⁵⁴ When he reported this to Major Hamilton, he was ordered to build a picketed fort, which he began immediately. As late as June 1774, Lord still had a sizable portion of his men involved in the "King's Work at Fort Gage," as the Kaskaskia garrison was sometimes known.⁵⁵

The troops remained at Fort Gage through 1775. Gage's return of forces in North America on 19 July 1775 listed two companies at "Kaskaskias Illinois Country" with seventy-six men.⁵⁶

In April 1776, the troops were ordered to Detroit to enlarge the garrison at that post in anticipation of a rebel attack. The troops left Kaskaskia in May 1776. When the detachment arrived at Detroit, Lord took temporary command of that post, since he was senior to the other officers present.⁵⁷ Lord appointed a former French officer, Philippe de Rocheblave, to



FIGURE I.3 Map of North America, 1775.

Map prepared by Brian Edward Balsley, GISP

command the Kaskaskia militia and serve as commander in Illinois in his absence. Rocheblave surrendered Kaskaskia to George Rogers Clark in 1778 and was taken as a prisoner to Williamsburg, Virginia.⁵⁸

Atlantic Seaboard Service

The grenadier and four battalion companies had returned to Philadelphia via Fort Pitt in the fall of 1772 under the direction of Major Hamilton.⁵⁹ Major Edmonstone, commanding the Royal Irish's companies at Fort Pitt, was ordered to withdraw from Fort Pitt as well.⁶⁰ Major Edmonstone's companies arrived in Philadelphia in December 1772 after selling off most of the king's supplies and leaving a corporal's guard to protect the remaining material and assist in communicating with Captain Lord's garrison in Illinois. The detachment at Fort Pitt, approximately five men, appears to have remained there well into 1775.⁶¹ This left eight companies of the Royal Irish in garrison in Philadelphia together with a company of the Royal Artillery in December 1772. A detachment of the 47th Regiment of Foot arrived in Philadelphia in the middle of 1773.

The officers of the Royal Irish moved easily back into Philadelphia society. The regimental band was again a key piece of the commencement ceremonies for Philadelphia College in July 1773. In late October or early November 1773, General Gage again reviewed the Royal Irish at Philadelphia. This time, however, the regiment was only eight companies strong and under the command of Major Hamilton.⁶²

It would have been at this time that James Wilkinson, later the commanding general of the U.S. Army, encountered a soldier for the first time in his life. It happened that the soldier was a member of the Royal Irish. Wilkinson wrote the following:

On approaching the gate, for the first time in my life, I beheld a man under arms, in complete uniform; he was a centinel on post, whose appearance riveted my attention; after surveying him attentively from head to foot, I passed without obstruction and entered the barrack yard, where the first, and I may say only, object that struck my eyes was the troops on parade at open order, which exhibited a more impressive spectacle than I had ever seen.⁶³

According to Wilkinson, four of the companies of the Royal Irish were quartered at Philadelphia's North Liberty Barracks at that time. The fall of 1774 saw the Royal Irish marching from Philadelphia to Elizabethtown, Perth, and Amboy, New Jersey. On 1 December 1774, the regiment was posted with five companies under Major Hamilton in New York, with three companies under Captain John Shee in Boston, and with two companies under Captain Lord at Kaskaskia.⁶⁴

In Boston, the three companies under Captain Shee were ordered into the 3rd Brigade under General Valentine Jones. Shee's command was joined with two companies of the 65th Foot, and the resulting ad hoc battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Bruce of the 65th Foot on 15 November 1774. This battalion grew to nine companies in May 1775 after four additional companies of the 65th Foot were ordered to Boston in April 1775. They embarked from Halifax by 30 April 1775. The original two companies of the 65th Foot were Captain George Sinclair's light infantry company and Captain Jonathan MacKay's battalion company. The companies of Captains Molby Brabazon, William Compton, Archibald K. Gordon, and William Hudson were the four that were added

in May 1775. Of the additional four company commanders, only Captain Compton appears to have been present at Boston.⁶⁵

Because it was present in Boston, the grenadier company participated in the march to Lexington and Concord. During this engagement, the grenadiers had one man killed, four wounded, and one captured. John Russell, the man who was killed, had been in the grenadier company since arriving in America in July 1767. He was present at every muster. He was never reported sick, and no discipline problems were recorded. He was a great loss to the Royal Irish.

The Royal Irish recorded the following equipment lost or damaged as a result of the fighting of 19 April 1775: 4 firelocks lost, 1 firelock broken, 3 bayonets lost, 2 pouches with shoulder belts lost, 2 water bottles lost, and 2 slings lost.⁶⁶

It was recorded in a letter between officers that Captain Shee had been wounded severely enough in action that Lieutenant Bruere had to take command of the grenadier company sometime during the retreat from Concord. Shee, however, was not listed as wounded in any official returns.

The man who was captured was Samuel Lee, the Royal Irish's master tailor. The reports on Lee's capture vary greatly. He was alternatively wounded, sick of fighting, or simply a deserter. The evidence does not shed any light on the specifics of his capture. The report that a rebel snuck up on him is plausible, because he was hard of hearing, if not nearly deaf. He remained in the area, opened a tailoring business, married, and raised a family. Either Lee himself or time and Victorian romanticism portray him as an officer of the 10th Foot in some secondary accounts of his capture or desertion.⁶⁷

The grenadiers also fought at the costly Battle of Bunker Hill. The Royal Irish left three private men dead on the field: James Flynn, William Serles, and Thomas Smith. Flynn and Serles were also long-serving soldiers who had been with the Royal Irish since before the regiment embarked for America. However, neither had been in the grenadier company for more than a year. Smith was a soldier who joined the Royal Irish in May 1773 from the 31st Foot. He may have been a deserter who turned himself in during an amnesty period. Lieutenant William Richardson was shot in the leg while mounting the rebel earthworks, which ended his participation in the battle that day. Seven rank and file were reported as wounded. Several of these men died in early July, making

24 Bunker Hill more deadly to the Royal Irish than was reported in the casualty returns.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the companies in New York City evacuated the town and sought safety on HMS *Asia* on 6 June 1775. During the evacuation, the troops were confronted by a mob of rebellious colonists. Some offered the men up to fifty pounds to desert on the spot, whereas others threatened the Royal Irish with violence. The regiment's baggage was taken along with the regiment's spare arms. The locks of the spare arms had been removed the night before and buried in the barracks floor, so the mob got nothing more than musket barrels and stocks.

After the events of 6 June, Lieutenant Alexander Fowler accused Captain Benjamin C. Payne, who commanded the five companies that day, of cowardice before the enemy. Payne was found not guilty, but the trial exacerbated a rift between the two factions of officers within the Royal Irish that had begun while the regiment was in Illinois and that was further complicated by the arrival of Chaplain Newburgh, who was a polarizing figure within the regiment. This rift had previously caused Newburgh to be the subject of a court-martial. Fowler was charged with bringing false charges against Payne. Lieut. Fowler was found guilty and sentenced to be cashiered. General Gage showed leniency and allowed Fowler to sell his commission.⁶⁹ (When an officer was cashiered, he was not simply discharged from the army, but was unable to sell his commission, effectively fining him the cost of his commission. Fowler is not the only example of a cashiered officer to be allowed by a compassionate commander in chief to sell out.)

At this point, Surgeon's Mate John Linn tendered his resignation. Major Hamilton viewed it as tantamount to desertion, which indeed it was, since Linn was commissioned as the surgeon of the 1st New York Regiment, a regiment of the American Congressional Army, within the month.

Many of the soldiers who had families with them disembarked on Governor's Island, in the harbor of New York City, while most of the single men remained on HMS *Asia* until the arrival of a transport to remove them to Boston.

The companies from New York arrived in Boston without further incident, making eight companies in Boston by July 1775. These eight companies numbered only 209 officers and men instead of the 398 authorized.⁷⁰ Sometime in late June or early July, the Royal Irish separated

from the 65th Foot and operated again as an independent unit. Major Hamilton, who was not held in high esteem by either General Gage or Lord William Barrington, the secretary at war, retired at the end of July; thus Captain Shee was the commander of the Royal Irish during its final months in Boston. Captain Chapman took over temporary command of the grenadier company.

The only significant service the Royal Irish saw after Bunker Hill was as part of a woodcutting expedition under Captain Payne to Penobscot, Maine. Payne's command included detachments of the Royal Irish under John Peter DeLancey and of the newly formed Royal Fencible American Regiment. The expedition left Boston in October and returned in early November 1775.

The Royal Irish's service in North America was all but over when General Gage was given orders to draft the regiment to the 59th Foot in August 1775.⁷¹ The officers, sergeants, drummers, and the private men who were not drafted returned to England to begin the process of recruiting anew. Officers' servants, bandsmen, and private men to be discharged as worn out or disabled were not transferred to other regiments.

The eight companies of the Royal Irish in Boston were drafted on 5 December 1775, leaving only the two companies in Illinois on American soil.⁷² The officers, sergeants, drummers, and remaining men of the regiment returned to England and were posted at Dover Castle, Kent, in February 1776, where they began recruiting a new body of men. A number of men were also discharged in the early months of 1776.

Fifty-eight men of Captain Lord's detachment of the Royal Irish were drafted into the 8th (King's) Regiment of Foot on 8 July 1776 at Detroit. Those men served in that regiment until it was relieved from the northern Great Lake posts in 1786. Buttons from the Royal Irish have been found at Fort Michilimackinac in Michigan. This indicates that at least some of the former Royal Irish were sent to that post. Others most likely remained at Detroit, and some may have been sent to Fort Niagara. Several men from the Royal Irish were captured at Vincennes, while serving in the 8th (King's) Regiment of Foot in the battles against George Roger Clark's Illinois Regiment in 1779.

The men in the eight companies of the Royal Irish drafted at Boston were the first draughts of the war. By the end of the American Revolution, twelve regiments would be wholly drafted. A week later, in December 1775, the 59th Foot was drafted. In 1776, the 6th, 50th, and

26 65th Regiments were drafted, along with the two remaining companies of the Royal Irish. In 1777, the 14th Regiment was drafted, and in 1778, the 10th, 45th and 52nd Regiments of Foot and the 16th Light Dragoons were drafted after Howe's army returned to New York City from Philadelphia. The 26th Foot was drafted in 1779, and the 16th Foot was drafted in 1782.⁷³

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