Kilkenny Colonels and Their Regiments in the Jacobite War, 1689-91

Harman Murtagh

Introduction

From 1689 to 1691, for the only time in history, Ireland was an important theatre in a major European war. For three years large armies, directed by generals of European reputation and comprised of soldiers of many nationalities, conducted a series of sieges, pitched battles and other military operations throughout the island.

The Irish government, under the earl of Tyrconnell, remained loyal to the deposed King James II after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The small Irish army, recently catholicised by Tyrconnell, was massively expanded to over 40,000 men. A generous measure of French support was made available by King Louis XIV to provide the arms, equipment and leadership it lacked, and James himself came to Ireland to lead his 'Jacobite' army in person. Louis's arch-enemy, William of Orange, who had replaced James on the English throne, responded by committing a large army to defeat the Irish Jacobites. Their resistance turned out to be more tenacious than was at first anticipated and the campaign in Ireland seriously hampered the war of William and his allies against Louis on the Continent. The impact of the crisis on Kilkenny has already been narrated by the late J.G. Simms in this journal. The focus of this essay is on the considerable manpower contribution the county made to the Jacobite war effort.

The post-Cromwellian settlement had greatly altered the traditional pattern of land ownership in County Kilkenny. Of the great estates, the principal survivors of the old order were the duke of Ormond and his relations: the Galmoy and the Paulstown Butlers in the barony of Gowran, the Mountgarret Butlers in Galmoy and the Kilcash/Garryricken Butlers in Kells. Otherwise, the only surviving pre-Cromwellian landowners were the Graces in Crannagh and a handful of smaller proprietors, such as Edward FitzGerald of Cluan, Edmond Blanchfield of Blanchfieldstown,
Robert Walsh of the Castlehale family, James Bryan of Jenkinstown and some others. Dramatic although the change undoubtedly was, the extent of its immediate economic and social impact can be exaggerated. Many of the dispossessed gentry seem to have remained in occupation of their old lands and even their old homes as tenants of the new proprietors. Thus, in 1689, Ballybur continued to be the home of Thomas Comerford, even though his family had forfeited the property. Similarly James Shortall resided at Kilrush, a part of Ballylarkin which the Shortalls had lost in its entirety. Amongst other examples, the Cantwells continued at Cantwell’s Court, the Sweetmans at Castleve and the Denns at Grenan. Adversity had obliged some city families, such as the Rothes and Shees, to refocus on their original vocations in business, administration, law and medicine, occupations which, while less prestigious and secure, were probably more lucrative than that of country gentleman. There was little new settlement apart from the 400 new landowners, not all of whom were resident. Thus, there was continuity as well as change. In the late 1680s County Kilkenny remained amongst the most developed and heavily populated regions in the country, whose older Roman Catholic inhabitants retained sufficient economic strength and vitality to play a full role in the final, epic struggle for the preservation of their civilisation. In common with their coreligionists throughout Ireland, of both Gaelic and Norman ancestry, they saw James as their best hope of reversing a century of losses to the newer protestant settlers who now supported William.

Colonels John Butler and Viscount Galmoy

John Butler of the Kilcash/Garryricken family and Pierce Butler, third Viscount Galmoy, were Kilkenny officers who featured prominently in Tyrconnell’s pre-war replacement of protestants with catholics in the Irish standing army. They were amongst the first catholics commissioned into the army in 1685 and were promoted colonels in 1687. John Butler was a soldier of some experience who had served in France in the 1670s. In the Irish army he commanded the sole dragoon regiment which he led to England in 1688 as part of a futile attempt by Tyrconnell to prop up James’s ailing regime. Following the Glorious Revolution, the regiment was disbanded and Colonel Butler incarcerated in the Tower of London, where, evidently, he sat out the war.
Galmoy commanded one of the three cavalry regiments of the standing army and was a prominent figure on the Jacobite side throughout the war. He had planned to serve in France in 1679 although it is unclear that he actually succeeded in doing so. His regiment won praise from King James and the French ambassador in 1689 for its excellent appearance. Born in 1652, his principal residence was at Lowgrange, near Gowran, on his 16,000-acre estate, which comprised the former Duiske Abbey lands. He was the leading Kilkenny Jacobite personality, lord lieutenant of the county and a member of the Irish privy council.

As part of the regular army, neither John Butler's nor Galmoy's regiments were specifically Kilkenny units. Nevertheless their colonels would have had an influence in recruiting and the granting of commissions which would have reflected their own locality and connections. In particular, Galmoy's long tenure of his cavalry regiment stamped it with a distinctive (but not exclusive) Kilkenny/south Leinster personality. By 1690 five other Butlers held commissions in it apart from Galmoy, including his son, Edward; his uncle, Edmund of Kilashoolan; and his cousin, Pierce of Grangefertagh. One troop was commanded by Captain James Bryan of Jenkinstown with, as lieutenant, his brother-in-law, Mathew Rothe of the wealthy Kilkenny merchant family. The cornet was John Smyth, eldest son of Ormond's agent, Valentine Smyth, and the quartermaster was James Shee, one of Ormond's collectors. Robert Mulloy of Kilkenny city, a quartermaster with the regiment in 1690, ended the war as a lieutenant.

Some Kilkenny names also appear amongst the officer lists of other mounted regiments, notably Colonel Henry Luttrell's cavalry. Captain Walter Lawless of Talbot's Inch commanded a troop in this regiment and two of the cornets, William and David Fanning, were also from Kilkenny. Another of Luttrell's troop commanders was Captain Harvey Morres of Castlemorres. Of 'Old English' background and married to Galmoy's aunt, he was one of the few protestant officers to serve in the Jacobite army. Cornet John Grace, grandson of Colonel John Grace of Courtstown, was described as an aide-de-camp to Patrick Sarsfield, possibly implying that he served in the Life Guards.

Mathew Rothe's elder brother, Michael, was a rising figure in the pre-war standing army. Captain of the king's company in the prestigious Footguards, he was evidently amongst the troops sent
to England in 1688. Subsequently he made his way to France where King James entrusted him with the sensitive mission of accompanying the sieur de Pointis to Ireland to report on the situation there with a view to French intervention. Rothe fought throughout the war and gained command of his own regiment as hostilities drew to an end in 1691.

The colonel was the key regimental officer from whom each unit took its name. He commanded the regiment in battle and was responsible for its general management and welfare. He was, in effect, the principal partner in an enterprise in which the other officers were junior partners. Many colonels were members of the peerage and most had access to considerable economic resources which could help to sustain their regiments through difficult times. The speed and size of the army's enlargement at the beginning of 1689 meant that the colonels of the numerous new regiments largely selected their own officers, and their choice was generally of relatives, connections and neighbours of sufficient influence or income to make a worthwhile contribution to the regiment's recruitment and maintenance. Inevitably, both officers and other ranks were generally closely associated with the colonel's own particular locality. An officer's rank was not necessarily related to his age.

An officer's commission was a potentially valuable asset and much sought after. As a consequence the new regiments at first often consisted of numerous companies, and therefore numerous officers to command them. There was considerable bitterness when the numbers had to be cut back. Some regiments were disbanded and most of the remainder standardised to single battalions of thirteen companies which allowed an establishment of forty-three officers to command sixty-five n.c.o.s, thirteen drummers and 650 private men. Wartime strength, however, was frequently much lower. One company in each regiment was comprised of grenadiers, or elite assault troops, armed with hand grenades, muskets and hatchets. Each of the other twelve companies was a mixture of musketeers and pikemen in a ratio of about 3:1. Dragoons (mounted infantry) had twelve companies in each regiment. Senior cavalry regiments consisted of nine troops, with six in the newer units. Galmoy's, which fell into the former category, deployed three squadrons in the line of battle, each of approximately 100 troopers. Lack of military training and experience were major shortcomings
of the expanded army. Veteran soldiers were at a premium, but only one or two such men were available for commissioning per regiment. They would have accounted for less than ten per cent of approximately 2,500 officers serving in the Jacobite army at any given time.

Four ‘Kilkenny’ infantry regiments

The mobilisation brought four new infantry regiments with Kilkenny colonels onto the army list: those of Edward Butler, Thomas Butler, Richard Butler and John Grace. Each was closely connected to one of the great surviving catholic estates of the county, and drew most of the officers, and probably other ranks, from Kilkenny and the surrounding counties. A fifth regiment, raised by a Colonel James Butler, was amongst those soon disbanded. The identity of this officer is obscure, but he may have been the future sixteenth Lord Dunboyne, who subsequently served as a troop commander in the cavalry regiment of Colonel Nicholas Purcell of Loughmoe, County Tipperary.

1. Colonel Edward Butler’s

Colonel Edward Butler, the proprietor of 1,700 acres, lived at Ballyragget Castle and was half-brother to the fifth Viscount Mountgarret. He had served in France in the 1670s, which may account for his being chosen to command the family regiment over Mountgarret, who was, in any case, reported as lacking in ability. John Ennis, the lieutenant colonel, was a mercenary who had returned to Ireland from France. This may have been the case also with the major, Garret Geoghegan, as professional soldiers frequently filled that rank in Jacobite regiments. Most of the rest of the officer corps was strongly north Kilkenny. Mountgarret served as a captain in the regiment in 1689, but his name is absent thereafter. Five other Butlers held commissions in 1690, including Captain Edmund, the colonel’s son, who succeeded to command of the regiment on his father’s death shortly before the end of the war. Another Captain Edmund may have been Mountgarret’s heir. If so, he did not remain with the regiment for long, for he was evidently a lieutenant colonel in the cavalry when captured at the siege of Derry in 1689. Possibly Ensign John Butler was Lord Galmoy’s younger son. Lieutenant Simon Cleare came from Donoughmore in Ballyragget parish, Captain Patrick Pay from Kilmucker and...
Lieutenant William Dormer from Ballyragget itself. Ensign John Purcell, probably of the Lismain family near Foulksrath, was a tenant of Ormond's at Dunmore. Captain James Blanchville, or Blanchfield, was the son of Edmund Blanchfield, proprietor of Blanchfieldstown. Lieutenant Michael Blanchfield and Ensign Nicholas Blanchfield were presumably his relatives. Other obvious Kilkenny names are Shee, Loughnane and Forrestal. Captain Aylward may have been Peter Aylward of Aylwardstown, the brother-in-law of Sir Walter Butler of Paulstown Castle. Sir Walter himself was a minor, which probably explains why Paulstown, alone in this respect amongst the great catholic estates of Kilkenny, did not raise a regiment for King James.

Lieutenant John Brennan of Crottologh was the representative of the dispossessed Fassadinin clan, more than a score of whom were outlawed by the Williamite regime. John's tombstone, with an inscription giving his rank as captain, is in the Church of Ireland churchyard at Castlecomer. Brennan's captain in 1690 was George Gaffney from Irishtown in Kilkenny city, where a datestone with his name was to be seen in Vicar Street, at the foot of Coach Road, until modern times. Because Gaffney's memorandum book survived to the nineteenth century, more is known about his company than any other in the Jacobite army. Together with much other interesting information, this document supplies the names and ranks of the sixty-odd personnel of Gaffney's unit. Not all have obvious Kilkenny names; however, the explanation may be that most were recruited in Kilkenny city where a greater diversity of names than in the countryside was to have been expected.

2. Colonel Thomas Butler's

Colonel Thomas Butler of the Kilcash/Garryricken family was a grand-nephew of the great duke of Ormond and in all probability, therefore, the nephew of Colonel John Butler. The regiment of which he was colonel was actually raised by his father, Colonel Walter of Garryricken, whom Thomas superseded on his return to Ireland as one of the party accompanying King James in 1689. Despite his relative youth, he was a man of some military experience, having served in the English army and campaigned with the Habsburg forces against the Turks in Hungary. Although several of the officers were from Tipperary, such as Ensign James Tobin the colonel's brother-in-law, a number bore Kilkenny names and
some of these can be precisely identified. Captain Edward Fitzgerald of Cluan had served for a time in France and owned a 1,600-acre estate near Inistioge. Lieutenant Marcus Shee was from the Sheestown/Wasehays family. Lieutenant James Hackett was from Kilkenny city, Lieutenant William Smyth was one of the Damma family. The lieutenant colonel in 1690, de Busby, was French. There are some grounds for thinking that this regiment was the unit Michael Rothe was appointed to command towards the end of the war.

3. Colonel Richard Butler's

Colonel Richard Butler was almost certainly the younger brother of Lord Galmoy, who had previously served in France and was commissioned a captain in the Irish army in 1686. The regiment he raised in 1689 was one of five battalions sent to France the following year under Lord Mountcashel (Justin MacCarthy) in exchange for a French brigade which came to Ireland. 39 officers and 611 men of Richard Butler's embarked at Cork. However, on its arrival in France their unit went out of existence when the French authorities reduced the Irish regiments to three, retaining the soldiers, but returning the disbanded officers to Ireland, with some disparaging comments. Neither Richard Butler nor his regiment subsequently reappeared on the army list. The colonel himself is mysteriously remote from these events. He was absent from the pre-embarkation review and from the party of ex-officers who gathered at Brest for passage back to Ireland. Evidently he did get to France where he remained with King James at St Germain-en-Laye. The lieutenant colonel of the regiment was Walter Butler, probably of Mountfin, County Wexford. The absence of christian names in most cases makes it difficult to pinpoint the identity of the other officers with precision. Some bore Wexford names, but others had surnames well-known in Kilkenny, such as Langton, Ryan, Roche, FitzGerald, Archer, Sweetman and St Leger.

4. Colonel John Grace's

Colonel John Grace of Courtstown Castle was the owner of about 7,000 acres around Tullaroan in Crannagh Barony, with an income of £9,000 p.a. After his death in 1690 his son, Robert, succeeded as head of the family and colonel of the Grace regiment. Other relatives holding commissions in the regiment were John’s brother,
also Robert, who was a captain; his brother-in-law, Robert Walsh, head of the Castlehale family; and Colonel Robert's sons, Oliver and John. Colonel John's uncle, old Colonel Richard Grace, was also nominal commander of a company in the family regiment. He was a celebrated soldier who had fought with distinction against Cromwell and on the Continent. His active role in the Jacobite war was as governor of Athlone. Captain James and Lieutenant William Shortall were probably of the Kilrush, Ballylarkin, family. Captain Edward Caddon, commander of the grenadier company, was a merchant and from Kilkenny city, as was his lieutenant, Thomas Pearson. Most of the other officers had obvious Kilkenny surnames, such as Daton, Knaresborough and Bryan.

It is impossible to give a precise figure for the number of Kilkenny men in the Jacobite army. 210 officers (by no means all from Kilkenny) were listed in 1690 for Galmoy's cavalry and the four infantry regiments with Kilkenny colonels. The following are the other ranks strengths of these units at various stages of the war:

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Army officers (who might have been better employed on their military duties) were prominent amongst the Kilkenny representatives at the Jacobite parliament, summoned in 1689. Colonel Lord Galmoy and Captain Lord Mountgarret attended the house of lords. In the commons, Colonel John Grace and Captain Robert Walsh sat for the county; Captain James Bryan for the city; the two Captains Robert Grace for Thomastown; Captain Harvey Morres for Knocktopher; Captain Edward Fitzgerald for Inistioge; and the English officer, Colonel Robert Fielding, for Gowran. The parlia-
The record of service

All four infantry regiments were present at the unsuccessful siege of Derry in 1689. They shared in the general shortage of weapons and equipment. Edward Butler's regiment had 268 broken muskets, and was short 86 muskets, 390 swords, 84 pikes and virtually its full complement of belts and bandoliers. The first four companies of Grace's to arrive had 83 muskets in need of repair, and were short 57 more, together with 140 swords and belts. Richard Butler's regiment had 70 broken muskets and was 60 short, together with 400 swords and belts, 100 pikes and 100 bandoliers. Most of Galmoy's cavalry was also in the north, participating in the futile campaign against Enniskillen and at Derry, where the shortage of forage caused a deterioration in the condition of their horses.

By August the Jacobite army had been driven out of Ulster and all five regiments commanded by Kilkenny colonels were back in Dublin or the nearby training camp at Lehaunstown. Galmoy's was reported as seeking recruits. Later, with Thomas Butler's regiment, it was specifically mentioned as part of the force with which King James opposed the Williamite offensive into Leinster led by Marshal Schomberg. All the regiments are shown on the Jacobite line of battle at this time, but Edward Butler's and Richard Butler's are merged into a single battalion and Thomas Butler's with another unit, suggesting all three Butler infantry regiments were substantially below strength. Both recruiting and subsistence must have been helped during the winter which followed by the arrangement of quartering the infantry regiments near their places of origin: Edward Butler's at Ballyragget, John Grace's at Maryborough, Thomas Butler's at Clonmel and Richard Butler's at Kilkenny. Richard Butler's was then sent to guard the ports of New Ross and Wexford, where it was reported to be without weapons. As mentioned, its transfer to France in 1690 ended the regiment's history.
The three remaining infantry regiments were presumably at the battle of the Boyne although there appears to be no specific mention of their presence. Galmoy's regiment was posted on the left wing where there was little fighting. Afterwards, it escorted the French infantry as they covered the Jacobite retreat. Some days earlier Galmoy's lieutenant colonel, Laurence Dempsey, had been mortally wounded in a skirmish north of Dundalk. Subsequently Robert Grace's and Edward Butler's regiments were part of the garrison that successfully defended Limerick against King William. Captain Robert Walsh of Grace's was killed as was Captain Richard Lawless of Talbot's Inch. Further north, Athlone was preserved by the determined resistance of its governor, old Colonel Richard Grace. He was killed in action when the Williamites stormed the town the following year. In the winter of 1690-1 Galmoy's regiment was quartered in County Sligo and the Kilkenny infantry probably in Limerick.

In 1691 the Kilkenny regiments suffered heavily at the bloody battle of Aughrim, afterwards mustering only 52 officers, no sergeants and 685 other ranks, a combined strength of little more than a single battalion. Thomas Butler's regiment was reduced to 9 officers and 157 men; Grace's to 22 officers and 251 men; and Edward Butler's to 21 officers and 277 men. Amongst the prominent casualties were Colonel Robert Grace who was mortally wounded, together with Lieutenant Colonel Edmund Butler of Kilashoolan and Captain Edward FitzGerald of Cluan who were both killed. Colonel Thomas Butler was captured as was young Major Patrick Lawless of Talbot's Inch. Galmoy's cavalry covered the Jacobite retreat 'as prosperously as so small a body could', suffering only light casualties.

The aftermath

Aughrim ended Jacobite hopes of resistance and Galmoy helped to negotiate the articles of Limerick which ended the war in Ireland and the distinctive existence of the four Kilkenny infantry regiments. In appearance a compromise, the articles represented, in fact, a near complete Jacobite defeat. A pardon was offered to Jacobites still in arms, or under the protection of the Irish army. Over fifty Kilkenny men benefited as a result. They included Lord Mountgarret, Colonel Edward Butler, Captain George Gaffney, Major Pierce Butler of Grangefertagh, Captain Peter Aylward,
Captain James Bryan and Lieutenant Marcus Shee. Not all were landowners, but a number who were thereby saved their estates. Less fortunate were young John Grace of Courtstown and Edmund Blanchfield, who both lost out on technicalities. Grace died a broken man in London in 1716. For Captain Harvey Morris, all was made easy after he paid £100 to Mrs. Margaret Uniack who was the mistress of the lord lieutenant, Viscount Sidney. The estates of Captain Edward Fitzgerald and old Colonel Richard Grace, casualties at Aughrim and Athlone respectively, were confiscated. A modern oil portrait of Grace by Maurice Cogan, based on a seventeenth-century engraving, is in the writer’s collection.

Colonel Thomas Butler was luckier: as a prisoner he was no longer in arms when the war ended and so should have been outlawed, but instead was quietly pardoned in 1699 in Dublin. Perhaps his cousin, the second duke of Ormond, intervened on his behalf. Although he took no further part in military life, his portrait (now in Kilkenny castle), painted by James Latham long after the war, defiantly depicts him in the conventional armour of a soldier. In 1694 he married Lady Iveagh, the widow of a fellow Jacobite colonel, sister of three more and sister-in-law of the famous Patrick Sarsfield. On the death of his grandfather, Thomas Butler succeeded to the Kilcash/Garryricken estate which he held until his death in 1738. After the war Colonel John Butler was released from the Tower of London and retired to Ireland to reside at Westcourt, near Callan, dying circa 1724. The net result of the war in terms of land ownership in Kilkenny was that catholics lost a further 32,000 acres, with the immense Galmoy and Grace estates accounting for almost two thirds of this figure. The catholic share decreased even further during the eighteenth century.

The majority of the surviving soldiers in the Kilkenny regiments, instead of remaining in Williamite Ireland, chose the alternative option, under the Limerick articles, of emigrating to France to continue under arms. This was the decision of 215 other ranks in Edmund Butler’s and 188 in Grace’s. No figure survives for the depleted regiment of Thomas Butler/Michael Rothe(?). 350 officers and men of Galmoy’s regiment are mentioned as arriving in France, accompanied by some of their horses. Only 50 men of Grace’s regiment are said to have returned to their homes. The tradition of Irish emigration to the armies of the European catholic powers, especially France and Spain, continued throughout the
eighteenth century.

Much the most prominent of the Kilkenny exiles was Viscount Galmoy. He continued to command a cavalry regiment in the exiled Jacobite army until its disbandment in 1698. He fought with distinction in the armies of France and Spain, and rose to the rank of lieutenant general, dying in Paris at an advanced age in 1740. His son, Edward Butler, was killed as a colonel at the battle of Malplaquet in 1709. Michael Rothe entered the French service and rose to the rank of lieutenant general. He was the subject of a magnificent portrait by the French painter, Nicolas de Largillière, now in an Irish private collection. He was succeeded as commander of one of the Irish regiments in the French army by his son, Charles Edward Rothe, also a general. In 1766 Kilkenny associations with the regiment were renewed when command passed to Count Antoine Walsh de Serrant of the Saint Malo shipping family, who descended from the Walshs of Ballynacooly.

Patrick Lawless, after a period in the Spanish army, became a distinguished diplomat, serving as Spanish minister in London and Stockholm. Galmoy's brother, Colonel Richard Butler, commanded a company in Dorrington's Irish regiment at Brest in 1692. He later came to England where he was for a time imprisoned on suspicion of being involved in Jacobite plots. By 1704 he was back in Ireland recruiting for the French service. He died at St Germain-en-Laye in 1725. Others to emigrate were Lieutenant William Dormer of Ballymartin, who had served in Edward Butler's regiment, together with Richard Marshal of Freshford and Michael Forristal of Kilfane, who may have been in the same unit. The death in France at the age of 104 of Lt Col Thomas Shortall, a native of Kilkenny and probably of the Ballymartin family, was recorded in 1762. He was stated to have been a captain of foot in Grace's regiment at the siege of Limerick and the last survivor of the Wild Geese of 1691.

Acknowledgements

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