

The Spanish Habsburgs and their Irish Soldiers (1587-1700)

By Moisés Enrique Rodríguez

In 1516, Ferdinand II of Aragon (better known as Ferdinand 'The Catholic') died, and the Spanish crown passed to his grandson, who ascended to the throne as King Charles I. He is better known as Charles V, since this was the title by which he reigned as Holy Roman Emperor.

Born in Ghent in 1500, the young man was brought up in the Netherlands and only arrived in Spain at the age of 17. As the son of Joanna 'The Mad', the daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, Charles inherited not only the Spanish kingdoms but also their overseas empires. Castile brought with it the colonies of South and Central America, and Aragon the Balearic Islands, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily and Naples. As the son of Philip 'The Handsome' (his Habsburg father who had died in 1506), he was already the ruler of the Burgundian territories: The Netherlands (spanning present-day Holland, Belgium and northern France) and the Franche-Comté (covering areas of present-day France and Switzerland). In 1519, upon the death of his paternal grandfather, Maximilian I, Charles inherited the Holy Roman Empire (present-day Germany and adjacent territories in Central and Eastern Europe).

During the subsequent forty years, the King-Emperor fought wars against the Turks, the French, the Protestant Princes of Germany and other enemies, and turned Spain into the leader of the Counter-Reformation. These policies continued under his successors. Exhausted by his immense responsibilities, Charles abdicated in 1556 and died two years later. The Spanish empire and the Burgundian inheritance went to his son Philip II and the Holy Roman Empire to his brother Ferdinand. The fact that the Netherlands were given to Philip meant that Spain became inextricably involved in the affairs of Northern Europe and was unable to concentrate her energies in her traditional areas of interest: the Mediterranean and the Americas. Madrid became the enemy of the Dutch Protestants and hence of Elizabeth's England. Habsburg (and Catholic) solidarity meant that Spain took part in the Thirty Years War. It also led to a dynastic confrontation with France which resulted in military campaigns in the Low Countries, Central Europe and Italy (where Madrid and Paris had been rivals since the Middle Ages).

During the two centuries of Habsburg rule, Spain fought innumerable wars: against the Dutch, the English and the French on the continent of Europe and on the high seas; and against the Moors and the Turks in North Africa and the Mediterranean. It is remarkable that at the same time her *Conquistadores* conquered much of Latin America for the Crown, putting an end to the powerful Aztec and Inca empires and subjugating the Maya and scores of other indigenous people.

Philip II was succeeded by Philip III and Philip IV, who continued the Eighty Year War against the Dutch. This conflict merged with the Thirty Years War in Germany and only came to an end in 1648, when the Treaty of Westphalia recognised the independence of the seven 'United Provinces'. However, Spain retained the Southern Netherlands (predominantly Catholic and spanning present-day Belgium and northern France) for the best part of a century and this territory witnessed many of the battles of her long war against the French.

In 1700, Charles II, the last Spanish Habsburg, died and left the Crown to the future Philip V, the grandson of Louis XIV of France. Emperor Leopold I supported the rival claim of Arch-Duke Charles and this led to the War of the Spanish Succession. The conflict ended in 1713 and the following year the Treaty of Utrecht confirmed Philip (the first Bourbon) as King of Spain but, as part of the general settlement, gave the Spanish Netherlands and the Kingdom of Naples to the Habsburg emperor.

This meant that under the Bourbons, Spain was still an empire but not a truly multi-national one. She remained a significant player in European and world affairs throughout much of the eighteenth century and fought several wars in Italy and elsewhere against the Austrians and French. The Bourbon kingdom of Naples and Sicily was created largely by Spanish bayonets, a significant achievement for a nation perceived to have been in decline. Madrid only sank into insignificance in the nineteenth century, after the loss of her American empire.

Irish troops fought in virtually all the Spanish wars between 1587 and 1814. During the Habsburg period (1587-1700), their Order of Battle changed frequently and regiments (named after their commanders) were created and disbanded in quick succession according to the number of troops available and the exigencies of the military situation. With the Bourbons, their organisation stabilised into a single Irish Brigade composed of three regiments: the 'Hibernia', the 'Ultonia' (Ulster) and the 'Irlanda'. These units were created in the first two decades of the eighteenth century and were disbanded in 1818.

Why the Irish?

During the sixteenth century, several areas of Europe had become traditional sources of mercenary troops. The Swiss Cantons provided military contingents for the armies of France, Spain and many Italian princes (including the Pope). The harsh geographical conditions, poverty and overpopulation had combined to turn the Swiss into the paramount source of professional soldiers. Scotland and Ireland experienced similar situations, which were rendered more difficult by the repressive actions of the London government and its local allies. Violence was a constant feature in the lives of the inhabitants of the two Celtic kingdoms. Scotsmen served France but not Spain because of their religion, but Irishmen made their way into the armed forces of both powers.

There was at this time no moral stigma attached to serving in a foreign army and the soldier was regarded as a professional who could sell his services to princes other than his own without shame. All European powers made extensive use of mercenary troops during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The first Irishmen to join the Spanish army did so in 1587 and became an essential (or at least significant) part of Madrid's armed forces for the next two centuries. Habsburg Spain, as we have mentioned, was permanently at war and this coincided with a period in which Spain itself underwent a demographic crisis, caused by the wars themselves but also by other factors such as emigration to America and epidemics. If the Peninsula itself could not supply the men to fight her wars, the troops had to come from elsewhere: the other 'Nations' of the Empire and foreign countries.

The Irish were among the most attractive candidates. First of all, they were Catholic. Secondly, their intermittent state of rebellion against the English had made them proficient in combat. Last but not least, being England's 'natural enemies' they were also perceived as Spain's 'natural allies', since 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. The situation was rather more complicated and at various times the English cooperated in the exportation of Irish soldiers to Spain, but this simplification has some validity.

'The dispossessed Gaelic chiefs and their swordsmen (...) fought with tenacious loyalty and fanatical zeal in Flanders. After all, the Dutch enemy were co-religionists of the Ulster planters, easily seen as affiliated to their English oppressors, and were actually in alliance with the latter against Spain in the years 1625-1630' (Stradling 1993: 133). These religious and ideological elements, however, were absent in the later wars against the French, Catalans and Portuguese, in which the Irish behaved for the most part as professional soldiers and gave a good account of themselves.

The English Civil War (1642-1651) and its aftermath forced many Irishmen to leave their native island. It has been estimated that 34,000 Irish soldiers joined the armies of Spain and France during the years 1641-1654. Concerning the former, most Irishmen were transported directly to the Peninsula (18,000-22,500), but a minority (2,000) made their way to Flanders. For obvious reasons, the aristocracy was over-represented in this exodus and by the second half of the seventeenth century, 'some nine-tenths of the dynastic leadership of traditional Ireland were present in the Spanish Netherlands or metropolitan Spain, the men serving as officers, their wives and children as dependents of the crown' (Stradling 1993: 125). This meant that between fifty and one hundred families of the old Irish ruling class became pensioners of Philip IV and his successor Charles II.

The Netherlands

The story of the Irish units in the armies of Spain commences in 1585 in the Netherlands. The Dutch had rebelled against their Peninsular masters and Elizabeth I sent an army to support them. Among these men were 1,500 Irishmen recruited by Sir John Perrot. They were commanded by the Englishman Sir Edward Stanley who, although a devout Catholic, had fought for Protestant England against both Irish rebels and Spanish troops. However, in 1587 the Spaniards bribed Stanley and he and his men went over to the enemy, to whom they surrendered the town of Deventure, which they were garrisoning. The unit became known as the 'Tercio Irlanda' and remained in existence until 1604 when it was broken down into individual companies. In 1605, Henry O'Neill (second son of the Earl of Tyrone) created the 'Tyrone Regiment' which included many of these men and which remained in existence for the next five years.

Irish troops were a permanent feature of Spain's Army of Flanders throughout the seventeenth century and fought first against the Dutch and then against the French. Between 1587 and 1661, this force included on average 1,000 Irishmen, although the numbers fluctuated over the years. Henry estimates that during this period, 10,000 Irish immigrants reached the Spanish Netherlands, of whom 6,300 joined the army. The organisation of the Irish regiments changed frequently and so did the names of the individual units, which were usually named after their commander. The Army of Flanders was truly multi-national and there were periods during which the Walloons and Flemings recruited among the local population outnumbered the Spanish soldiers. Germans, Italians, Swiss and Irish were also represented.

'Beginning with Stanley's defection to Spain, and progressing in spurts during the late sixteenth century, emigration of Irishmen for this purpose (serving in foreign armies) became virtually continuous. It received a great impetus with the return, by stages, to a state of general warfare on the continent after 1618. Though isolated groups reached the Baltic States, and others found service in France, a large majority of these exiles (at least three quarters of the total)

went to serve in the Army of Flanders after Spain's renewal of war with the rebel United Provinces (1621). As Catholics, who often came to the camp with their own embattled, zealous chaplains, and as men acclimatized by their very nurture to many of the environmental hardships of campaigning in the Low Countries, they were highly valued by the field officers of the Spanish Monarchy. By the beginning of the great war between the two Catholic powers of Spain and France, which broke out openly in 1635, one authority (Jennings) estimates that as many as seven thousand Irishmen were enlisted in the forces commanded by Philip IV's brother, Don Fernando de Austria, governor of the Spanish Netherlands' (Stradling 1993: 17).

'In the middle decades of the seventeenth century, transportation of men from Ireland to fight in Flanders, and later in Spain itself, became a major aspect of international strategy, with significant commercial aspects to set beside its military logic' (Stradling 1993: 25). There was a fairly constant flow of arrivals, but it is likely that 6,000 of the 7,000 men in service in 1635 had come to the Netherlands as recently as 1634, as a result of an agreement between Juan de Necolalde (the Spanish Chargé d'affaires in London) and King Charles I of England. The Irishmen were organised in four 'Tercios', under Colonels Owen Roe O'Neill (a nephew of the Earl of Tyrone), Thomas Preston, Hugh O'Donnell and Patrick Fitzgerald. They suffered extremely high casualties in the battles against the French and only a third were still in service in 1639. It became difficult to recruit replacements and only 150 fresh Irish volunteers arrived in time for the campaign of 1640. 'The bravery of the remaining Irish at the terrible sieges of Arras and Genrep, in 1640-1641, brought them undying fame' (Stradling 1993: 26).

'For some years thereafter, the numbers of Irish in the Army of Flanders were not sufficient to maintain a specific Tercio and the companies were integrated into other units' (Stradling 1993: 26). From a peak of 7'000 men, the Irish contingent was reduced to 200 in the years 1636-1646. Casualties in the battlefield were only one of the reasons for this depletion. Transfers were another: In 1638, Madrid dispatched two Irish regiments from the Netherlands to northern Spain, where a French attack was expected. In 1641, after the siege of Arras, Colonel Patrick Fitzgerald (or Geraldine) and the survivors of his unit were sent to Catalonia, where the population (allied with France) had risen against the King. According to Stradling, the vast majority of the officers and men serving in the Spanish Netherlands in the 1620s were transferred to Spain in the period 1638-1662. Last but not least, the Irish uprising of 1641 further depleted the ranks of the Army of Flanders. In the following months, many veterans returned home to join the insurrection. Owen Roe O'Neill was one of them: He departed in 1642, became the rebellion's commander-in-chief and died of illness in 1649 while the war was still in progress.

The uprisings in Catalonia and Portugal in 1640 meant that the priority of the Spanish war effort in the next decades was the Peninsula itself and not the Low Countries. Madrid continued recruiting Irishmen but most of them were dispatched directly from Ireland to the northern ports of Spain and never served in the Netherlands.

In the winter of 1645-1646, during the English Civil War, the Irish army led by Randal MacDonnell, Earl of Antrim, found itself surrounded by Parliamentary forces in the Kintyre Peninsula (Scotland). Knowing that they would be massacred if they surrendered, Antrim escaped to Brussels where he negotiated the transfer of his force to Spanish service. The final outcome of the operation is not known with certainty, but 'early in 1647 a new force of nearly 700 Irishmen appeared in the musters of the Army of Flanders. This force is consistent with the hypothetical number of survivors from an original 1'600, allowing for the losses of campaigning in Scotland, and a winter under siege in Kintyre, and after the vicissitudes they had suffered since Antrim had left to seek means to their rescue. These twelve companies, commanded by John Murphy, were added to Patrick O'Neill's four to make up a respectable Irish Tercio of 947 effective' (Stradling 1993: 63). O'Neill remained in command but was later succeeded by Murphy.

In 1653, survivors of the rebel army that had fought under Owen Roe O'Neill in Ireland were hired by Spanish agents and made their way to the Peninsula's northern ports. In the following year, Philip IV decided to dispatch 3,000-4,000 of these men to Flanders. It is not known how many were actually transported but at least one regiment (750 men under Colonel O'Reilly) reached its destination.

In 1661, Irish troops were sent to fight in Portugal and this reduced the number of Irishmen in the Army of Flanders to around 400, a level that was maintained until at least 1700. The institution disappeared in 1714, when Spain ceded the Southern Netherlands to Austria.

The Iberian Peninsula

The first Irish volunteers to reach Spain (several hundred men under Donal O'Sullivan Bere, Earl of Berehaven) arrived in La Coruña in 1605, in the aftermath of the Nine Year War (the failed rebellion against the English which lasted from 1594 to 1603). Madrid did not need their services on the Peninsula and soon afterwards transferred them to the Netherlands, where they joined the Army of Flanders and were placed under the orders of the Earl of Tyrone. Unable to obtain an independent command and unwilling to serve under his countryman, O'Sullivan returned to Spain where he settled.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, the Spanish Hapsburgs faced a dire emergency in the Iberian Peninsula. They were faced with rebellions in both Catalonia and Portugal, and unrest in Andalusia (1647-1652).

The insurrection in Catalonia (1640-1659) represented by far the most serious of these menaces since it endangered the unity of Spain itself and threatened to divide the country again along the lines of Castile and Aragon. France had

a common border and could and did intervene in support of the rebels. Spain answered in kind and launched an invasion of the Guyenne. This war ended in victory for Madrid but it was close-run. Considerable numbers of Irish troops (as well as Germans and Walloons transferred from the Army of Flanders) fought in these operations alongside the Spanish regulars.

Portugal had been part of the dominions of the King of Spain since 1580, when Philip II had obtained the Lusitanian crown after the extinction of the House of Avis. The association between the two countries was intended as a purely personal union, but slowly turned into Spanish domination of Portuguese affairs. Lisbon tolerated this situation for the next sixty years but in 1640, taking advantage of Spain's predicament in Catalonia, finally revolted against Philip IV under the leadership of the Duke of Braganza. The rebellion (known in Portugal as the 'War of the Restoration') lasted until 1668 and ended in Portugal's independence from Spain.

Faced with this emergency, Spain proceeded to transfer many units of the Army of Flanders to the Peninsula, including the bulk of her Irish soldiers. Envoys and contractors (including the Burgundian François Foisotte) were sent to Ireland to recruit more troops, and as a result of their activities several ships made their way to the ports of northern Spain directly from the island. These events coincided with the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (1639-1651) on the British Isles, which included the English Civil War and the submission of Ireland by Oliver Cromwell and his generals. Many Irishmen left their country after the victory of the Commonwealth's forces and a large number of them joined the armies of France, Spain and the exiled Charles II Stuart. This meant that on the European battlefields Irishmen often fought against fellow Irishmen.

The first Irish units to see active service in Spain were the regiments known as the Tyrone and Tyrconnell Tercios. They were commanded by John O'Neill (Earl of Tyrone) and Hugh O'Donnell (Earl of Tyrconnell) respectively and arrived in the ports of the Basque country in 1638. Spanish intelligence had learned that France intended to launch an attack across the border and these troops were transferred from the Army of Flanders to help strengthen the northern defences. They took part in the relief of Fuenterrabía in September of that year, where they made a significant contribution to the Spanish victory. With a strength of 1,200 men, the Irish Tercios comprised about 10% of the Peninsular force. Subsequently they took part in other military operations in northern Spain and during the winter of 1639-1640 they distinguished themselves at the siege of Sales.

Catalonia

The Catalans rebelled against the king in June 1640 and the Irish troops already in Spain were part of the Spanish forces sent to suppress them. France intervened and sent an army across the border in support of the insurrection.

In 1641, the Irishmen fought at the disastrous battle of Montjuic, near Barcelona, where they suffered heavy casualties including John O'Neill (Earl of Tyrone) who 'was killed at the head of his men, both he and they fighting with their accustomed valour' (Stradling 1993: 115). The Tyrone regiment was annihilated, with most of their members either slain in battle or taken prisoner.

Hugh O'Donnell was able to retreat southwards after the battle and the 450 survivors of his Tercio managed to reach the precarious safety of Tarragona with the main Spanish army, where they were besieged. Along the way, they undertook reprisals against the local population and sacked Reus. Unfortunately, they punished the wrong people. The town had not joined the rebellion and had remained loyal to Philip IV.

The siege of Tarragona lasted 104 days but the Irishmen only took part in its initial stages. A few weeks after their arrival, they were attached to a force that was taken behind enemy lines by the Spanish navy, in an attempt at relieving Perpignan. This might have been a punishment for their excesses at Reus. The operation was a shambles and the town fell to the enemy in 1642. The Peninsular ships were intercepted by the French navy on the return journey and O'Donnell and hundreds of his men died in the fighting. The remainder were captured and the Tyrconnell Tercio disappeared from the Spanish Order of Battle.

Other units were brought to Catalonia from the Army of Flanders, including the survivors of the siege of Arras who were led by Colonel Patrick Fitzgerald (or Geraldine). However, transfers from the Spanish Netherlands would clearly not suffice and Spain dispatched a number of envoys and contractors to Ireland, to raise new regiments. As a result of their activities, in the years 1641-1654, between 18,000 and 22,500 troops reached the Peninsula directly from Irish ports. The conditions of the voyage were often appalling and many died of disease and hunger either during the journey or shortly after their arrival. The men had to be billeted among the local population and their numbers put a considerable strain on the local economy. Deaths and desertions while quartered in northern Spain greatly reduced the number of Irishmen who actually made it to the battlefields of Catalonia and Portugal.

Madrid had been extremely impressed with the Irishmen's performance in the Netherlands. This was not the case after the operations in Spain. Although many Irishmen performed well, the rate of desertions was extremely high and there were instances where whole units went over to the enemy (the French also employed Irish troops). A possible reason for the difference might have been ideological. In Flanders, the original enemy had been the hated Protestants. French, Catalonians and Portuguese were fellow Catholics. During the Dutch war, the Irish in Spanish service were (or became) professional soldiers. In Spain and Portugal, a whole generation of exiles joined the

Habsburg army and this meant many raw recruits, often in poor health because of what they had endured at home, the sea voyage and the winter months in northern Spain.

The first troops from Ireland reached La Coruña in the autumn of 1641: 300 men led by George Porter, an English Catholic. They were part of an ambitious contract signed between Alonso de Cárdenas (the Spanish Ambassador in London) and a group of officer-entrepreneurs. The agreement was to raise a force of 8,000 in ten regiments, but the rest of the troops never departed. They stayed in Ireland and became the might of the rebellion which broke out later in the year and which was only crushed by Cromwell's generals the following decade. Many believed that Spain had never really intended to recruit such a large force and that the operation had been a smokescreen to create an army capable of liberating Ireland from British dominion and thus restoring her to the Catholic faith. It is more likely that Cárdenas was duped by the rebel leaders who might have used his scheme as a deception for preparing the uprising. Men such as Owen Roe O'Neill, then serving in the Army of Flanders, must have known what was really happening.

Catholic Ireland needed her men at home to fight the Parliamentarians but also required financial assistance from Madrid. The Confederation of Kilkenny (as the rebels are remembered) had to trade troops (her only commodity) for gold and, if possible, arms. The Spanish envoy, the Burgundian François Foisotte, was able to negotiate the dispatch of several shipments: 6,500 men in the period 1644-1654. However, the last contract (for 1,800-2,000 soldiers) was signed not with the rebels (who had by then been defeated) but with the victorious Parliamentarians, who agreed to sell their prisoners of war to Foisotte, thus sparing their lives.

Foisotte was not alone. In 1644, 1,200 men recruited in Ireland arrived in northern Spain under the command of James Preston, whose father and brother (Thomas) were serving with distinction in the Army of Flanders. They fought in the war in Catalonia and in autumn 1646 were part of the Spanish force that relieved the town of Lérida, the decisive battle of this conflict. 'The enemy, demoralised by successive failures of assault on the citadel, decimated by disease and debilitated by insufficient supply, disintegrated before the Spanish offensive. In the ranks of the victorious army were the Tercios of Patrick Fitzgerald and James Preston. They shared in the glory and Madrid went wild with triumph and relief' (Stradling 1993: 55).

In the winter of 1646-1647, Preston returned to Ireland with a contract to raise 3,000 soldiers. 'By the middle of May, Preston had collected 500 men, who were loaded into two transports in Waterford. Just as they were sailing out of the bay, a French squadron of five warships appeared as if on signal from behind a promontory. They intercepted the Irish vessels and - with no apparent resistance - carried them off as prizes, with their precious cargo of prisoners (...). Once on French soil, Preston and his men passed smoothly into French service' (Stradling 1993: 59). The Colonel does not seem to have acted independently and the leaders of the Confederation of Kilkenny were most probably in connivance with the French. Preston served his new masters effectively and was later sent to Portugal with a large purse, with orders to bribe the Irishmen in Spanish service into desertion. He had considerable success in this task.

Patrick Fitzgerald seems to have returned to Ireland in 1647. His Tercio had the longest service of all the Irish units in the Peninsula (seven years). After his departure, command of the Irish troops in the army of Don Juan José de Austria in Catalonia was given to General George Goring, an English 'Cavalier'.

In addition to Foisotte and Preston, other envoys and contractors were active in the recruitment and transport of Irish soldiers to Spain, such as Don Diego de la Torre (envoy extraordinary of the King to the Kilkenny Confederation in 1646), Dermot O'Sullivan (son of the Donal O'Sullivan mentioned above), the White brothers, Colonels Christopher Mayo and Christopher O'Brien (who commanded the troops they raised), among others.

Stradling mentions that 4,000 men arrived in Spain directly from Ireland in the 1640s and that 2,500 of them were still on duty in 1650, when they made up 5% of the Habsburg army in the Peninsula. 2000 soldiers recruited by Mayo reached Guipúzcoa in 1652 and 500 landed in Cádiz soon afterwards. In the last week of the year, 4,000 additional troops arrived in San Sebastián and Pasajes in a dozen ships. 3,000 of them formed the core of the Bordeaux expedition in 1653.

In June 1653, because of desertions and the fear of the plague (then raging in some areas of Ireland) the King of Spain 'resolved that the persons engaging in making levies should cease forthwith and that the 'asientos' (contracts) most recently concluded should not be proceeded with' (Stradling 1993: 79). At this time there were still five outstanding contracts for 16,000 men. The moratorium could not be implemented and in the years 1653-1654, following the final collapse of the Irish rebellion, 12,000 more Irishmen reached northern Spain. Madrid could do little to stop them and accepted them in her armed forces. More followed and the flow only stopped in 1655. Few Irish soldiers arrived in the Peninsula except as individuals after that date but military emigration to the Army of Flanders continued (albeit in much smaller numbers).

Irish troops, including 1,000 men sent by Foisotte, fought during the siege of Barcelona (1651-1652). In the following year, 2,000-3,000 Irishmen took part in the failed campaign against Guyenne, where 500 lost their lives and a similar number deserted to the enemy. The Spaniards landed at the Gironde Estuary but were unable to

relieve Bordeaux (besieged by the French army). They managed to hold out for six months in spite of severe supply problems and returned to Spain at the end of the year. Half of the 4,000 survivors were Irish.

Portugal

Irish soldiers were also active in the Portuguese war but in smaller numbers. In 1644, a regiment of 'Naciones' (i.e., non-Spanish troops) including Irishmen fought at the battle of Montijo. 600 Irish troops took part in the offensive of 1653, in the Tercios commanded by William Dongan and Bernard Patrick. The latter was killed at the battle of Olivenza. The Irish were given praise for their heroism in the defence of Badajoz. By 1662 there was no longer an Irish Tercio because of the small numbers of soldiers of that nationality, but a number of Irishmen took part in the last two campaigns of the war which culminated in the defeats of Ameixial (1663) and Villaviciosa (1665).

In 1653, the survivors of the army which Owen Roe O'Neill had led during the Irish rebellion arrived in La Coruña under Colonels O'Reilly, O'Ferral and O'Rourke. Their departure from Ireland had been the result of negotiations between Ambassador Cárdenas and Captain (later Major) George Walters. Madrid intended to employ them against Portugal but nothing came of it. Galicia was not a good route to invade Portugal as the natural path of advance was through Extremadura.

The local authorities of La Coruña only allowed two of the seven vessels to land (1,000 men under O'Reilly) and the following year these troops were transferred to the Army of Flanders. The remaining ships (1,900 soldiers) had to proceed to Pasajes, where they linked up with another Irish contingent of 800 men. In the weeks that followed, many died of hunger or disease and others became beggars. The bulk of the survivors were sent to reinforce the ill-fated expeditionary force in Guyenne, but others remained in precarious billets in northern Spain. Their commander, Thaddeus (Tadhg) O'Rourke, travelled to Madrid in March 1654 to complain about the conditions and was finally given orders to muster his men and move to Zaragoza. 1,100 men had gone into winter quarters in Cantabria in the autumn of 1653. By January, only 540 were still under the colours (the remaining had died or deserted).

So many Irishmen had become scattered in northern Spain that in 1654 Madrid sent two trusted servants to re-assemble them into an army. One of them was Colonel Hugh O'Neill, a leader of the Irish rebellion who had been released from the Tower of London by the intervention of Ambassador Cárdenas. The other was the ubiquitous François Foisotte.

Moisés Enrique Rodríguez

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Articles

I am indebted to Dr. Óscar Recio Morales for providing his essays:

- *Incauta Nación, de un Irlandés te has fiado. Nobleza, nación e identidades del grupo militar irlandés en el ejército de los Borbones. El caso O'Reilly.*
- *Los Extranjeros y la Nación Irlandesa en el contexto de la Nueva Historia Militar Europea.*
- *La Gente de Naciones en los Ejércitos de los Austrias hispanos: servicio, confianza y correspondencia.*

Online Resources

<http://www.tcd.ie/CISS/mercenaries/spanish/>, accessed 3 May 2007. This is the website of The Centre for Irish-Scottish and Comparative Studies of Trinity College Dublin.

<http://www.irishinspain.org/> accessed 3 May 2007. This is the website of the project 'La Comunidad Irlandesa en la Monarquía Hispánica' of the CSIC (Spanish National Research Council).