To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would always lead to logical absurdity.

Clausewitz

In Ireland, Oliver Cromwell’s name will for ever be associated with the storming of the towns of Drogheda and Wexford in the autumn of 1649. The massacre of troops and civilians in both cases shocked contemporary Irish opinion and left a deep legacy of bitterness towards English colonial rule. Condemned by his critics for unprecedented savagery, Cromwell’s apologists excused his conduct as merely reflecting the bloody and unprincipled nature of the war in that country, and of warfare in general during the mid seventeenth century. The widely publicized horrors of the Thirty Years War in Germany confirmed contemporary perceptions of the all-destructive impact of prolonged armed conflict. However, in a seminal article on the laws of war, Geoffrey Parker argues that most modern conventions concerning restraint in combat appeared in Europe between 1550 and 1700, initially in theory and (not surprisingly) more slowly in practice. These restrictions had their antecedents in medieval Europe, through initiatives such as the Peace of God, but it was Renaissance writers such as Francisco de Vitoria, Balthazar

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2 Philip Vincent, The Lamentations of Germany: Wherein, as in a Glasse, We May Behold her Miserable Condition, and Reade the Woefull Effects of Sinne (London, 1638, STC 24761), is one of the best examples in English of the contemporary pamphlet literature on the horrors of the Thirty Years War. For a discussion of the reality and perceptions of war, see Geoff Mortimer, Eyewitness Accounts of the Thirty Years War, 1618–48 (Basingstoke, 2002), ch. 14.

Ayala, Alberico Gentili and Hugo Grotius who first published detailed treatises outlining legitimate and acceptable behaviour during conflict. Their work, based on classical precedent, largely disregarded contemporary practice and therefore, in order to understand the moral context of warfare at the time, it is necessary to extract some general rules from the ‘untidy and variable body of customary law’. Barbara Donagan does exactly that, identifying three distinct categories in her study of the English Civil Wars during the mid seventeenth century. The first of these, ‘the law of nature and nations’, focused on the behaviour to be expected of any reasonable, moral Christian, including the protection of non-combatants. The second category, the ‘laws of war’, dealt with issues such as surrender on the battlefield and the etiquette of sieges. Adherence to these customary laws, although subject to local variation, was considered both Christian and honourable. Only the third category, ‘military law’, consisted of a series of formally codified articles.

From the late sixteenth century, this military law acted as an important moderating influence. The Spanish, Dutch and Swedes all published articles to regulate the behaviour of their troops while on campaign, and reached agreement with their opponents on issues such as the exchange of prisoners. Parker attributes this increasing restraint to a number of factors: stricter central control over armies; the gradual deconfessionalization of conflict; revulsion towards excesses; and, finally, the spread of reciprocity. With the important exception of religious

4 Theodor Meron discusses these developments in detail in a series of essays: see Theodor Meron, War Crimes Law Comes of Age: Essays (Oxford, 1998), esp. chs. 1–5. For the medieval precedents, see M. H. Keen, The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages (London, 1965).
5 Pádraig Lenihan, Confederate Catholics at War, 1641–49 (Cork, 2001), 167.
7 These military manuals were widely distributed across Europe, and translated into various languages. For an example of a tract translated into English, see The Swedish Discipline, Religious, Civile and Military (London, 1632, STC 23520).
divisions, all these factors are directly applicable to the war in Ireland, which began in October 1641 with the revolt of the Catholic Irish, and continued for twelve years until the final victory of the English parliamentary forces in 1653. Yet, the belief persists that the conflict in Ireland somehow operated outside the acceptable laws of war as understood in the seventeenth century. In a recent volume on massacres in history, Robin Clifton states that, unlike in England and Scotland, it was only in Ireland 'that civil war unleashed humanity’s full capacity for wholesale and pitiless slaughter'; while Nicholas Canny argues that despite the efforts of some professional soldiers, 'it quickly became apparent that warfare in Ireland was constrained by no moral economies'. Similarly, according to John Morrill, Cromwell's extreme behaviour at Drogheda and Wexford merely reflected the codes of military conflict in the Irish theatre. The reality, however, is more complex, and the war, in fact, went through a number of distinct phases. Indeed, only by examining the entire conflict in its broader context, encompassing events in the three Stuart kingdoms as well as on the Continent, can the nature of warfare in Ireland during the 1640s and 1650s be properly assessed.

I

The conduct of war became increasingly bloody in Ireland from the mid sixteenth century, due to a potent mix of religious and ethnic tensions between Catholic Irish natives and Protestant English administrators. Martial law, the imposition of summary justice following the suspension of the normal legal process, emerged as an important weapon in the Tudor arsenal for dealing with the recalcitrant Irish. From the fourteenth century until the 1550s, the use of martial law had been specifically restricted to situations of war or open rebellion. This changed dramatically in 1556 when Lord Deputy Sussex introduced a new pre-emptive

form of the law into Ireland, which enabled specially appointed commissioners to execute suspected offenders, even before they had committed an offence. All levels of society suffered at the hands of these military administrators, and from the 1570s, according to Vincent Carey, government-sponsored slaughter featured prominently as part of the Irish colonial experience. The Puritan Thomas Churchyard, in his book *A Generall Rehearsall of Warres*, commented favourably on the brutal ‘fear and terror’ tactics employed by Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Lord President of Munster in the 1570s. He fully supported targeting the extended families of the native Irish, arguing that the ‘killing of them by the sword, was the way to kill the men of war by famine’, who otherwise saved themselves by fleeing into the bogs and woods. In one six-week campaign, Gilbert reportedly captured twenty-three castles and slaughtered all the occupants, including women and children. Decades later, after the outbreak of the Ulster rebellion in October 1641, the Dublin authorities would advocate a similar type of ‘total war’ in Ireland.

The extensive use of summary justice, against both soldiers and civilians, helped the English eventually gain the upper hand in the Nine Years War (1594–1603). Despite the surrender of the principal native Irish leaders in 1603, the Dublin authorities continued to rely on martial law to maintain order in the localities. In 1611, the Catholic lords protested to the Irish Privy Council about the excessive abuse of summary powers, which they argued


11 Vincent Carey, ‘John Derricke’s Image of Ireland, Sir Henry Sidney and the Massacre at Mullaghmast, 1578’, *Irish Hist. Studies*, xxxi (1999), 327. Carey lists a number of the most infamous massacres of the late sixteenth century, including the killing of six hundred unarmed men, women and children on Rathlin Island in 1574.

12 Churchyard believed that ‘severe and straight’ handling of rebellious people brought them sooner to obedience, rather than ‘any courteous dealing’: see Thomas Churchyard, *A Generall Rehearsall of Warres, Called Churchyardes Choise* (London, 1579, STC 5235.2), sig. Q.ii.

should not be used in times of peace. A similar complaint appeared in a petition to Charles I in 1625, and strict limitations on the use of martial law formed part of the ‘Graces’, concessions granted by the king in 1628, though not subsequently implemented. In 1639, Lord Deputy Thomas Wentworth (later the earl of Strafford) invoked martial law to prevent disturbances from the covenanting revolt in Scotland spreading to Ulster. This action formed the basis of one of the charges at his subsequent trial at Westminster. In his defence, Wentworth emphasized that this law had ‘always been practised by the Lieutenants and Deputies of that kingdom [Ireland]’, a fact confirmed by two of his political opponents, Lords Cork and Wilmot, both veterans of previous Irish administrations. In April 1641, the king licensed the use of martial law by the Lords Justices, Sir John Borlase and Sir William Parsons, to deal with potential unrest across Ireland, following his decision to disband Strafford’s enlarged Irish army. By the outbreak of the Ulster rebellion in October of that year, therefore, martial law was a well-recognized, and frequently invoked, weapon of coercion, used in times of peace and war, against combatants and non-combatants alike.

Despite the tension of the preceding years in Scotland, England and Ireland, the rebellion of 1641 took the authorities in Dublin completely by surprise. Disgruntled native Irish Catholic landowners in the northern province of Ulster launched a pre-emptive strike on 22 October, hoping to force concessions from the king, as the Scottish covenanters had already done. The Catholics seized key strongholds in Ulster, and drove Protestant settlers from their farms and homes. Thousands of terrified refugees fled to Dublin, Scotland or England, bringing with them stories of atrocities by the Catholic insurgents. Surviving evidence, however, suggests that relatively few died on either side in the early weeks of the rising, although as many as ten thousand men,
women and children, Catholic and Protestant, subsequently perished during the winter of 1641–2.\textsuperscript{17} Each side accused the other of starting the killings, in an argument that raged for decades. A leading Catholic lord, the earl of Castlehaven, writing during the Restoration, alleged that the Lords Justices had exploited the crisis to attack all Catholics, giving orders ‘to their parties sent into the enemies [Irish] quarters, to spare neither man, woman nor child’. The eminent lawyer Sir Nicholas Plunkett made a similar point during his presentation to Charles II on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland in 1661.\textsuperscript{18} On the other side of the political and religious divide, one of the earliest historians of the wars of the 1640s, Edmund Borlase (son of Sir John), condemned the Catholic Irish for plunging the kingdom into a bloody conflict. Nonetheless, Borlase felt obliged to address accusations that Protestant massacres exceeded those of Catholics, ‘as well in respect of brutishness as numerousness’. He admitted frankly ‘that many things (contrary to the Laws of Arms and Christianity) during the rebellion were severely committed by the English’, but concluded that this was an understandable response to the savage excesses of the Catholics.\textsuperscript{19}

Whether provoked or not, the ferocious nature of the government’s reaction to the revolt exacerbated an already explosive situation. On 23 October, the day after the rebellion broke out in Ulster, the Lords Justices issued a proclamation blaming the disorder on ‘evil affected Irish papists’ without distinction. A grudging retraction/clarification six days later, following complaints by the Catholic lords of the Pale, did little to assuage fears

\textsuperscript{17} Trinity College, Dublin, MSS 809–41 (1641 Depositions) contain over three thousand witness statements compiled by the authorities in Dublin from the early 1640s, until the completion of the Cromwellian conquest in the 1650s. A detailed case study of County Armagh, where a number of massacres took place, suggests that up to five thousand Protestants may have died across the country, along with a similar number of Catholics. See Hilary Simms, ‘Violence in County Armagh, 1641’, in Brian MacCuarta (ed.), Ulster 1641: Aspects of the Rising (Belfast, 1993).


about the blatantly sectarian response of the Dublin administration to the crisis. Over the next two months, the brutal and indiscriminate reprisals by commanders such as Sir William St Leger in Munster and Sir Charles Coote in Leinster persuaded Old English Catholics to throw in their lot with the native Irish insurgents in Ulster. According to one petition to the king, a number of Catholics near Dublin were ‘murdered in their beds, and many hanged by martial law without cause by Sir Charles Coote and others here’. St Leger, Lord President of Munster, launched an equally bloody offensive across the south of the country, targeting hundreds of Catholics, including the landed gentry. He explained in a letter to the earl of Ormond how ‘in these days Magna Charta must not be wholly insisted on’. One account recorded how St Leger’s execution of innocent civilians ‘gave the people a general apprehension that the extirpation of the Catholic religion and the nation, not the punishment of men’s particular crimes, was the end he aimed at’.

After some initial successes in late 1641, the rebels found themselves increasingly on the defensive. In January 1642, the Lords Justices declared that ‘any colonel or commander may execute to death or otherwise by martial law any pillager, or any rebel or traitor’. The contemporary diarist Father Turlough O’Mellan listed a series of atrocities subsequently committed by Lord Moore in County Louth, north of Dublin, including the murder of over 140 men, women and children in

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20 A Great Conspiracy by the Papists in the Kingdome of Ireland Discovered by the Lords Justices and Counsell at Dublin and Proclaimed There Octob. 23, 1641 (London, 1641), 1; A Declaration by the Lords Justices and Council . . . 29 October 1641 (Dublin, 1641).
22 Thomas Fitzpatrick, The Bloody Bridge and Other Papers Relating to the Insurrection of 1641 (Sir Phelim O’Neill’s Rebellion) (London, 1970), 158. According to Sir John Temple, St Leger killed two hundred and hanged several prisoners, ‘for a greater terror to all such as should adventure afterwards to follow their example’: see Sir John Temple, The Irish Rebellion: or, An History of the Beginnings and First Progress of the General Rebellions Raised within the Kingdom of Ireland . . . in the Year 1641. Together with the Barbarous Cruelties and Bloody Massacres which Ensued Thereupon (London, 1646), §2, p. 36.
23 Richard Bellings, ‘History’, in History of the Irish Confederation and War in Ireland, ed. Gilbert, i, 64.
one particularly gruesome incident. Contrary to early modern conventions, the Lords Justices believed that women should be specifically targeted, 'being manifestly very deep in the guilt of this rebellion, and as we are informed, very forward to stir up their husbands, friends and kindred'. A handful of Protestant refugees fleeing Ulster did accuse individual women of inciting violence, but these depositions provided little more than a veneer of justification for indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Similarly, government forces routinely executed captured Catholic clergy, and one colonel observed that 'whatever priests, friars or Jesuits scape the sword, the gallows claims and has them'. Few would have believed the protestations of the Lords Justices when they insisted that the total extirpation of the Irish nation was far from their thoughts, 'though some to render us the more odious report so of us'. By the early summer of 1642, in the face of this savage onslaught, the rebellion appeared likely to collapse. However, the deaths of St Leger and Coote, the latter allegedly shot by one of his own men, removed two of the most energetic commanders from the field, while disease ravaged the English forces. Growing tensions in England, which would lead to the outbreak of civil war between king and parliament in August, also prevented further supplies of men and equipment from reaching Ireland. All these factors combined to halt the government offensive by the late summer. This provided Irish Catholics with a temporary breathing space, and an opportunity to organize militarily and politically.

During the summer of 1642, the Catholic elite throughout the kingdom, both native Irish and Old English, formed the


25 Lords Justices and Council to His Majesty's Commissioners for the Affairs of Ireland, 7 June 1642, in Historical Manuscripts Commission (hereafter HMC), Ormond MSS, new ser., ii, 130–1.

26 For an account of the role of women in the 1641 rebellion, see Mary O'Dowd, 'Women and War in Ireland in the 1640s', in Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd (eds.), Women in Early Modern Ireland (Dublin, 1991), 95–7.

27 Colonel Thomas Pigott to Sir Philip Percival, 1 Oct. 1647, in HMC, Egmont MSS, i, 473.

28 Lords Justices and others to the King, 16 Mar. 1643, in HMC, Ormond MSS, new ser., ii, 252.
confederate association, primarily to restore law and order. Based in Kilkenny, the confederates established regular armies in each of the four provinces, to replace those irregular levies badly mauled by government forces.29 Around the same time, the Scottish covenanters dispatched troops to Ulster to protect Protestant settlers. They established headquarters at the port of Carrickfergus, while further south the colonial administration consolidated its control of enclaves around Dublin and elsewhere.30 By early 1643 the pattern of warfare in Ireland had altered significantly, with the conventional armies on all sides operating largely according to accepted military standards. Developments in England also influenced the conflict in Ireland. In February 1643, Captain William Tucker described in glowing terms a raid by Sir Richard Grenville towards the confederate capital at Kilkenny, ‘killing and destroying by fire and sword all that came in his way’.31 As the campaign progressed, however, news reached Dublin of the king’s willingness to receive peace proposals from the confederates, in the hope of obtaining supplies and manpower for use against the English parliament. The Lords Justices opposed all attempts at conciliation, arguing that ‘if peace should now be granted them [Catholic Irish] before the sword or famine should have so abated them in numbers as that in reasonable time English colonies might overlap them . . . the English plainly do forsee it can never be safe for them to cohabit with them’.32 Despite their protestations, talks began shortly afterwards, and in September the two sides agreed a truce. At the end of the year, the king appointed the staunchly royalist James Butler, marquis of Ormond, as

29 For a detailed description of the formation of confederate government, see Micheál Ó Siochru, Confederate Ireland, 1642–1649: A Constitutional and Political Analysis (Dublin, 1999), ch. 1.
30 David Stevenson, Scottish Covenanters and Irish Confederates: Scottish–Irish Relations in the Mid-Seventeenth Century (Belfast, 1981), gives the best account of events in Ulster in 1642; while Robert Armstrong, Protestant War: The ‘British’ of Ireland and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (Manchester, 2005), examines the Protestant enclaves in Dublin and Cork. I am grateful to Robert Armstrong for allowing me to read an advance copy of his book.
32 Lords Justices and others to the King, 16 Mar. 1643, in HMC, Ormond MSS, new ser., ii, 251–2.
Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The consolidation of power in Ormond’s hands gradually moderated the military conduct of the Dublin administration, despite criticisms of this more lenient policy from his parliamentary opponents.  

For the moment at least, the revulsion felt on all sides in Ireland at the unrestrained killings in the early stages of the rising, along with the establishment of some form of central authority (in Kilkenny and Carrickfergus, as well as in Dublin), undoubtedly helped curb the worst excesses of individual commanders.

However, more than any other factor, the impact of continental veterans completely changed the nature of warfare in Ireland. With the outbreak of hostilities in the three Stuart kingdoms, thousands of Irish and Scottish veterans returned from the Continent to fight at home. After prolonged exposure to the horrors of unrestrained warfare, they appreciated the advantages of military discipline, which had become increasingly evident in the latter stages of the Thirty Years War. One Irish veteran, Garrett Barry, had already published a manual on military discipline, while the most famous returnee, Owen Roe O’Neill, complained bitterly in 1642 about the lack of obedience among the soldiers of his new command in Ulster: ‘if one can call men soldiers who behave nothing better than animals’.

O’Neill immediately set about enforcing his authority, and within

33 For criticisms of Ormond and his supporters in this regard, see [Adam Meredith], Ormonds Curtain Drawn: In a Short Discourse Concerning Ireland. Wherin his Treasons and the Corruption of his Instruments Are Laid Bare to the Stroke of Justice (London, 1646), 28–9.


35 The sack of Magdeburg by Tilly’s troops in 1631 is often referred to when describing the horrors of the Thirty Years War. Its very scale, however, made it exceptional; it was hardly a typical occurrence during that conflict. For the official Swedish account of the massacre, see Germany in the Thirty Years War, ed. and trans. Gerhard Benecke (London, 1978), 34–5.

a short time, according to an officer in the opposing Scottish covenanting army, he ‘reduced many of the natives to a more civil deportment and to a pretty good understanding of military discipline’. 37

Among the Scots in Ulster, led by Major-General Robert Monro, a veteran of the Danish and Swedish armies, a reciprocal professionalism slowly began to emerge. 38 On arriving in Ireland in April 1642, the covenanters forces under his command embarked on an orgy of revenge for the killing of Protestant settlers. Following the capture of Newry, they summarily executed sixty townsmen, and drowned a number of women in a nearby river. Raiding parties in the surrounding countryside massacred men, women and children indiscriminately, and put to death captured Irish troops. 39 However, as their initial ardour began to cool, those Scots with experience of continental warfare began to reappraise the situation. The murder of civilians and prisoners had simply enraged their enemies, and with no immediate end to the war in sight, the possibility arose that Scottish troops might well fall into confederate hands at some stage. Sir James Turner, who had served in Germany, witnessed the execution of some Irish prisoners after a skirmish in 1642. He wrote, ‘and herein also their revenge overmastered their discretion, which should have taught them to save the lives of those they took, that the rebels might do the like to their prisoners’. The realities of the conflict in Ulster gradually tempered the conduct of the covenanting forces, and by late 1642/early 1643, Turner recorded

37 Sir James Turner, Memoirs of his Own Life and Times, 1632–1670 (Bannatyne Club, xxviii, Edinburgh, 1829), 26. Another continental veteran, Thomas Preston, apologized to Ormond for hanging a royalist prisoner in early 1643, but justified his action on the grounds that the victim had earlier deserted from confederate service. Preston merely ‘caused the military laws to be put in execution, according to the custom of the country wherein I serve [the Spanish Netherlands]’. See Preston to Ormond, 26 Mar. 1643, in HMC, Ormond MSS, new ser., i, 57. Thanks to Geoffrey Parker for bringing this reference to my attention.

38 Like Barry, Monro published a work on military discipline: Major Generall [Robert] Monro, The Scotch Military Discipline Learned from the Valiant Swede (London, 1644). He was also the author of the first regimental history in the English language: see Monro his Expedition with the Worthy Scots Regiment (called Mac-Keyes Regiment) Levied in August 1626 (London, 1637, STC 18022).

39 Stevenson, Scottish Covenanters and Irish Confederates, 105–7, believes that local Protestant forces assisting the covenanters were responsible for most of the killings, but that Monro did nothing to restrain them.
This principle of reciprocity (as outlined by Turner) increasingly influenced the course of conflict on the Continent, and formed the basis of the 'laws' of war in Ireland during the 1640s. The early modern theorist Balthazar Ayala argued that the rules of war did not apply to rebels, and during the early stages of the Dutch Revolt the duke of Alba explained that it was Spain's policy to hang all captured troops. This changed abruptly when the Dutch seized the count of Bossu, a trusted adviser of Alba, in 1573. They threatened to kill him if the executions continued and, before long, the two sides reached an informal agreement on the exchange of prisoners. Similarly, during the early days of the English Civil War, King Charles treated the parliamentarians as rebels, and hanged a handful until his opponents threatened to retaliate in kind. In Ireland, from late 1642 onwards, the increased professionalism of the various armies, along with the threat of retaliation, acted as a moderating influence, as all sides acknowledged that the introduction of some general rules of engagement would be of mutual benefit. The war continued to rage across the four provinces, with frequent raids and skirmishes, as well as sieges and the occasional set-piece battle. Yet, during this period no major massacres took place, terms of surrender were honoured (for the most part) and prisoners were exchanged on a regular basis. The publication of strict codes of conduct also signalled efforts to regulate the behaviour of troops during large-scale military campaigns. This is not to suggest that atrocities did not take place, even where soldiers tried for the most part to act honourably towards their enemies. As the seventeenth-century diarist John Evelyn commented sadly, 'it is impossible to avoid doing very unhandsome

40 Turner, Memoirs, 20–1, 25.
42 These were concerned primarily with the conduct of troops while on campaign and did not deal directly with the treatment of enemy troops. See, for example, [Earl of Castlehaven], Laws and Orders of Warre, MDCXLIII, Established . . . for the Conduct of the Armie Designed for the Expedition of Ulster (Waterford, 1643), printed in History of the Irish Confederation and War in Ireland, ed. Gilbert, iii, 74–85.
43 Donagan argues that soldiers normally fought to win, a fact which placed practical limits on acts of courtesy: see Donagan, 'Web of Honour', 387.
things in war'. However, the reality in Ireland during much of the 1640s was far from the indiscriminate, sectarian butchery of the early months of the conflict.

II

While the conduct of war in Ireland gradually moderated in 1642–3, parliamentarians and covenanters in England and Scotland increasingly targeted Irish troops fighting for the king. Traditional racial and confessional hostility, reinforced by graphic propaganda about the massacre of Protestant settlers in 1641, legitimized for many the violent treatment of Catholic Irish prisoners. In a typical pamphlet, entitled The Teares of Ireland, the Catholic Irish were accused of ‘cruelties and tortures exceeding all parallel, unheard of among Pagans, Turks or Barbarians, except you would enter into the confines of Hell itself’. According to the author, this ‘Popish brood’, incited by their clergy, had already murdered fifty thousand Protestant men, women and children, but at the day of recompense God would ‘make his arrows drunk in their blood’. William Gouge, renowned Puritan divine and author of God’s Three Arrows: Plague, Famine, Sword, in Three Treatises, cautioned how ‘some that outwardly profess the Christian Faith, may be as great enemies to the true Faith, as plain infidels’ and denounced Catholics as the ‘deadliest enemies that Christ’s true Church ever had’. Speaking on the need to dispatch troops immediately to Ireland, the parliamentarian leader John Pym declared ominously that ‘nothing but the sword must decide the controversy’.

44 Quoted in Carlton, Going to the Wars, 257.
46 William Gouge, God’s Three Arrows: Plague, Famine, Sword, in Three Treatises (London, 1631, STC 12116), 213; Mr Pym, his Speech in Parliament . . . for the Present Pressing of 15,000 Men, To Be Immediately Transported to Ireland (London, 1642), 4.
Clearly, Irish Catholics could expect little mercy from such men. However, with Ormond firmly in control of Dublin, the parliamentarians temporarily lacked a base in Ireland from which to prosecute their crusade.

A truce between the confederates and the royalists in September 1643 allowed Ormond to transfer royalist soldiers to England the following year. No confederate troops accompanied this force, which consisted primarily of Englishmen returning home along with some Irish Protestants. Parliamentary propaganda, however, exploited widespread fears in England of a Catholic Irish invasion, and individual commanders dealt harshly with any soldiers captured coming from Ireland. In July 1644, for example, the confederate supreme council recorded the drowning by the parliamentarians of a company of Protestant royalists sailing to England. A number of women accompanying them also perished. In October, Westminster issued an ordinance that no quarter was to be given to any Irish Catholics ‘taken in hostility against the Parliament’. The ordinance instructed parliamentary commanders specifically to exclude the Irish from any surrender agreements with the enemy, and ‘forthwith put every such person to death’. Anybody who refused to implement the ordinance would be ‘reputed a favourer of that bloody rebellion of Ireland’ and be liable to punishment. Crucially, this ordinance applied to the war in England, Wales and on the high seas, but not in Ireland. The parliamentarians had gained a foothold in Ireland during the summer of 1644, when the royalist commander in Munster, Lord Inchiquin, switched his allegiance to Westminster in protest at Ormond’s continuing truce with Kilkenny. Surrounded by confederate forces, Inchiquin fully realized that any attempt to apply the

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47 Bibliography of Royal Proclamations of the Tudor and Stuart Sovereigns, ed. Steele, ii, 49.
‘no quarter’ ordinance risked immediate retaliatory measures from his enemies.

The Irish in England, however, enjoyed little protection, despite the best efforts of some individual officers. In February 1645 Colonel Thomas Mytton captured the royalist town of Shrewsbury and hanged a number of Irish soldiers, according to Parliament’s instructions. In retaliation, Prince Rupert executed the same number of parliamentarian prisoners and threatened a similar response in future cases. Outraged, the House of Commons ordered the earl of Essex to explain to Rupert, a German, the difference between Catholic Irishmen and Protestant Englishmen. Essex wrote to Rupert expressing dismay at the prince’s actions, claiming that the Irish had already killed 154,000 ‘harmless British Protestants, men, women and children’ and had been declared traitors by the king. Moreover, he continued, in Ireland ‘they neither did give nor receive quarter’. In the light of all this, Parliament could not consent to the Catholic Irish being ‘made equal in exchange with the English nation, and Protestants’. Rupert, the consummate professional soldier, dismissed Essex’s arguments out of hand. He described the Irishmen executed at Shrewsbury as ‘His Majesty’s good subjects taken prisoner in the act of their duty’. They had served the king faithfully in Ireland and, therefore, the circumstances of the 1641 rebellion did not apply in their case. Rupert condemned the killing of prisoners after granting them quarter as ‘a proceeding contrary to the laws of nature and nations, contrary to the rules and customs of war in any part of the Christian world’. He concluded that any further incidents of this nature would elicit a similar response from him. Rupert never carried out his threat, departing for the Continent shortly afterwards, and the targeting of the Irish by the parliamentarians continued unchecked. In fact, it is

49 When the royalist Lord Byron surrendered Chester on 3 February 1646 he failed to get the Irish soldiers under his command included in the articles, as the parliamentarians insisted they could not disobey the 1644 ordinance. Byron persisted, however, and ‘had an engagement from them [the parliamentarians] upon honour not to put that ordinance into execution, which was punctually observed so that the Irish passed away as free as any other soldiers’. See ‘John Byron’s Account of the Siege of Chester, 1645–6’, Cheshire Sheaf, vi (1971), 23.

50 A Letter from the Earl of Essex to His Highnesse Prince Rupert . . . with His Highnesse Answer Thereunto (Bristol, 1645).
remarkable how many of the documented massacres in the English Civil War have an Irish connection, either directly or indirectly. For example, the execution of seventy-five Irish prisoners at Conway Castle is a pretty straightforward case, but the Welsh royalist camp followers at the battle of Naseby appear to have been butchered in the mistaken belief that they were Irish.51

In Scotland, the covenanting regime shared the English parliament’s antipathy towards native Irish Catholics, and adopted a similarly hard line, though the failure of many to distinguish between Irish and Scottish Gaels further complicated matters. A confederate expeditionary force, comprising Irish and Highland Scots, conducted a lightning campaign across Scotland in 1644–5, winning a series of stunning victories against the covenanting forces. The MacDonald element in this army, led by Alasdair MacColla, seized the opportunity to settle old scores with their clan rivals, the Campbells, while further east, city residents blamed the Irish contingent for the worst excesses during the sack of Aberdeen. The covenanters finally defeated the expeditionary force, without MacColla, at Philiphaugh in September 1645 and massacred around a hundred Irish soldiers, despite promises to spare their lives. According to Patrick Gordon of Ruthven (no friend of the Irish), the camp followers of this small army (exclusively Irish women and children) were also ‘cut in pieces with such savage and inhumane cruelty, as neither Turk nor Scithean was ever heard to have done the like’.52

In December, the Scottish parliament ordered that Irish prisoners be ‘executed without any further assise or process’, as granting them quarter was contrary to the covenant and therefore a sin. Throughout 1646–7, the covenanters ruthlessly hunted down

52 Gordon described the Irish during their campaign in Scotland as ‘too cruel ... for they killed men ordinarily with no more feeling or compassion, and with the same careless neglect that they kill a hen or capone for their supper’: see Patrick Gordon, A Short Abridgement of Britane's Distemper, 1639–49 (Aberdeen, 1844), 160–1. According to local tradition, the killing of the camp followers was in revenge for the massacre of Protestant settlers by the native Irish, at Portadown Bridge in County Armagh, at the beginning of the rebellion: see Geoffrey Ridsdill Smith and Margaret Toynbee, Leaders of the Civil Wars, 1642–1648 (Kineton, 1977), 131. For a superb account of the MacColla campaign, see David Stevenson, Alasdair MacColla and the Highland Problem in the Seventeenth Century (Edinburgh, 1980).
and massacred remnants of this expeditionary force, with stragglers still being executed as late as 1649.53

III

Around this time the savage practices of England and Scotland dramatically entered the Irish arena, albeit briefly. Following the defeat of the king in the first English Civil War, the marquis of Ormond surrendered the city of Dublin to the English parliament in June 1647. The new governor, Colonel Michael Jones (an Irish Protestant), commanded an army consisting of local Protestants and troops recently arrived from England. On 8 August, Jones defeated a confederate force at Dungan’s Hill near Dublin, and the largest single massacre of the entire war ensued, with somewhere between three and five thousand killed. A battlefield rout often resulted in the slaughter of the fleeing enemy, but at Dungan’s Hill the surrounded confederate forces retreated into a bog, where a contemporary diarist describes the killing of the rank and file soldiers ‘agus iad ceangailte, iar ceathramha [do ghealladh] doibh’ (manacled after quarter [had been granted] to them).54 Not surprisingly, English sources make no mention of granting terms to the confederate troops, and the official parliamentary account of the battle, approved by Jones and published by order of the House of Commons, insisted that only those ‘not admitted to quarter’ were executed.55 Writing during the Restoration, Richard Bellings described how a Colonel Flower did grant protection to a number of confederate officers,

53 Carlton, Going to the Wars, 262–3. The parliamentary declaration refers to Irish prisoners at Selkirk following the battle of Philiphaugh. See also Turner, Memoirs, 46–8; Allan Macinnes, ‘Slaughter under Trust: Clan Massacres and British State Formation’, in Levene and Roberts (eds.), Massacre in History, 132–4. In February 1649, the Scottish Committee of Estates ordered that some recently captured Irish stragglers from the 1644–5 expeditionary force ‘be put to present execution’: see David Stevenson, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Scotland, 1644–1651 (London, 1977), 148.

54 ‘Cin Lae Ui Mheallain’, 36–7. O’Mellan did not witness these events directly, although he may have met survivors, as Owen Roe O’Neill’s army passed through the battlefield some months later.

55 An Exact and Full Relation of the Great Victory Obtained against the Rebels at Dungons-Hill in Ireland, August 8. 1647 (London, 1647), 10. Two accounts of the battle, written immediately afterwards by parliamentary sympathizers, agree on these basic details: see Valentine Savage to Sir Philip Perceval, 9 Aug. 1647, and Sir Patrick Wemys to Sir Philip Perceval, 10 Aug. 1647, both in HMC, Egmont MSS, i, 444–7.
but the parliamentarians ‘without mercy, put the rest unto the sword’. According to Thomas Fairfax, if troops surrendered upon mercy rather than quarter, the victorious commander was ‘free to put some immediately to the sword, if he [saw] cause’. Nonetheless, Sir James Turner believed that ‘in such cases mercy is the more Christian, the more honourable, and the more ordinary way in our wars in Europe’. At Dungan’s Hill, however, Jones ignored continental military conventions and acted instead according to the harsh dictates of Westminster. Similarly in Munster, the rabidly anti-Catholic Lord Inchiquin, reinforced with fresh supplies of arms and men from England, launched a bloody offensive deep into confederate territory. He massacred the handful of surviving defenders at the siege of Cashel in September, and executed the Highland/Irish contingent after the battle of Knocknanuss two months later, including their feared commander, Alasdair MacColla.

Bolstered by reinforcements and confident of total victory, both parliamentary commanders displayed the brutal self-assurance born of recent successes in England and unleashed a brief period of unrestrained warfare in late 1647. However, despite the increased intensity of the fighting from 1647, the surviving evidence indicates that neither Jones nor Inchiquin deliberately targeted civilians in their campaigns against the confederates. With supplies from England still unreliable, they required a cooperative local population to provide basic provisions. In fact, within days of his arrival in Dublin, in June 1647, Jones issued a

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56 Bellings, ‘History’, in History of the Irish Confederation and War in Ireland, ed. Gilbert, vii, 32–3. An anonymous account, written during the Restoration, insisted that many wounded officers were killed the day after the battle: see A Collection of Some of the Murthers and Massacres Committed on the Irish in Ireland, since the 23rd of October 1641 (London, 1662), 13.
57 Fairfax is quoted in Donagan, ‘Codes and Conduct in the English Civil War’, 80; see also Turner, Memoirs, 47.
59 Pádraig Lenihan concludes that practical considerations may also have sealed the fate of the prisoners. There were simply too many to guard and feed, or to ransom. Moreover, unlike the war in England, religious and racial antipathies prevented any recruitment from among the defeated forces. See Lenihan, Confederate Catholics at War, 209–14.
series of ordinances to regulate the conduct of his army, which were read to the troops each week, ‘that none may be ignorant of the laws and duties required’. The vast majority of the rules dealt with discipline within the army itself, but a number related to the civilian population. Murder, rape and theft were all punishable by death, along with unlicensed destruction of goods and property, ‘be it of friend or foe’. Nonetheless, the military tactics of Jones and Inchiquin in 1647 presaged in many ways those adopted by Cromwell and his commanders in the Irish wars two years later. As Sir John Byron, an English royalist and continental veteran, commented bitterly, the parliamentarians ‘when they have an advantage, think it [a] dishonour to use those civilities practised by soldiers in foreign parts’.

The outbreak of the second English Civil War in 1648 prevented further military supplies reaching Ireland that year, and temporarily stalled the parliamentary offensive. By the summer of 1649, geographically isolated and under increasing threat from resurgent confederate forces, two leading parliamentary commanders in Ireland, Charles Coote and George Monck, readily agreed to a temporary truce with the native Irish general, Owen Roe O’Neill, who had fallen out with the Kilkenny leadership over a renewed peace deal between the confederates and the royalists. Although Coote and Monck subsequently renounced (or were forced to renounce) these pacts, they showed that religious or political principles did not always dictate parliamentary policy in Ireland. With the renewed prospect of massive reinforcements from England, however, Michael Jones held firm in Dublin, rejecting a plea from the Lord Lieutenant, the marquis of Ormond, to join with the royalists. His subsequent victory

60 Colonell Michael Iones, Lawes and Ordinances of Warre, Established for the Good Conduct of the Army (Dublin, 1647). All sides in the conflict pillaged enemy quarters, but the parliamentarians proved no more thorough or brutal than their confederate opponents in this regard.


62 Ormond to Jones, 9 Mar. 1649: Bodleian Library, Oxford, Carte MS 24, fos. 103–4; Jones to Ormond, 14 Mar. 1649: Bodleian Lib., Carte MS 24, fo. 129. Parliament published the correspondence between Coote, Monck and O’Neill in order to dispel rumours that major concessions had been offered to Irish Catholics: see A True Relation of the Transactions between Sir Charls Coot Kt. Lord President of Connnaught in Ireland, and Owen-Roe-O-Neal (London, 1649); Generall Owen Oneales Letter to Collonell Monck (London, 1649).
over Ormond at Rathmines on 2 August cleared the way for Oliver Cromwell and the New Model Army to land unopposed two weeks later.

Victory over English and Scottish opponents in 1648, and the execution of the king in January 1649, had freed parliamentary troops and resources for a renewed invasion of Ireland. The parliamentarians viewed Ireland, unlike Scotland, as a dependency of England, directly subject to the dictates of Westminster. As Henry Ireton later explained, ‘Ireland being a conquered country, the English Nation might with justice assert their right and conquest’. They hoped to use Irish land to repay massive debts and to avenge the widely reported massacre of Protestant settlers in 1641–2. Of more immediate concern, following the peace treaty in January 1649 between the marquis of Ormond and the confederates in Kilkenny, royalist forces in Ireland now posed a serious threat to the new regime in England. The House of Commons appointed Oliver Cromwell to lead the expeditionary force. He believed that the possibility of Catholic Irish troops landing in England would ‘awaken all Englishmen who perhaps are willing enough he [Charles II] should have come in upon an accommodation, but not [that] he must come from Ireland and Scotland’. Populist publications in London bolstered this crude appeal to nationalist sentiment with renewed attacks against the Catholic Irish. The authorities at Westminster authorized Thomas Waring to revisit the massacre of the Protestant settlers at the outbreak of the Irish rebellion. Basing his account on the depositions of the

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63 Ireton’s words are quoted in Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow Esq., 2 vols. (Vivay, 1698), i, 375. Ludlow’s ‘memoirs’ were extensively reworked before publication by John Toland, and must be used with caution. Nonetheless, for much of the 1650s Ludlow was centrally involved in Irish affairs. For a discussion on the ‘memoirs’, see Edmund Ludlow: A Voice from the Watch Tower, pt 5, 1660–1662, ed. A. B. Worden (Camden Soc., 4th ser., xxi, London, 1978).

64 ‘Cromwell’s Speech to the General Council of the Army at Whitehall, 23 March 1649’, in The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, ed. W. C. Abbott, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1988), ii, 36–9. Cromwell had enjoyed a remarkable record of success in the English Civil Wars, and was the obvious choice to lead an expedition to Ireland in 1649. His record, however, was not without blemish. In October 1645, he commanded the assault on Basing House in Hampshire, and refused quarter to the garrison for continuing to resist after an offer of terms. According to contemporary accounts the dead included a number of civilians. The severity of these actions was probably due in part to the fact that the house belonged to a prominent Catholic peer, and the defenders included many Catholics. See J. C. Davis, Oliver Cromwell (London, 2001), 109–10.
survivors, he dismissed Irish Catholics as ‘merely a kind of reptilia . . . creeping on their bellies, and feeding on the dust of the earth’. He argued that there could be ‘no safety in cohabitation with them’, and concluded that Parliament could ‘warrantably and righteously endeavour the extirpation of them’. As William Hickman later wrote to Cromwell, ‘God hath marked out that people for destruction’. 65 Cromwell himself described the campaign in equally stark, apocalyptic terms, condemning the Irish Catholic bishops as ‘part of the Antichrist, whose kingdom the Scripture so expressly speaks should be laid in blood’. 66 With the ideological ground for the resumption of brutal military tactics in Ireland clearly so well prepared, the handful of dissenting voices in England proved all too easy to ignore. 67

Cromwell had little direct experience of Irish affairs prior to his expedition in 1649, apart from helping to organize and finance the troops sent over by Parliament in 1642. 68 Arriving in Dublin at the end of the campaign season in late August 1649, with an army totalling twelve thousand men, he desperately needed (as Jones had before him) a co-operative local population to help sustain his forces. From the outset, therefore, he adopted a dual approach towards the local population. On landing in Dublin, he denounced the ‘barbarous and bloodthirsty Irish, and the rest of their adherents and confederates’, but shortly afterwards publicly assured those wishing to contribute to the


66 *A Declaration of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, for the Undeceiving of Deluded and Seduced People* (1650), in *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Abbott, ii, 199.


68 Cromwell sat on a number of parliamentary committees established in early 1642 to deal with the crisis in Ireland: see *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Abbott, i, 162, 172, 181, 186. He also invested £600 in the Irish venture in 1642, and subscribed an additional £250 before acquiring over 1,200 acres in King’s County. See Karl S. Bottigheimer, *English Money and Irish Land: The ‘Adventurers’ in the Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland* (Oxford, 1971), 70; *Calendar of State Papers, Adventurers, 1642–1659* (London, 1903), 319–20; ‘Register of Adventurers, 1658’; Marsh’s Library, Dublin, MS Z2.1.5, fo. 27.
parliamentary army that they would not 'be troubled or molested in their persons or goods'. Cromwell hanged a few of his troops for unlicensed pillaging, and where possible insisted that his army pay for whatever goods they took.69 This drive to win the hearts and minds of the local population proved successful at first, unsettling Cromwell’s opponents. Sir Edmond Butler, governor of County Wexford, wrote to Ormond complaining that he had difficulty in preventing the country people from making terms with the parliamentarians, as ‘the rouges allure them by speaking that they are for the liberty of the commoners’. The earl of Castlehaven concurred, as he noted incredulously how Cromwell paid a local inhabitant £5 for a night’s lodging.70 In contrast, each day fresh petitions reached Ormond, detailing abuses committed by royalist troops against the inhabitants, and in early September the Lord Lieutenant published a declaration for the punishment of serious offences.71 This had little effect, since, according to the royalist Sir Lewis Dyve, in the absence of regular supplies the army had no choice but to ‘take their sustenance where they could find it’. The parliamentarians, on the other hand, he noted warily, ‘had money to pay for what they took’.72

The strategic town of Drogheda, thirty miles north of Dublin, was Cromwell’s first target. After a short siege, the parliamentarians successfully breached the old medieval walls, stormed the town and killed most of the three thousand defenders. This savage action shocked opinion in Ireland and abroad, but by a strict interpretation of the rules of war Cromwell acted entirely

69 Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, ed. Abbott, ii, 107, 111–12. The Independent minister and preacher John Canne similarly urged Cromwell ‘to proceed wisely in war and justly after victory’. He believed the ‘barbarous and savage’ Catholic Irish would willingly abandon their leaders in response to Cromwell’s military victories. See John Canne, The Improvement of Mercy: or, A Short Treatise, Shewing How, and in What Manner, our Rulers and All Well-Affected to the Present Government Should Make a Right and Profitable Use of the Late Great Victory in Ireland (London, 1649), 19, 24.

70 Butler also noted that Cromwell hanged troopers for stealing three herrings. The letters of Butler and Castlehaven are in History of the Town and County of Wexford, ed. Philip Herbert Hore, 6 vols. (London, 1900–11), v, 278–80.

71 ‘Declaration by the Lord Lieutenant, 4 Sept. 1649’: Bodleian Lib., Carte MS 162, fos. 75–6.

72 A Letter from Sir Lewis Dyve: To the Lord Marquis of New-Castle Giving his Lordship an Account of the Whole Conduct of the Kings Affaires in Ireland [sic] since the Time of the Lord Marquis of Ormond, His Excellencies Arrival There out of France in Septem. 1648. Until Sr. Lewis his Departure out of That Kingdome, in June 1650 (The Hague, 1650), 28.
within his rights. The commander of Drogheda, Sir Arthur Aston, refused a summons to surrender, thereby forfeiting his life and that of the garrison in the event of a successful assault. In 1381, the duke of Bourbon threatened to hang all the defenders of Moléon if they refused his summons, while centuries later the duke of Wellington remarked ‘that it has always been understood that the defenders of a fortress stormed have no claim to quarter’. However, by Cromwell’s own admission ‘many inhabitants’ also perished, and in the context of an Irish siege during the 1640s, or indeed one in England or Scotland, the scale of the killing was unprecedented. Moreover, Cromwell did not bother to preserve any prisoners for ransom or future exchanges with the enemy. Irish Catholics could either surrender unconditionally or die. Edmund Ludlow, no friend of Cromwell, speculated that this ‘extraordinary severity . . . was used to discourage others from making opposition’. Cromwell suggested as much when writing to John Bradshaw, president of the Council of State, a few days after the massacre. He explained how ‘the enemy were filled upon this with much terror. And truly I believe this bitterness will save much effusion of blood’. However, in a letter to Speaker Lenthall, which he knew would almost certainly be published, the motive of revenge took precedence. ‘I am persuaded’, he wrote, ‘that this is a righteous judgement of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood’. These twin justifications, he concluded, were ‘satisfactory grounds for such actions,

73 The duke of Bourbon is quoted in Keen, Laws of War, 120; Wellington is quoted in Parker, ‘Etiquette of Atrocity’, 155.
74 The nearest equivalent in Scotland was the storming of Dundee by the parliamentarians on 1 September 1651. Eight hundred defenders were killed in fierce fighting, along with some women and children. See Stevenson, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Scotland, 208. Cromwell used the phrase ‘many inhabitants’ in a letter to Lenthall (27 Sept. 1649), subsequently published by order of parliament: see Letters from Ireland, Relating the Several Great Successes It Hath Pleased God to Give unto the Parliaments Forces There in the Taking of Drogheda, Trym, Dundalk, Carlingford, and the Nury (London, 1649).

75 Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, i, 303. In Spain, the marquis of Los Vélez adopted similar terror tactics when he moved against Catalan rebels in late 1640. At Cambrils the garrison surrendered on terms, but the commander and his chief lieutenants were hanged for treason, and hundreds of ordinary soldiers were massacred, allegedly for acting in an insolent manner following the surrender. This severity resulted in the rapid surrender of a number of other garrisons, but Catalan resistance continued for well over a decade. Thanks to Geoffrey Parker for this information from his forthcoming book on the ‘World Crisis’.
which otherwise cannot but work remorse and regret’. That Drogheda’s garrison included some Englishmen, as well as Irish Protestants, did not concern Cromwell. An example had to be made, and Protestant blood avenged.

Ormond quickly condemned the massacre, which ‘would make as many several pictures of inhumanity as are to be found in the Book of Martyrs or in the relation of Amboyne’. He compared Cromwell’s actions at Drogheda with the storming of Rathfarnham outside Dublin by the royalists in July. In the latter case, the entire garrison had been taken prisoner, ‘and though 500 soldiers had entered the castle before any officers of note yet not one creature was killed, which I tell you by the way to observe the difference between ours and the rebels making use of a victory’. Nonetheless, Cromwell’s severity appeared to have the desired effect, as a number of garrisons in the vicinity of Drogheda fled without even a show of resistance. Ormond explained in a letter to Charles II that it was ‘not to be imagined how great the terror is that those successes and the power of the rebels have struck into this people’. The commander of the town of Wexford, Cromwell’s next target, warned Ormond that the inhabitants wanted to surrender, ‘such [an] impression they have of Drogheda’. On 11 October, Cromwell’s forces stormed Wexford, which suffered a similar fate to Drogheda, with over two thousand soldiers and townspeople put to the sword. However, the severity of the campaign, and the persistent accusations of breach of quarter and the murder of civilians, began to generate a backlash. When Cromwell next approached the strategic fort of Duncannon, the commander, Thomas Roche, rejected the summons to surrender, as ‘I and those under my

76 This slightly apologetic tone suggests that Cromwell at least recognized that his actions at Drogheda may have appeared excessive even to an English audience: see Cromwell to John Bradshaw, 16 Sept. 1649, and Cromwell to Lenthall, 17 Sept. 1649, both in Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, ed. Abbott, ii, 124–8.
77 Ormond to Lord Byron, 29 Sept. 1649: Bodleian Lib., Carte MS 25, fos. 628–30. The massacre of English merchants by the Dutch in the East Indies thirty years earlier had outraged opinion in England, which was expressed in numerous publications. See, for example, A True Relation of the Unjust, Cruel, and Barbarous Proceedings against the English at Amboyna in the East Indies by the Netherlandish Governour and Counsell There (London, 1632, STC 7453).
79 Colonel David Sinnott to Ormond, 30 Sept. 1649, in History of the Town and County of Wexford, ed. Hore, v, 279.
command are sensible of your cruel and tyrannical quarter’. Shortly afterwards, when the royalists attempted to retake the town of Carrick, recently captured by the parliamentarians, the attackers cried out to the besieged ‘that they would soon give them Tredagh [Drogheda] Quarters’. Following his failure to take Duncannon and the nearby city of Waterford, Cromwell reassessed his use of harsh tactics, and there were no more major atrocities during his time in Ireland. In preparation for the new campaign in early 1650, he corresponded with the enemy for the first time about the exchange of prisoners. He offered generous terms to encourage the town of Fethard to surrender quickly, and for the most part only executed officers after the storming of a garrison. In May, despite suffering heavy losses at the siege of Clonmel, he scrupulously adhered to the surrender terms, even though the garrison had slipped away at night while the negotiations took place. It appears that a growing respect for the military capabilities of his enemies, coupled with the restraints of reciprocity, gradually tempered Cromwell’s outrage at the alleged crimes of the Catholic Irish and moderated his conduct of the military campaign.

Cromwell left Ireland shortly after the siege of Clonmel to deal with a renewed threat from Scotland, while the Irish war entered what Nicholas Canny describes as ‘the bloodiest and most

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80 Thomas Roche to Cromwell, [25 Oct.] 1649: BL, Add. MS 4769B, fo. 4; ‘Copies of Letters Relating to Ireland, 1649–50, with Narrative’: BL, Add. MS 4769B, fo. 8v. Drogheda was also known as ‘Tredagh’ in the seventeenth century.

81 Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, ed. Abbott, ii, 197. Not everybody shared Cromwell’s doubts about the effectiveness of harsh tactics. In December, the parliamentary attorney-general of Ireland, William Basil, exulted in the fact that following a victory in Ulster, none of the Irish troops received quarter. See Two Letters from William Basil Esq., Attorney General of Ireland (London, 1649), 5.

82 See Cromwell’s letters describing the ongoing campaign in Cromwelliana: A Chronological Detail of the Events in which Oliver Cromwell Was Engaged from the Year 1642 to his Death 1658. With a Continuation of Other Transactions to the Restoration (London, 1810), 75–7; Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, ed. Abbott, ii, 231–5; The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, ed. Thomas Carlyle, 3 vols. (London, 1904), iii, 265–6, 420, 423. The earl of Castlehaven complained bitterly about the continued execution of officers by Cromwell, particularly as the earl had released parliamentary prisoners following the recapture of Athy: see Denis Murphy, Cromwell in Ireland: A History of Cromwell’s Irish Campaign (Dublin, 1883), 291.

83 Although Cromwell did not vent his anger on the inhabitants of Clonmel, he sent cavalry in pursuit of the fleeing garrison. Upwards of two hundred stragglers, including wounded soldiers and some women, were killed. See Ian Gentles, The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645–1653 (Oxford, 1992), 375.
prolonged aspect of the struggle'.84 Between 1649 and 1653 Ireland suffered a ‘demographic catastrophe’, with mortality in the region of 20 per cent due to the continued fighting, alongside widespread starvation and disease. This compares with an estimated 3 per cent population loss in England during the Civil Wars of the 1640s.85 Cromwell’s son-in-law, Henry Ireton, replaced him as commander in Ireland and resumed the campaign against the remaining royalist strongholds. Ireton could be ruthless in pursuit of victory. At the siege of Limerick in 1651, he executed a number of civilians fleeing the city, in order to discourage others from leaving and increase the pressure on the beleaguered garrison. Following the surrender of the city in October, Ireton informed the speaker of the Commons of his policy towards the vanquished enemy. ‘I suppose’, he explained, ‘we shall see cause to execute some of them in a military way, in relation to the holding out of the place, and for terror to others’.86

Although harsh at times in his treatment of the enemy, Ireton also demanded strict compliance with the conventions of war from his own commanders. He suspended Colonel Axtell, governor of Kilkenny, for executing innocent civilians in retaliation for the death of parliamentary troops, ‘by arbitrary power without trial or conviction’. An unrepentant Axtell soon returned to military service, and later argued that ‘God did use me as an instrument [in Ireland] ... for the suppressing of that bloody enemy’.87 Ireton also summoned a council of war to examine charges that Colonel Tothill had ordered the execution of troops who had surrendered on terms. The council stripped Tothill of his

84 Canny, Making Ireland British, 570.
86 A Letter from the Lord Deputy-General of Ireland unto the Honorable William Lenthal Esq. (London, 1651), 8. The description of the execution of those fleeing the city is in Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, i, 368–9. Such harsh actions were frequently condoned during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: see Keen, Laws of War, 121–2.
87 Rebels no Saints: or, A Collection of the Speeches, Private Passages, Letters and Prayers of Those Persons Lately Executed. By a Person of Quality (London, 1661), 132–3. On his way back to England, following his suspension, Axtell was captured at sea by royalists and taken to the Scilly Isles. The Irish on the island wanted to execute him, but nothing was done for fear of retaliation. See Charles Firth and Godfrey Davies, The Regimental History of Cromwell’s Army, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1940), ii, 629. The full list of charges against Axtell can be found in Trinity College, Dublin, MS 844, fos. 131–3.
command, but Ireton worried that the punishment ‘fell short of the justice God required therein to the acquitting of the army from the guilt of so foul a sin’. He notified the royalists of what had taken place, and released other prisoners without exchange or ransom. Despite these measures, Ireton blamed a subsequent setback suffered by the parliamentary forces on Tothill’s bad faith.  

Ireton, however, had no time for the soldier’s code of honour, which he believed prolonged the war unnecessarily. Shortly before his death in November 1651, Ireton sent a summons to Thomas Preston, commander of the last major royalist stronghold at Galway. Preston, a continental veteran, dismissed the summons as dishonourable, since the parliamentary forces had not yet appeared before the city. Ireton replied in scathing terms that ‘men of your unhappy breeding think such a glorious trifle worth the sacrificing or venturing other men’s lives and interests for’.  

As the war dragged on into 1652, the parliamentary commanders offered generous terms to those troops willing to surrender and enter the service of either France or Spain. Catholic soldiers received assurances that they would not be held responsible for killings in the heat of military action, and only those guilty of murdering ‘any person or persons of the English not in arms’ were to be excluded from terms. Away from the front line and the major engagements, however, the civilian authorities in Dublin displayed little of Ireton’s earlier restraint. Harried by continuing pockets of Irish resistance close to the city, they adopted an increasingly hard line, deliberately targeting a civilian population which in their eyes refused to accept Parliament’s military superiority as a clear manifestation of God’s will. In

88 Tothill was accused of executing a number of Irish prisoners who had been granted quarter by one of his junior officers. The entire episode is described in a pamphlet entitled Sad Newes from Ireland: How the Lord Hath Been Pleased to Chastize the Parliament’s Forces by a Losse from the Rebels (London, 1651). Augustin von Fritsch witnessed a similar case in 1636, involving French troops in Germany: see Mortimer, Eyewitness Accounts of the Thirty Years War, 43.

89 Ireton to Preston, 7 Nov. 1651, in HMC, Ormond MSS, new ser., i, 225–6. According to Barbara Donagan, courage was most admired when it served a rational purpose: see Donagan, ‘Web of Honour’, 373–4.

90 The quotation is taken from the articles agreed between the parliamentarians and Viscount Muskerry, in June 1652, and is typical of surrender terms from that year: see Ireland under the Commonwealth: Being a Selection of Documents Relating to the Government of Ireland from 1651 to 1659, ed. Robert Dunlop, 2 vols. (Manchester, 1913), i, 224–8 n.
1651, the governor of Dublin, Colonel John Hewson, declared the entire population of each barony responsible for any attacks within it by Tories, and ordered fines to be levied according to the losses sustained. Hewson also strictly enforced martial law in the city, handing close to thirty people in one three-month period, including five women, for allegedly maintaining contact with the enemy. In February 1651, faced with an intensified guerrilla war and a hostile local population, the parliamentary commissioners deemed large tracts of the countryside to be outside of protection, and ordered the people residing there to move with their goods into designated areas. Anybody who failed to relocate was to be ‘taken, slain and destroyed as enemies’. Over the next twelve months, the authorities concentrated their military resources on certain problem districts, such as Wicklow, Wexford and Tipperary, destroying crops and killing livestock in order to deprive the enemy of vital supplies. Allegedly, at least five hundred ‘poor labourers and women’ were hanged in garrisons in Tipperary, ‘guilty of no other crime but being found within the imaginary lines drawn by the Governors of the several garrisons in the said county’. The deliberately destructive parliamentary military campaign exacerbated famine conditions, which in turn facilitated the spread of diseases such as the plague.

It appears that few could escape the horrors of war. The Catholic cleric John Lynch accused the governor of Wexford, Colonel George Cooke, of the ‘indiscriminate massacre’ of at least four thousand men, women and children. According to Venetian sources in London, ‘this slaughter lasted four days running’ and made the final victory of Parliament ever more likely.

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92 ‘Minutes of Court Martials held in Dublin, 1651/2’: Marsh’s Lib., MS Z3.2.17 [2]. This is the only surviving detailed record of court-martial proceedings in Ireland during the Cromwellian period.
93 ‘Orders of State: Commissioners of Parliament for the Affairs of Ireland, 27 Feb. 1650’: BL, Egerton MS 1761, fos. 6v–9v. Similarly, in September 1649, Ormond ordered all inhabitants within a 15-mile radius of the parliamentary-held city of Dublin to withdraw or be treated as enemies: see Mercurius Elenecticus, 24 Sept. – 1 Oct. 1649.
94 A Collection of Some of the Murthers and Massacres Committed on the Irish in Ireland, 21. This account, compiled during the Restonanat, lists alleged atrocities by government forces throughout the 1640s and 1650s.
Another account, published in London in March 1652, portrayed the scenes of devastation encountered on a journey through the Irish countryside. 'You may ride 20 miles', the author wrote, 'and scarce discern any thing or fix your eye upon any object, but dead men hanging on trees and gibbots: A sad spectacle but there's no remedy; so perfidious are the people, that we are enforced thereunto for the safeguard of our own lives'. The influential Protestant settler Vincent Gookin conceded that those living under parliamentary protection had suffered terrible injustices. However, he blamed rogue elements for the worst excesses, arguing that every army included 'some that swerved from the integrity of the rest'. In July 1652, as the conventional war wound down, Charles Fleetwood received his commission as commander-in-chief in Ireland, with full power and authority to execute martial law against the enemy 'and them to pursue, invade, resist, kill and destroy by all ways and means whatsoever'. The civil commissioners explained that this policy 'being done in the time of war and out of necessity, as affairs now stand shall not be any precedent or rule for future times'.

The temporary nature of these measures provided scant consolation to those suffering under the harsh parliamentary regime, and only when Henry Cromwell assumed control of the Irish administration in 1655 did army officers cease to be 'civil justiciaries, and dispensers of fines and death at their discretion'. It seems 'total war' demanded 'total victory', whatever the human cost.

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96 *A Bloudy Fight in Ireland, between the Parliaments Forces, Commanded by Sir Charles Coot, and Col. Russels; and the Kings Forces* (London, 1652), 8.
97 Vincent Gookin, *The Author and Case of Transplanting the Irish into Connaught Vindicated from the Unjust Aspersions of Colonel Richard Laurence* (London, 1655), 16. Writing during the Restoration, the earl of Orrery agreed that private soldiers were 'apt to do amiss, when they have the power to do it, especially if not under the eye of their officers': see Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, *A Treatise of the Art of War: Dedicated to the Kings Most Excellent Majesty* (London, 1677), 65.
98 'Orders of State: Commissioners of Parliament for the Affairs of Ireland, 29 April 1652': BL, Egerton MS 1761, fos. 93–100; Cromwell to Fleetwood, 10 July 1652, in *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Abbott, ii, 563.
99 Until then, according to the Munster settler Vincent Gookin, 'all went as they [army officers] would have it': see Gookin to Cromwell, 22 Nov. 1656, in *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe: Containing Authentic Memorials of English Affairs from the Year 1638 to the Restoration of Charles II*, ed. Thomas Birch, 7 vols. (London, 1742), v, 647.
IV

Can this harsh treatment of the Catholic Irish by English parliamentarians be attributed solely to the nature of warfare in the early modern period? How, for example, do these horror stories from Ireland compare with contemporary accounts of the Thirty Years War? Scholars such as Robert Ergang, S. H. Steinberg and Gerhard Benecke have challenged traditional views of warfare in seventeenth-century Germany. They conclude that the greatly exaggerated rhetoric of death and destruction in contemporary accounts led gullible historians to produce grossly inflated figures for loss of life and economic damage. More recently, Christopher R. Friedrichs and John Theibault have questioned these assumptions, with Theibault arguing that by overcompensating for the potential bias of the sources, the revisionists seriously underestimate levels of violence. According to Geoff Mortimer, in his detailed analysis of eyewitness accounts, the reality probably lies somewhere between these polarized positions. While contemporary perceptions may indeed have been worse than the actual experience, it does not follow that all accounts of atrocities and hardship can be completely dismissed. Mortimer’s assessment could equally be applied to Ireland, where historians have engaged in a similarly heated debate over the nature of the Tudor conquest in the late sixteenth century. For the wars of the 1640s–1650s,


102 Mortimer argues that the perception of contemporary writers was compatible with later images and, therefore, the destructive ‘myth’ first appeared during the Thirty Years War itself: see Mortimer, Eyewitness Accounts of the Thirty Years War, 174–6.

103 T. W. Moody is widely accredited with setting the revisionist agenda in the 1960s, questioning many long-held assumptions about the nature of the English conquest: see T. W. Moody, ‘A New History of Ireland’, Irish Hist. Studies, xvi (1968–9). Brendan Bradshaw, a leading critic, believes that the enterprise effectively sought to remove the bloodshed from Irish history: see Brendan Bradshaw, ‘Nationalism and Historical (cont. on p. 85)
nobody disputes that Ireland experienced appallingly high levels of bloodshed, but the carnage was clearly not as arbitrary and indiscriminate as most studies suggest. Nonetheless, Irish Catholic eyewitnesses did single out the English parliamentarians for blatantly disregarding the conventional rules of war. Writing during the Restoration, John Lynch claimed that ‘there was a wide difference between the Puritan and the Protestant: the latter had some regard for mercy and plighted faith; the former trampled on the laws of humanity and paid no respect to treaties’.104 Another cleric, Turlough O’Mellan, accused them of failing to observe promises of quarter or protection, and of indiscriminately murdering Irish men, women and children.105

While acknowledging the biased nature of these accusations, it is undoubtedly the case that periods of unrestricted warfare did coincide with major English parliamentary military intervention in Ireland. In 1642, the deaths of thousands of English and Scottish Protestant settlers, and the need to protect those who had survived, justified for many the severe retaliatory measures adopted by the Dublin authorities. Hugo Grotius rejected the concept of collective responsibility, deeming it ‘not sufficient that by a sort of fiction the enemy may be conceived as forming a single body’, but the parliamentarians rarely made such subtle distinctions when it came to Ireland.106 The Irish were perceived to be a barbarous people, and as papists they were both politically and religiously suspect. Cromwell’s campaign in 1649 may have been driven by economic and political imperatives, but negative perceptions of the Catholic natives clearly influenced his conduct while in Ireland. In early 1650, Cromwell bitterly denounced the Irish Catholic clergy, and their covenant with ‘death and Hell’. The general population may have been more gullible than guilty in his eyes, but while they ‘headily run on after the counsels of their Prelates and Clergy and other leaders, I . . . shall rejoice to

(n. 103 cont.)


104 Lynch, Cambrensis eversus, ed. Kelly, iii, 201.
105 ‘Cin Lae Ui Mheallain’, 36.
106 Hugo Grotius is quoted in Meron, War Crimes Law Comes of Age, 55–6.
exercise the utmost severity against them'. When he invaded Scotland a few months later in July 1650, the difference in language could not have been more marked. Cromwell addressed the people of Scotland, describing the 'unavoidable necessity' of bringing his army north, while assuring them of his 'sincere and honest intentions'. He also wrote to the General Assembly of the Kirk, pleading with the members to 'think it possible you may be mistaken', while he hoped that 'the Lord give you and us to do that which is well-pleasing in his sight'. Apart from the storming of Dundee, following a brief siege, there were no major massacres in the Scottish campaign, or widespread targeting of the civilian population. The New Model Army, professional as well as godly, was clearly aware of the conduct expected in warfare, but in Ireland English troops found it difficult to rise above contemporary cultural prejudices. More often than not, as Barbara Donagan explains, the 'barbarous' Catholic Irish lay outside the protection of both honour and humanity. Faced with a resentful and hostile local population, the quest for total victory ultimately imposed few restraints. For the majority of English parliamentarians in practice, as much as for Clausewitz in theory, the very idea of moderation in a war with Irish papists was an absurdity.

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107 *Declaration of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, for the Undeceiving of Deluded and Seduced People* (1650), in *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Abbott, ii, 205.

108 *A Declaration of the Army of the Commonwealth of England, to the People of Scotland* (1650), and *A Letter Sent to the General Assembly of the Kirke of Scotland* (1650), both in *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Abbott, ii, 290–1, 302–3.