

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Politics, Performance and Morale:

16 Irish Division, 1914-1918

by

Lynn Speer Lemisko

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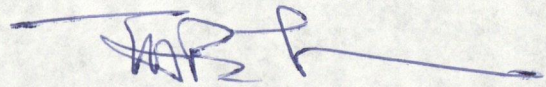
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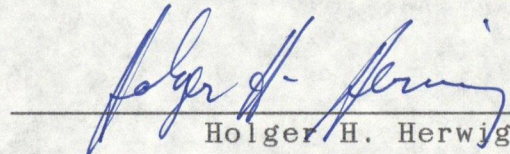
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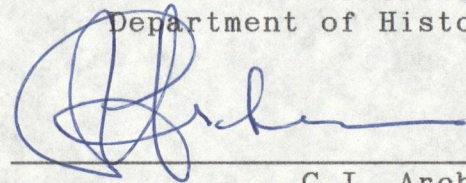
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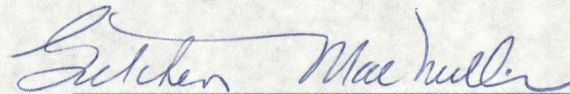
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ABSTRACT

During the First World War, Catholic nationalist Irishmen fought both with and against Great Britain. Catholic nationalist Irishmen had volunteered to serve with 16 Irish Division, and were on active duty in April 1916, while Irish nationalists staged an insurrection against Great Britain during the same month. These contradictory actions led to suspicions regarding the loyalty and effectiveness of 16 Irish Division and to the belief that it had been undermined by political problems.

This thesis studies the effect of politics on 16 Division by first examining the political conflicts which surrounded the creation of the division, September 1914 to December 1915. This thesis then examines the effect of politics on 16 Division as it served on the Western Front by analyzing the morale and performance of the division. Thus, this thesis provides insight into the extent of the influence of politics on 16 Division and a deeper understanding of Irish involvement in the First World War.

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List of Abbreviations

Used in the Text

BEF	_____	British Expeditionary Force
CIGS	_____	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CO	_____	Commanding officer
GHQ	_____	General Headquarters
GOC	_____	General Officer Commanding
INVs	_____	Irish National Volunteers
NCO	_____	Non commissioned officer
ORs	_____	Other Ranks

Used in the Endnotes

CAB	_____	Cabinet papers
IWM	_____	Imperial War Museum
LHCM	_____	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives
NAM	_____	National Army Museum
NLI	_____	National Library of Ireland
NATS	_____	Ministry of National Service papers
PRO	_____	Public Record Office
WO	_____	War Office papers

INTRODUCTION

During the First World War, questions were frequently raised regarding the reliability of 16 Irish Division. Some contemporary observers feared that uncertain political loyalties had undermined the morale of 16 Division and reduced the effectiveness of the division in combat. Concerns regarding the effect of politics on the morale and performance of 16 Irish Division seem somewhat justified in light of the fact that Catholic nationalist Irishmen fought both with and against Great Britain during the course of the war. Catholic consitutional nationalist Irishmen had voluntarily enlisted in 16 Irish Division and were on active duty on the Western Front in April 1916, while in that same month, on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, Irish revolutionary republican nationalists staged an insurrection against Great Britain. The revolt was launched with the reading of a Proclamation of Independence from the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin, followed by the seizure of a number of important public buildings by the armed rebels.

Although this seems a powerful contradiction which begs analysis, Irish historians have generally ignored Irish involvement in the First World War. Perhaps this is not surprising, considering the outcome of the internal political struggle that took place in Ireland during and after the war. Ultimately the Sinn Fein party, representing the revolutionary republican nationalist

position, took power and led the government when the Irish Free State was established in 1922. Because of this, revolutionary mythology became entrenched in Irish public consciousness and came to dominate the historiography produced in the Irish Free State in the first half of the twentieth century. There was:

"an institutionalization of a certain view of history in the Free State, as instructed by the Department of Education from 1922, and memorialized in textbooks that did duty for the next forty years."¹

Irish revolutionary mythology portrayed all Irishmen in pre-war Ireland as ardent republicans straining to throw off the shackles of an oppressive regime and marked those who did not as traitors. Irish revisionist historian F.X. Martin stated:

"It has not been the fashion in Ireland to admit that the Irish who fought on the side of Great Britain during the years 1914-1918, were motivated by as high a patriotic ideal as were the men [who fought in the Easter Rising]".²

Because of the entrenchment of revolutionary mythology Irish historians of the first half of the twentieth century simply ignored Irish involvement in the war.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, Irish revisionist historians have undertaken research which has repudiated much of the revolutionary mythology. However, most of the studies which cover the 1914-1918 time period have focused on the domestic economic, social, and political situation in Ireland. It has been only very recently, since

the mid-1980s, that historians such as Terry Denman, Patrick Callan, and Martin Staunton have begun to examine specific issues in regards to Irish involvement in the First World War. Their studies have focused on recruitment in Ireland, the service of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, and the part played by General Sir Lawrence Parsons during the establishment of 16 Irish Division.³ However an analysis of the effect of politics on the service of 16 Irish Division during the First World War has not yet been undertaken.

Irish historians were not alone in neglecting 16 Irish Division. First World War historians have generally paid little attention to Irish involvement in the war. Although the British official history⁴ of the First World War includes detailed narrative descriptions of 16 Division's participation in various actions, military historians have given the division little more than a byline in their studies of particular battles. Typically, the performance of 16 Division is only specifically mentioned in studies which have examined the March 1918 German offensive and ensuing British retreat. Martin Middlebrook, in The Kaiser's Battle (London, 1978), and Tim Travers, in The Killing Ground (London, 1987), have given some attention to the particular problems experienced by 16 Division on 21 March 1918, the first day of the German offensive. But these studies do not focus on 16 Division and therefore many questions about the division's performance on that day remain unanswered. Henry Harris, The Irish Regiments in the

First World War (Cork, 1968), did write a narrative account describing the actions of the Regular Irish regiments and the New Army 10, 16, and 36 Divisions during the war. But this account is totally undocumented and includes little analysis. When historians who have examined social and political aspects of the war mention the involvement of Ireland in their studies, they primarily focus on the ramifications of the Irish political crisis on the home front. For example, Trevor Wilson, The Myriad Faces of War (Cambridge, 1986), discusses the effect of the Irish crisis on British government policy, but does not examine its affect on Catholic Irish soldiers on the Western Front. In their study of unrest in the BEF during the First World War, Gloden Dallas and Douglas Gill, The Unknown Army (London, 1985), have painted a rather muddled picture regarding the effect of politics on 16 Division. On the one hand these authors imply that political conditions did cause disaffection among 16 Division soldiers, but on the other they state that political problems did not impair the loyalty of Irish soldiers in the British Army. These contradictory positions cloud rather than clarify the issue.

While morale is an intangible quality that is difficult to measure, historians have produced some useful studies that provide relevant models which have been useful in the context of this examination. Lord Moran, The Anatomy of Courage (London, 1945, reprinted Boston, 1967), and Richard Holmes, Firing Line (London, 1985), have looked at the

behaviour of men involved in battle. John Baynes, Morale, A Study of Men and Courage (New York, 1967) and Brent Wilson, "Morale and Discipline in the British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918 (M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1978), have outlined specific indicators of good morale and have demonstrated methods for utilizing these indicators to measure morale in military formations. J.G. Fuller, Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918 (Oxford, 1990), offers an analysis of various factors which affected the spirit of the BEF and argues that the translation of pre-war culture to the Western Front assisted in the maintenance of morale in the BEF. Roger Noble, "Raising the White Flag: The Surrender of Australian Soldiers on the Western Front", (1990)⁵ lists the particular battlefield conditions which caused units with an excellent combat record to surrender. However, historians who have focused on the morale of the BEF have not done a specific analysis of morale in 16 Irish Division.

This thesis examines the effect of politics on 16 Irish Division by analyzing the morale and performance of the division when on active duty on the Western Front from 1916 to 1918. It is organized into three chapters. Chapter I first discusses the political conditions in Ireland that allowed Catholic nationalist support for the British war effort in 1914, and then examines how the conflicting political objectives of the British War Office and the Irish nationalists influenced the organization, recruitment and

training of 16 Irish Division. An examination of the political conflict which occurred during the formation of the division is important because it provides an insight into problems that could have undermined 16 Division as a loyal and effective combat unit within the BEF. Chapter II evaluates the morale of 16 Division by examining a number of indicators including positive attitude, self-respect, health, and behaviour. It tries to determine whether political conditions influenced the spirit of the division, and examines particular factors that undermined or sustained morale. Comparisons with other BEF divisions will be made in order to determine whether 16 Division experienced unusual fluctuations in its level of morale. Chapter III examines the performance of 16 Division during periods of static warfare and in major battles between 1916 and 1918, and compares the performance of the division with other BEF divisions. This chapter includes a thorough examination of the performance of 16 Division on 21 March 1918 because the effectiveness of the division on defense, during the first day of the German offensive, has been particularly criticized. It also tries to determine whether politics affected the performance of 16 Division. Taken in its entirety, this thesis shall indicate the extent of the influence of politics on the morale and performance of 16 Division and should provide a deeper understanding of Irish involvement in the First World War.

Endnotes

1. Roy F. Foster, "History and the Irish Question", in Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fifth series, vol. 33, (London, 1983), p. 187.
2. F.X. Martin, "1916 - Myth, Fact and Mystery", Studia Hibernica, no. 7 (1967), p. 62.
3. See: Terry Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons and the raising of the 16th (Irish) Division, 1914-1915", Irish Sword, vol. 67 (1987-88), pp. 90-104; "The 16th (Irish) Division on 21 March 1918: Fight or Flight?", Irish Sword, vol. 69 (1989), pp. 273-287; and "The Catholic Irish soldier in the First World War: the 'racial environment'", Irish Historical Studies, vol. 27, no. 108 (November 1991).
 Martin Staunton, "Ginchy: Nationalist Ireland's forgotten Battle of the Somme", An Cosantoir (December 1986), pp. 11-14; "The Fate of the 2nd Munsters", An Cosantoir (November-December 1988), pp. 40-43; The Story of the Munster Fusiliers, 1914-1918, (unpublished manuscript based on M.A. thesis, Dublin University College, 1988). Patrick Callan "Recruiting for the British Army in Ireland during the First World War", Irish Sword, vol. 66 (1987), pp. 42-56; and "British Recruitment in Ireland, 1914-1918", Revue Internationale D'Histoire Militaire, vol. 63 (1985), pp. 41-50.
4. Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds, Military operations, France and Belgium, 14 volumes, (London, 1922-1948).
5. Roger Noble, "Raising the White Flag: The Surrender of Australian Soldiers on the Western Front", Revue Internationale D'Histoire Militaire, vol. 72 (1990), pp. 55-71.

CHAPTER I

Irish Politics and the Creation of 16 Irish Division

"I have made a real endeavour to eliminate political considerations from the administration with which I am caged. But in Ireland it seems impossible to proceed without impinging upon sensibilities which are closely allied to such considerations." H.J. Tennant, Assistant Secretary of State, War Office, February 1915.¹

To what extent was 16 Irish Division influenced by politics during its recruitment and training period, from September 1914 to mid-December 1915? From the military perspective, the formation and training of 16 Division was a relatively straightforward organizational task. The British War Office, aiming to tap the reserve of potential recruits in Ireland, officially authorized the creation of 16 Division on 11 September 1914. Army Order XII directed that 16 Division be raised and trained in Ireland and General Sir Lawrence Parsons, an Anglo-Irishman with a distinguished career in the British Regular Army, was given command of this New Army formation.² The headquarters of 16 Division was established at Mallow and the three infantry brigades which joined the Division, the 47th, 48th, and 49th, were based at Fermoy, Buttevant, and Tipperary, respectively.³ The task of preparing untrained men for active duty commenced in late September and early October 1914, when new recruits began arriving at the training bases.

However, Irish constitutional nationalists had a stake in the formation of 16 Division. These nationalists wanted

the Division to develop as a unit which specifically represented Catholic nationalist Ireland. The aims of the Irish nationalists added complicating political dimensions to the task of organizing, recruiting and training 16 Division. This chapter examines the effect of politics on 16 Division during its formation, but the study would be perplexing without the provision of adequate background information. Because Irish revolutionary mythology has colored general perceptions of the relationship between Ireland and Great Britain, Catholic Irish support for the British war effort appears to be an anomaly. Therefore, the political conditions which allowed Irish constitutional nationalist support for the British war effort must be briefly outlined, and it will be demonstrated that these nationalists, and the Irishmen who volunteered to serve with 16 Division, were supported by the majority of Irish public opinion. This background information will assist in understanding the complex political milieu in which 16 Division functioned during its formation.

Ireland had become directly subject to the British Parliament at Westminster following passage of the Act of Union in 1800. During the nineteenth century most of the major issues, which were flashpoints of dispute between Ireland and Great Britain, had been dealt with by the passage of legislation wrung from the British Parliament through the efforts of Irish constitutional nationalists. Therefore, the main political issue in pre-war Ireland was

self-government.⁴ There were a variety of opinions regarding Union and self-government circulating in Ireland during the pre-war period which became manifest in positions taken by three political parties.

The majority of Protestant Anglo-Irishmen favoured Union, believing that the arrangement ensured the protection of their rights and position in Irish society. Many Protestant Irishmen believed that their opinions would be overwhelmed by the Catholic majority if Ireland achieved a form of self-government. Irish Protestants generally became strong supporters of the British-based Unionist Party. Ulster Unionists, in particular, became militant in their resistance to Irish self-government. The slogans "Home Rule is Rome Rule" and "Ulster will fight; Ulster will be right", became popularized by Conservative Unionist politicians seeking support from the Protestant Anglo-Irish community.⁵ Following the 1910 general election, the Irish Unionists held nineteen seats in the British House of Commons.⁶

Irish nationalists did not support Union and had been actively working towards its dissolution throughout the nineteenth century. However, there were two traditions in Irish nationalism, each favouring a different form of self-government. The Sinn Fein Party, which came to represent the revolutionary, or radical, republican nationalist tradition, favoured the complete separation of Ireland from the British Empire and the establishment of a totally independent republican government. The Sinn Fein Party did

not hold any seats in the House of Commons during the pre-war period.⁷ On the other hand, John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party, representing the constitutional, or moderate nationalist tradition, favoured continued linkage with the British Empire but sought Home Rule through the establishment of an independent Irish Parliament. The Irish Parliamentary Party held seventy-three seats in the House of Commons following the 1910 elections.⁸ Based on the number of M.P.s elected from the opposing parties, it can be deduced that Home Rule was the form of self-government favored by the majority of the Irish population in the pre-war period.

Home Rule was not a new issue on the agenda of the Parliament at Westminster, but the idea of Irish self-government had not received widespread support from British M.P.s or from the House of Lords. However, in early 1912, political conditions finally favored the Irish Parliamentary Party. By promising support for the minority Liberal government on other issues, the Irish Parliamentary Party was able to ensure passage of the Home Rule Bill through the House of Commons. The Parliament Act of 1911, which limited the veto power of the House of Lords to three consecutive sessions or two years, seemed to guarantee that Home Rule would become law no later than 1914.⁹

The Home Rule issue was not resolved, however. Active resistance to the bill was carried on by Ulster Unionists. This resistance included intense lobbying by the Unionist

Party in Britain and the rallying of Protestant Ulster by Sir Edward Carson and Sir James Craig. In the summer of 1912, Carson and Craig created the Ulster Provisional Government, to operate when Home Rule became law, and raised and armed the Ulster Volunteer Force to resist the enforcement of Home Rule in the North.¹⁰ Both of these actions were in direct defiance of Parliament. Witnessing the inaction of the British government in regards to the establishment of the private army in Ulster, Irish nationalists raised their own private army, the Irish Volunteers, in response to the threat of the Ulster Volunteer Force.¹¹ Several attempts to resolve the Home Rule issue through constitutional methods were made between 1912 and 1914. Proposals put forward for amending the Home Rule Bill included the exclusion of Ulster and the partition of Ireland, but these suggestions were rejected by Irish nationalists. Meanwhile tensions in Ireland mounted and it began to appear that unconstitutional methods might be employed in resolving the problem.

Several specific incidents added fuel to the fire. In March 1914, General Sir Hubert Gough and other officers in command of British troops at the Curragh army base in Ireland, announced that they would not participate in any military effort to impose Home Rule in Ulster. These officers declared that they would resign their commissions if ordered to enforce Home Rule in the North.¹² This incident became known as the Curragh Mutiny. In April 1914,

the Ulster Volunteer Force, with impunity, smuggled a large shipment of arms and ammunition into Ireland.¹³ Tensions reached crisis proportions on 26 July 1914, when members of the King's Own Scottish Border Regiment fired on a jeering Dublin crowd which had gathered at Bachelor's Walk following the thwarted attempt by the Irish Volunteers to smuggle arms into Ireland. Three unarmed civilians were killed in this incident.¹⁴ Ireland seemed on the brink of civil war by July 1914, but it should be noted that Redmond and other constitutional nationalists believed it was the intransigence of the Ulster Unionists, not opposition from the British government, which had created the tense circumstances.¹⁵ It was at this juncture that events in Europe intervened and imposed a new set of conditions on the Irish political situation.

Britain's declaration of war on 4 August 1914 created an uncomfortable predicament for all parties interested in the Home Rule issue. Sir Edward Carson was reluctant to commit his Ulster Volunteers to the British war effort when no amending acts to the Home Rule Bill had been agreed upon. But, having loudly proclaimed their loyalty to Great Britain, the Ulster Unionists were now obligated to demonstrate their patriotism by volunteering for the British Army.¹⁶ Carson ultimately gave full support to the war effort and the War Office allowed the Ulster Volunteer Force special privileges in the New Army, 36 Ulster Division.¹⁷ Meanwhile, John Redmond and other constitutional

nationalists believed that Ireland had an obligation to assist Belgium, a small Catholic nation assaulted by an invading imperial force.¹⁸ They also speculated that Irishmen in the North and South might be united by a common cause if nationalist Ireland demonstrated a willingness to be supportive of the British war effort. But Irish nationalist M.P.s could only offer limited support because Home Rule was not yet assured. Redmond's immediate response to Britain's declaration of war was to propose the establishment of an all-Irish Home Defense Force, which would allow Great Britain to withdraw British Army troops normally stationed in Ireland. In a speech made in the House of Commons following the declaration of war by the Secretary of State, Redmond stated:

We offer to the Government of the day that they may take their troops away, and that, if it is allowed to us, in comradeship with our brethren in the North, we will ourselves defend the coasts of our country.¹⁹

Redmond's proposal did not suggest that Ireland would offer assistance by sending southern Irishmen to fight on the Continent. Redmond could not offer this deeper commitment until the Home Rule Bill became law. The British government needed to settle the Irish situation so that it could concentrate on the war effort, but the problem of Ulster exclusion had not been satisfactorily resolved. In an effort to satisfy both the Irish nationalists and the Unionists, the British government settled on the following

compromise. The Home Rule Bill received final approval and was put on the statute books by 18 September 1914. However, the bill was suspended for one year, or until the end of the war, as a concession to the Unionists.

With Home Rule on the statute books, and believing that Ireland must now demonstrate its commitment to the Empire and prove that Home Rule was deserved, John Redmond offered full support to the British war effort:

We have, even when no ties of sympathy
bound our country to Great Britain, always
given our quota, and more than our quota,
to the firing line, and we shall do so
now.²⁰

Although Catholic Irish participation in the British Army was not an unusual phenomenon, in hindsight John Redmond's offer of Irish support for the British war effort in 1914 seems somewhat naive.²¹ His proposals caused a division in the ranks of the Irish Volunteers. The organization split into two groups, the Irish Volunteers, lead by Eoin Mac Neill, and the Irish National Volunteers who remained loyal to Redmond. The Irish Volunteers supported the revolutionary nationalist position which believed that 'England's pain is Ireland's gain'. This split in the nationalist volunteer organization indicates that there was a fracture in Irish public opinion regarding support for the British war effort.

Revolutionary mythology has implied that Redmond was a misguided figure who had lost touch with the true opinions

of his constituents in regards to support for the war effort. For instance, the American historian Lawrence J. McCaffrey states:

There was a slowly expanding gap between the Home Rulers at Westminster and their constituents. It was so easy for Home Rule leaders to lose touch with the nuances of Irish life. Redmond, an introvert, sometimes was insensitive to the undercurrents of Irish opinion.²²

The evidence clearly indicates however, that Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party had the support of the majority of their constituents between 1910 and 1916, while Sinn Fein had the support of a significantly smaller percentage of the Irish population.

Historian David Fitzpatrick provides interesting statistics in his study of patterns in Irish nationalism which verify the preceding statements. Fitzpatrick's analysis of the percentage of valid votes cast for opposing parties in the last general election before the war, December 1910, provides a clear picture of the breakdown of Irish popular opinion.²³ The Irish Party secured 44.9 percent of the vote, Sinn Fein and other independent revolutionary nationalists received 16.7 percent, Unionists obtained 28 percent, and Labour Candidates received 10.4 percent.²⁴ These figures demonstrate that the Irish Parliamentary Party had nearly three times the amount of support given to Sinn Fein and other revolutionary nationalists. Fitzpatrick suggests, however, that electoral analysis may not provide a true picture of the patterns in

Irish nationalism and argues that analysis of participation in nationalist organizations is the best method for understanding the support given to particular nationalist ideas.²⁵ Fitzpatrick's statistics clearly indicate that constitutional nationalist organizations had the largest percentage of public support between 1913 and 1916. It should be pointed out that a relatively large number of Irishmen were members of nationalist organizations. Slightly more than 10 percent of the total Irish population, 1,018 people per 10,000, were listed as active members. Out of a total of 403,594 persons belonging to nationalist organizations, constitutional nationalist groups had recruited 383,009 members, or 94.9 percent of the total membership. Revolutionary or republican nationalist organizations had recruited 20,585 members, or 5.1 percent of the total.²⁶ Constitutional nationalist organizations had nineteen times the amount of support given to republican or revolutionary nationalist groups. An examination of two specific organizations which supported the opposing nationalist approaches reveals that the preceding analysis holds true. According to Fitzpatrick, a total of 189,477 individuals belonged to the southern private Irish volunteer armies from 1914 to 1916. The membership in Redmond's Irish National Volunteers, following the split in 1914, stood at 182,097, or 96 percent of the total membership. Membership in Mac Neill's Irish Volunteers, three months before the Easter Rising, stood at 7,380, or 4 percent of the total

membership.²⁷ Fitzpatrick's examination reveals that Redmond continued to receive more than twenty times the support given to the republicans into 1916.

Evidence from other sources also indicates that John Redmond's position received wide public support into 1916 and beyond. Although his numbers are somewhat different, historian F.X. Martin provides statistics that support Fitzpatrick's evidence:

How little hold the Irish separatists had on the people can be clearly shown by cold statistics - in mid-April 1916 there were 265,600 Irishmen serving, or in alliance, with the British forces; as against those figures there were, at a maximum estimate, 16,000 Irish Volunteers under Mac Neill. For every Irishman with Mac Neill there were sixteen with the British; over eighty percent of the people were in sympathy with England's war effort.²⁸

F.X. Martin also points out that two weeks prior to the 1916 Easter Rising, the majority of Irishmen were not contemplating insurrection and appeared to remain loyal. Martin supports his conclusion with the following excerpt from a confidential report on the state of Ireland which was produced on 10 April 1916 by Major Ivor Price, Director of Military Intelligence in Ireland, at the request of British authorities:

The general state of Ireland, apart from recruiting, and apart from the activities of the pro-German Sinn Fein minority, is thoroughly satisfactory. The mass of the people are sound and loyal as regards the war, and the country is in a very prosperous state and very free from ordinary crime.²⁹

Historian John O'Beirne Ranelagh echoes Martin's and Fitzpatrick's conclusions and indicates that most Irishmen continued to support the moderate nationalist position following the 1916 Easter Rising:

Perhaps fewer than 1000 men, women and children took part in the 1916 Rising (probably fewer than 700 in Dublin according to a survey conducted by the rebels themselves), which was not a number representing any generation. Hundreds of thousands of Irishmen had volunteered for service in the [British] army. Throughout the post-1916 troubles more Irishmen joined the RIC than the IRA. For the vast majority of Irishmen, Unionist and nationalists alike, a connection with Britain was fundamentally accepted. After 1916, most nationalists wanted an extensive form of home rule: the demand for a sovereign republic was the province of the extremists in the IRB.³⁰

John Redmond's biographer, Dennis Gwynn, provides some interesting anecdotal evidence as to the immediate reaction of the Irish population to Redmond's proposals at the outbreak of the war. Gwynn reported that the response in Ireland to Redmond's proposal for an all-Irish home defence force showed that he had "interpreted faithfully the instincts of the vast majority of Irishmen".³¹ Gwynn points out that city and county corporations and councils, in Waterford and Cork as examples, quickly passed resolutions supporting Redmond's position.³² Gwynn also indicates that tensions in Ireland appeared to dissipate following the declaration of war and that the public demonstrated a willingness to support the transportation of troops to fight on the Continent.

An extraordinary transformation of opinion all over Ireland manifested itself at once. Troops were embarking daily for active service, and everywhere great crowds came out to cheer them and offer them presents as they marched through the streets. Most remarkable of all was the fact that even in Dublin, when the King's Own Scottish Borderers emerged for the first time from being confined to barracks since the shootings at Bachelor's Walk, they too were greeted with cheers and every sign of goodwill.³³

The preceding discussion is not an attempt to convey the notion that there was no difference of opinion in Ireland regarding the Home Rule issue and support for the war effort. This would plainly be a misrepresentation of the situation. But it can be concluded that John Redmond had the support of the majority of his constituents and that public opinion supported the actions of Irishmen who volunteered for 16 Irish Division.

A number of factors, including the settlement of disputed issues in the nineteenth century, the apparent resolution of the Home Rule question, and beliefs regarding Ireland's obligations to other small nations, allowed Catholic Irish support for the British war effort. However, John Redmond and other constitutional nationalists argued that support could quickly decline if Catholic nationalist recruits were not given the same recognition within the BEF that had been given to the Ulster Volunteer Force. Redmond suggested that a division be established specifically for southern Irish recruits, "so that Ireland may gain national credit for their deeds, and feel, like other communities of

the Empire, that she too has contributed an army bearing her name in this historic struggle".³⁴ Redmond believed that the establishment of a distinctly Irish division within the context of the BEF would generate and sustain enthusiasm for the war effort in Ireland.

Irish nationalists put forward three basic proposals for the development of 16 Division as a distinctly Irish formation. First, the nationalists wanted the War Office to quickly and officially announce that 16 Division was specifically a southern Irish Division. Second, they proposed that Roman Catholic Irishmen be appointed or commissioned to officer the division. Third, the nationalists wanted a distinctive badge and colors for the unit. Redmond and his supporters believed they had good reason to be granted these conditions because the War Office had already allowed similar special conditions for 36 Ulster Division. Also, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith had indicated his government's support for the notion that the Irish should have their own identifiable units within the BEF. In a speech delivered in Dublin on 26 September 1914, Asquith stated:

I should like to see an Irish Brigade, or better still an Army Corps. Don't let [Irish recruits] be afraid that by joining the colors, they will lose their identity or be artificially distributed into units which have no national cohesion or character.³⁵

However, it soon became clear that the War Office was not open to suggestions from Irish nationalists or the prime

minister. Military authorities were interested in developing a loyal, cohesive combat unit which would be a fully integrated and effective part of the BEF. The War Office apparently presumed that granting special conditions in the formation of 16 Division would interfere with its objectives and resisted most of the proposals put forward by the nationalists. An examination of the way in which Irish nationalist proposals were handled will demonstrate that competing political objectives influenced the formation of 16 Division.

Army Order XII did not indicate that 16 Division was to be considered a specifically southern Irish unit. But, on 12 October 1914, General Sir Lawrence Parsons was ordered to clear the four battalions of the 47th Brigade and to set aside these units exclusively for recruits who had been members of the Irish National Volunteers (hereafter INVs).³⁶ This order was welcomed by John Redmond and his supporters and the clearing of the 47th Brigade did attract a large number of INVs into 16 Division.³⁷ However, Irish nationalists maintained that the War Office was not doing enough to encourage southern Catholic Irishmen to volunteer and pressured British authorities for an official announcement establishing 16 Division as a distinctly Irish formation.

This proposal was ultimately disregarded by the War Office. An official announcement was never made. Information regarding the establishment of 16 Division and

the clearing of the 47th Brigade for INVs had to be communicated to the Irish public by Redmond and other nationalists during recruiting speeches. Nationalists engaged in the Irish recruiting campaign argued that the lack of official confirmation was jeopardizing their credibility and making it difficult to attract recruits to 16 Division.³⁸ Also, while the War Office allowed the Ulster Volunteer Force to operate semi-independent recruiting offices to attract men to 36 Ulster Division,³⁹ the nationalists were accumulating information which indicated that many roadblocks were being put in the way of Irishmen who wished to join 16 Division.

Redmond received the following letter on 11 November 1914, from a Mr. M. Maguire, a nationalist involved in the recruiting campaign:

It may interest you to know that no facilities have been granted to the [Royal Irish] Constabulary to send any recruits to the "Irish Brigade". Two recruits presented themselves at Ballybofey police barracks yesterday and asked to be sent on to the Headquarters of the Irish Brigade and were informed by the Head Constable that he could only send them to Omagh - so to Omagh they went and by now they are counted as Unionist Volunteers, although both are strong Nationalists.⁴⁰

Apparently, members of the Royal Irish Constabulary were not to be encouraged to join 16 Division.⁴¹ John Redmond was also frustrated when the War Office refused to allow Irish Catholics working in northern England to join 16 Division. In one particular case, the Irish proprietor of the

Newcastle Chronicle had raised 4000 men specifically for 16 Division, but the War Office refused to transfer them to Ireland and "the Irish force thus raised was brigaded with the Northumberland Fusiliers".⁴² Redmond found this refusal exasperating. He asserted that if these men were transferred to 16 Division, "the mere effect of their arriving in Ireland in a body to join that Brigade would create intense enthusiasm and largely help the recruiting movement".⁴³

Perhaps the most damaging factor which hindered the recruitment of Irishmen into 16 Division was a directive issued by the War Office on 10 December 1914. The order instructed infantry depots to send Irish recruits to Reserve or Special Reserve battalions unless they expressly stated their wish to be posted to 16 Division.⁴⁴ Redmond did not discover that this order had been issued until April 1915, when he received a letter from Mr. Maguire regarding the matter. Maguire was extremely irritated because he believed that this order had directly affected the raising of 16 Division. Maguire commented:

This has been going on for three and a half months and accounts for some of our shortages [in the] Division, as crowds of recruits coming up don't quite know or expressly state that they're for the 16th Division.⁴⁵

This order was baffling to Irish nationalists. They could not understand why Irishmen were being allocated to Reserve battalions when 16 Division was not yet up to full strength. Probably the War Office ignored the Irish nationalist

proposal for an official announcement of 16 Division as a specifically Irish formation, and issued an order which in effect directed Catholic Irishmen away from joining the Division, because British military authorities were concerned about creating a unit with dubious loyalty. A contemporary observer, Alfred Perceval Graves, noted: "It would appear as if the Government or War Office, or both, distrusted the loyalty of these proposed Irish regiments".⁴⁶ Regardless of conjectures about the motivations of the War Office, it can be deduced that competing political objectives influenced the raising of 16 Division.

The request for Catholic Irishmen to officer 16 Division seemed reasonable to Irish nationalists. Approximately 98 percent of the other ranks in 16 Division's infantry brigades were Catholic and nationalist. But all of the brigadier-generals and senior divisional staff, and 85 percent of the lower ranking officers initially appointed to 16 Division by the War Office, were Protestant and unionist.⁴⁷ Irish nationalists argued that the composition of the division's officer corps should reflect that of the troops under its command. The War Office reacted slowly to this nationalist proposal, and the commissioning of officers during the formation and training of 16 Division was mainly the responsibility of the divisional commander, General Sir Lawrence Parsons.

General Parsons was a Protestant Irishman who had supported the Unionist cause. However, Parsons was

primarily concerned with his military obligations, and had developed some sensitivity for the nationalist position.⁴⁸ General Parsons cooperated with John Redmond to accommodate some nationalist proposals, but he remained adamant in refusing to commission the majority of Irish candidates who applied or who were recommended by John Redmond. Prominent nationalist M.P.s, including Tom Kettle, Stephen Gwynn, and John Redmond's fifty-five year old brother Willie Redmond, and most former INV officers, were refused direct commissions. Parsons believed that most of these candidates had an inadequate military background or were "quite socially impossible as officers".⁴⁹

Despite the continual pressure for Catholic officers coming from Irish nationalists, Parsons developed a system which he believed would produce well trained officers and weed out the socially impossible. General Parsons established a candidate or cadet company as part of the 7th Leinsters, where individuals wishing to receive commissions could gain military training. Individuals with no military background were required to enlist as private soldiers in the cadet company, and had no guarantee that they would ever be recommended for a commission. Candidates would be considered for officer or N.C.O. rank based on merit.⁵⁰ Parsons was proud of the work done by the cadet company. When the War Office continued to post officers to 16 Division, over-looking the members of the cadet company, Parsons wrote to the Secretary of War insisting that his men

be considered for positions and that he have input into the selection of new officers.⁵¹ Between November 1914 and December 1915, one hundred and sixty-one candidates passed through the cadet company and were posted to positions in 16 Division. Most were Catholic nationalists.⁵²

From the military perspective, the system adopted by Parsons appears to have been fair and reasonable, and ultimately produced well trained Catholic nationalist officers for 16 Division. However, the system did not seem just to John Redmond and other Irish nationalists. They knew that the War Office allowed 36 Ulster Division troops to elect their own officers and had permitted previously mobilized former officers of the Ulster Volunteer Force to transfer into the Ulster division.⁵³ The War Office refused requests from previously mobilized former INV officers wishing to transfer to 16 Division and did not allow the Division to elect its own officers.⁵⁴ The fact that nationalist M.P.s and former INV officers were required to participate in Parsons' cadet company to earn commissions seemed absurd and unfair to Irish nationalists when they compared this treatment to the treatment accorded 36 Division.

Irish nationalists believed they had legitimate reasons to request Irish Catholic officers that went beyond attempting to achieve equal status with 36 Ulster Division. Nationalists received information, or had personally observed, a negative attitude toward enlisted Irishmen among

some British and Protestant Anglo-Irish officers. For example, Captain Sheehan of the 9th Munster Fusiliers, who was also a nationalist M.P., recalled a negative comment he overheard during training, when four cadets were sent to his battalion from the 7th Leinsters. An English officer of the 9th Munsters declared, "Four more bloody Irishmen coming to our regiment!".⁵⁵ The nationalists believed that the antipathy of British officers was effecting the recruiting campaign in Ireland. In January 1915, John Redmond received the following complaint from Hervey de Montmorency, a former INV who became a captain in the 9th Dublin Fusiliers:

I have observed the Irish soldiers are regarded with dislike and contempt by their British officers, the one idea of the British officers is to get rid of the Irishmen from his battalion and to replace them with Englishmen. Irishmen are treated with contempt, addressed as if the name of Irishman and rogue were synonymous terms. An Irish sergeant of mine was treated with extreme injustice the other day by our commanding officer and reduced to the ranks. I believe the state of affairs I have described as existing in my battalion is known to Irishmen throughout Ireland and that it is greatly discussed in Irish homes, hence the reluctance of Irishmen to enlist.⁵⁶

Ultimately, 16 Division did achieve a balanced representation of Catholic Irish officers. The percentage of Protestant officers declined during the training period, and decreased even further when 16 Division was reorganized in France by General William B. Hickie, a Catholic Irishman and the new divisional commander. By 1916 approximately 95 percent of the officers and men were Roman Catholics.⁵⁷

However, this objective had not been achieved without creating tension and controversy which may have affected the recruiting campaign. Conflicting positions regarding the commissioning of Catholic Irishmen had obviously influenced 16 Division.

Because 36 Ulster Division was permitted the adoption of the Red Hand of Ulster as its divisional insignia,⁵⁸ Irish nationalists believed that a distinctive badge and colors for 16 Division was a reasonable proposal. John Redmond suggested the Irish harp as an appropriate design for the divisional badge and requested special colors for battalions of the Division.⁵⁹ Redmond believed that these symbols would help attract Irish recruits. Sir Lawrence Parsons decided to cooperate with Redmond on the issue of special battalion colors. Through letters published in local newspapers, Parsons appealed to the women of Ireland to make and present colors for the battalions as "an advertisement that the 16th is an Irish Division".⁶⁰ However, Parsons was not in favour of a special divisional badge. He believed in developing loyalty to the "time-honored regiments" and therefore could see no value in a distinctive divisional insignia.⁶¹

Redmond continued to pressure Parsons and the War Office for a special divisional badge. Eventually Parsons established a committee to consider various designs for an insignia. Parsons believed that if a badge was necessary, a sprig of shamrock or an Irish cross were more appropriate

designs than the Irish harp.⁶² In the end the War Office disallowed the presentation of special colors to the battalions by the women of Ireland, and 16 Division was not permitted a distinctive badge. Irish nationalists could not understand why this seemingly simple proposal was denied.

Irish nationalists were convinced that resistance to their proposals on the official level affected 16 Division by damaging the Irish recruiting campaign. In a letter to Prime Minister Asquith, Redmond claimed that the refusal to meet nationalist requirements had:

created a most mischievous impression that the War Office was hostile to the creation of a distinctly Irish Brigade or Army Corps. This impression has undoubtedly had a very considerable effect in damping enthusiasm and checking recruiting.⁶³

Following the initial surge of recruiting, 16 Division did experience difficulties filling its ranks. Although the 47th Brigade filled rapidly with recruits who had been INVs, and the 48th Brigade was quickly brought up to full strength, the 49th Brigade struggled to bring up its numbers well into the spring of 1915. In June 1915, the 49th Brigade's numbers were considerably reduced when 1,200 of its men were transferred to 10 Division, which had been ordered out on active duty.⁶⁴ The 49th Brigade was not up to strength until February 1916.

Recruitment and dispersal were also problems when the reinforcement of 16 Division with Irishmen became an issue while the division was active on the Western Front. British

authorities maintained that 16 Division could not be reinforced with Irishmen because "recruiting in Ireland had almost ceased".⁶⁵ But Irish nationalist M.P.s argued that there were plenty of Irishmen in Army Reserve available to reinforce the Division. Redmond pointed out that Irishmen in Army Reserve were being sent, "against their will, to English, Scottish and Welsh regiments" despite an order which stipulated that men of Irish nationality could transfer to Irish regiments.⁶⁶ Unbeknownst to Redmond, the War Office, concerned about the loyalty of Irish soldiers following the 1916 Rising, had issued another directive to GHQ on 26 October 1916, which indicated that the New Army battalions of 16 Division were to be reinforced with Englishmen, and that only the Regular Irish battalions were to be supplied with Irishmen.⁶⁷ Despite this order, 16 Division was able to maintain a relatively high percentage of representation from Catholic Ireland as the war progressed. "Contrary to prevailing British opinion, the Irish themselves accounted for the majority of soldiers in the Irish regiments throughout the war."⁶⁸ Even though recruiting efforts produced fewer results, and casualties decimated the ranks of 16 Division between 1916 and January 1918, Irishmen still contributed two thirds of the Division's strength in March of 1918.⁶⁹

It is difficult to measure how deeply the tensions arising from competing political objectives damaged the Irish recruiting campaign. Other factors, such as the

heavily rural Irish population, attractive wages in wartime industries, and Sinn Fein anti-war propaganda, also detracted from recruiting. But the lack of response from the War Office to nationalist proposals seemed to demonstrate to Irishmen that British authorities distrusted the motivations of Irish nationalists, and that Catholic Irish support of the war effort would only be accepted under conditions which satisfied British political requirements. This must have dampened the enthusiasm of Irish volunteer recruits and created misgivings about the motivations of British authorities when dealing with issues that were important to Catholic nationalist Ireland.

Whether or not the nationalists were justified in their allegations regarding damage to the recruiting campaign, it is clear that politics added complicating dimensions to the task of organizing, recruiting, and training 16 Division. General Parsons continually complained about political interference from both the nationalists and the War Office in his diary and letters.⁷⁰ For example, in 1915 a frustrated Parsons wrote to John Redmond:

Politicians are apt to forget that I alone am responsible that I get my Division fit to take its place in the Field and that when it gets there it will not disgrace the British Army and its country and that I therefore cannot go on indefinitely sacrificing military to political interests.⁷¹

Lower ranking 16 Division officers also felt the impact of political pressures. John Staniforth, training with the 7th

Leinster cadet company, commented:

There is altogether too much politics in the Irish Brigade business - if there were less politics and more soldiering we might see the front sooner."⁷²

Catholic nationalist recruits were obviously aware of Irish political conditions. Their presence in the ranks of 16 Division and their reaction to the political situation ensured that 16 Division developed as a unit which represented Catholic Ireland despite War Office resistance. In nearly all of the battalions the men wore a tab of bright green cloth sewn high up on the sleeves of their tunics and the skirl of Irish warpipes, playing such airs as "The Wearing of the Green" and "O'Donell Aboo", lent a distinctly Irish atmosphere to divisional parades and ceremonial reviews.⁷³ It can be deduced that both officers and other ranks were influenced by the political milieu which surrounded 16 Division during its formation.

Politics clearly affected 16 Division between September 1914 and mid-December 1915. During this period, the aims of Irish nationalists conflicted with the implicit objectives of British military authorities, producing tensions and controversy that hindered the Irish recruiting campaign and added complications to the task of raising and training the division.

Political tensions between Ireland and Great Britain did not subside after 16 Division was sent on active duty to the Western Front. In fact, the Irish domestic political

situation became increasingly tense during the course of the war. Catholic Ireland had initially supported the British war effort, but a number of issues arose which gradually undermined this support. The manner in which the British government handled the 1916 Easter Rising, combined with its failure to implement Home Rule and its threat to impose conscription, ultimately turned Catholic Irish public opinion towards the revolutionary republican nationalist position.⁷⁴ Obviously, politics had influenced the creation of 16 Division, but how deeply and how long-lasting was the effect? Had political interference influenced the development of 16 Division to such an extent that the formation was undermined as a loyal, cohesive, and effective combat unit within the BEF? And did the politically manipulated origins of 16 Division mean that it reacted to the increasingly tense Irish domestic political situation when the division was on active duty on the Western Front? These issues will be examined in the following chapters by analyzing the impact of politics on the morale and performance of 16 Irish Division.

Endnotes

1. Tennant to General Sir Lawrence Parsons, 26 February 1915, Sir Lawrence Parsons Papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London University (hereafter LHCM).
2. Terry Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons and the raising of the 16th (Irish) Division, 1914-15", Irish Sword, vol. 17, no. 67 (1987-88), pp. 91-92; Peter Simkins, Kitchener's Army, (Manchester, 1988), p. 70. New Army divisions were created by Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, in an effort to quickly expand the British Army, which was far below the strength necessary to fight a prolonged war.
3. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 99.
4. J.H. Whyte, "The Age of Daniel O'Connell", in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, eds., The Course of Irish History, (Cork, 1967), p. 248.
5. J.L. McCracken, "Northern Ireland", in The Course of Irish History, p. 313.
6. David Fitzpatrick, "The Geography of Irish Nationalism", Past and Present, no. 78, (1978), p. 123.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Lawrence J. McCaffrey, Ireland from colony to nation state, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1979), pp. 126-129; Edmund Curtis, A History of Ireland, (London, 1936; reprint ed. 1981), p. 403.
10. McCracken, "Northern Ireland", pp. 313-314.
11. F.X. Martin, "1916 - Myth, Fact, and Mystery", Studia Hibernica, no. 7 (1967), p. 52; McCaffrey, Ireland from colony to nation state, p.132.
12. Curtis, A History of Ireland, p. 405; McCaffrey, Ireland from colony to nation state, p. 132.
13. Patrick Buckland, "Irish Unionism and the New Ireland", in D.G. Boyce, ed., The Revolution in Ireland, 1879-1923, (London, 1988), p. 77.
14. Patrick Callan, "British Recruitment in Ireland, 1914-1918", Revue Internationale D' Histoire Militaire, vol. 63 (1985), p. 41.

15. Donal McCartney, "From Parnell to Pearse", in The Course of Irish History, pp. 305-306; Martin, "1916 - Myth, Fact, and Mystery", pp. 56-61.

16. John O. Stubbs "The Unionist and Ireland, 1914-18", The Historical Journal, vol. 33, no. 4 (1990), p. 871.

17. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 90; Martin Staunton, The Story of the Munster Fusiliers, 1914-18, (unpublished manuscript based on M.A. thesis, Dublin University College, 1988), p. 185. For example, 36 Ulster Division was allowed to adopt a distinctive cap badge, the Red Hand of Ulster. Interestingly, this emblem was the symbol of an ancient Celtic warrior cult.

18. H.A. Law, Why is Ireland at War?, (Dublin, 1915), p.39; John Redmond, Ireland and the War, (Dublin, 1914), pp. 9-10.

19. John Redmond in Dennis Gwynn, The Life of John Redmond, (London, 1932), pp. 356-357. Although Gwynn's biography was first published in 1932, it has been described as "an authoritative, masterly work, which was lucidly written and based chiefly on Redmond's unpublished papers as well as drawing widely on other printed sources", by F.X. Martin in, "1916 - Myth, Fact, and Mystery", p. 61.

20. Ibid., p. 385.

21. Terry Denman, "The Catholic Irish soldier in the First World War: the 'racial environment'", Irish Historical Studies, vol. 27, no. 108 (November 1991), pp. 353-354. "Significant numbers of Catholic Irish began serving with the army in the 1770s...By 1830, 42 percent of the [British] army was Irish. Just before the outbreak of World War I the percentage of Irishmen in the BEF was at a level that closely matched the percentage of Irish in the total population of the United Kingdom."

22. McCaffrey, Ireland from colony to nation state, pp. 119 & 120.

23. Fitzpatrick, "The Geography of Irish Nationalism", p. 123. As previously noted, Sinn Fein did not win any seats in this election; the Irish Parliamentary Party won seventy-three seats and the Unionists won nineteen.

24. Ibid., p. 124.

25. Ibid., p. 271.

26. Ibid., p. 129. Statistics calculated based on numbers found in Table 3 of Fitzpatrick's article.

27. Ibid.
28. Martin, "1916 - Myth, Fact, and Mystery", p. 68.
29. F.X. Martin, "The Origins of the Irish Rising of 1916", in Desmond Williams, ed., The Irish Struggle, 1916-1926, (London, 1966), p. 3.
30. John O'Beirne Ranelagh, "The Irish Republican Brotherhood in the Revolutionary Period, 1879-1923", in The Revolution in Ireland, 1879-1923, p. 142.
31. Gwynn, The Life of John Redmond, p. 361; also, Michael Hopkinson, Green against Green, the Irish Civil War, (Dublin, 1988), p. 2. Hopkinson states: "At the start of the war the majority of Southern Irish opinion was in favour of Irish participation, [in the war] on the implicit understanding that a Home Rule settlement for all of Ireland would be granted at the end of the conflict".
32. Gwynn, The Life of John Redmond, pp. 364-365.
33. Ibid., p. 365.
34. John Redmond in Gwynn, The Life of John Redmond, p. 385.
35. Asquith in Gwynn, The Life of John Redmond, p. 393.
36. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 91. Clearing meant that recruits originally assigned to the four battalions were transferred to other 16 Division battalions if they had not been I.N.V.s. The four cleared battalions were the 7th Leinsters, 6th Connaught Rangers, 6th Royal Irish Regiment and the 8th Munster Fusiliers.
37. Patrick Callan, "Recruiting for the British Army in Ireland during the First World War", Irish Sword, no. 66 (1987), p. 52.
38. Redmond to Prime Minister Asquith, Memorandum regarding recruiting in Ireland, no date but c. December 1914 - January 1915, MS 15259, Redmond Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin (hereafter NLI).
39. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 90.
40. M. Maguire to Redmond, 11 November 1914, MS 22187, Redmond Papers, NLI.
41. Redmond to Prime Minister Asquith, Memorandum regarding recruiting in Ireland, no date but c. December 1914 - January 1915, MS 15259, Redmond Papers, NLI.

42. Alfred Perceval Graves to John Redmond, 2 October 1915, 'Extracts from a conversation with Sir Edward Carson which took place on 13 March 1915', MS 15261(2), Redmond Papers, NLI.

43. Redmond to Prime Minister Asquith, Memorandum regarding recruiting in Ireland, no date but c. December 1914 - January 1915, MS 15259, Redmond Papers, NLI.

44. Maguire to Redmond, 30 April 1915, MS 22187, Redmond Papers, NLI.

45. Ibid.

46. Alfred Perceval Graves to John Redmond, 2 October 1915, 'Extracts from a conversation with Sir Edward Carson which took place on 13 March 1915', MS 15261(2), Redmond Papers, NLI. Alfred Perceval Graves was an Anglo-Irish writer who resided in England. He was the father of the poet and First World War officer, Robert Graves, who wrote Goodbye to All That, (Harmondsworth, 1929,; revised edn., 1957).

47. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", pp. 90 & 99.

48. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 92. Parsons' wife and daughter were supporters of Home Rule. Parsons developed a friendship with Willie Redmond, a nationalist M.P., and John Redmond's brother.

49. Parsons to Secretary of the War Office, 29 November 1914, Sir Lawrence Parsons Papers, LHCM.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 94.

53. Staunton, The Story of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, p. 185; Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 90. Staunton states: "John Redmond tried to ensure that the INVs ...would receive recognition with the military framework similar to that of the Ulster Volunteers in the 36th (Ulster) Division. [Redmond's] areas of concerns included the election of their own officers within the 36th Division...". Denman states: "The [36] division was also given the freedom to choose its own officers,...".

54. Staunton, The Story of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, p. 187.

55. Captain Sheehan, 9 April 1918, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 104 (1918), 1406-07.

56. Captain Hervey de Montmorency (9th Dublins) to Redmond, 24 January 1915, MS 15261(2), Redmond Papers, NLI.
57. C.A. Brett (6th Connaught Rangers), "Some notes on how things were organized in France, 1916-1918", C.A. Brett Papers, National Army Museum, London (hereafter NAM).
58. Staunton, The Story of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, p. 185.
59. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 97.
60. Parsons, Diary, 15 October 1914, Sir Lawrence Parsons Papers, LHCM.
61. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", p. 97.
62. Ibid.
63. Redmond to Asquith, no date but c. spring 1915, MS 15261(2), Redmond Papers, NLI.
64. Denman, "Sir Lawrence Parsons", pp. 100-101. 10 Division was the third New Army division that was raised in Ireland.
65. Minutes of the Proceedings of and Precises prepared for the Army Council 1915 and 1916, from discussions during 188th and 190th meetings, 27 September and 19 October 1916, and Precise no. 838, 27 September 1916, WO 163/21, Public Record Office, Kew Gardens (hereafter PRO).
66. John Redmond, 1 October 1916, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 86 (1916), 1708.
67. War diary, Adjutant General, General Headquarters, 26 October 1916, WO 95/26, PRO.
68. Patrick Callan, "British Recruitment in Ireland, 1914-1918", Revue Internationale D' Histoire Militaire, vol. 63 (1985), p. 49.
69. All but two of 16 Division's original battalions were amalgamated or disbanded over time; but 16 Division retained a two to one ratio of Irishmen to men of other national origins, because regular battalions of the Irish regiments were attached to the division. The 7th Leinsters and the 6th Irish Rifles were disbanded in February 1918; the 7th and 8th Irish Fusiliers were amalgamated in October 1916, then disbanded in February 1918; the 8th Munsters were absorbed by the 1st Munsters in November 1916. 16 Division included the following battalions on 21 March 1918: 1st and 2nd Munsters, 2nd Leinsters, 6th Connaughts, 1st and 2nd

Dublins, 2nd and 7th Irish Regiment, 7/8th Inniskillings. War diaries, 16 Division, 1915 to 1918, WO 95/1955-1978; Discussions regarding recruitment and conscription in Ireland, March 1918, CAB 23/5/374 and 375, PRO; Martin Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, (London, 1978), p. 389.

70. As examples: Parsons, Diary, 2 October 1914, Parsons was irritated by the pressures regarding the commissioning of officers: "Most damnably annoyed and could not sleep"; and on 29 October 1914, Parsons recorded that the business of clearing the Brigade and getting colors for the battalions was all: "a d-d nuisance", Sir Lawrence Parsons Papers, LHCM.

71. Parsons to Redmond, 24 February 1915, MS 22185, Redmond Papers, NLI.

72. John Staniforth (7th Leinsters) to parents, 27 February 1915, Staniforth Papers, Imperial War Museum, London.

73. Anonymous reporter, 'Queen inspects the 16th Irish Division', The Freeman's Journal, Friday, 3 December 1915; Rowland Feilding to wife, 20 February 1917, in War Letters to a Wife, (London, 1929), p. 153. The Freeman's Journal was a newspaper published in Dublin, which generally supported the constitutional nationalist position.

74. During the first general election following the war, December 1918, the Sinn Fein Party won 73 seats, the Unionists won 26 and the Irish Parliamentary Party only won 6 seats. McCartney, "From Parnell to Pearse", p. 310.

CHAPTER II

The Effect of Politics on the Morale of 16 Irish Division

Soldiers of 16 Irish Division were not divorced from political problems while training in Ireland and they did not remain totally immune to the politics of their homeland while serving on the Western Front between 1916 and 1918. Old political animosities were certainly at the root of an incident which took place in October 1917. Soldiers of the 7th Irish Rifles, 16 Division, discovered that men of 36 Ulster Division had attached labels to bottles of soda which read "Boyne Water". Outraged at the "bloody Orangemen ...the men started off in a body for the Ulster Division to avenge what they considered a mortal insult". Their baffled South African acting battalion commander, Denys Reitz, managed to defuse the situation "without bloodshed".¹

Catholic Irish soldiers chose to demonstrate loyalty to their country by displaying unofficial symbols, though 16 Division had been denied special identifying colors or badges. Rowland Feilding, commanding the 6th Connaught Rangers, recorded in May 1917:

One of my Companies has produced an enormous green flag with a yellow Irish harp upon it, which the men carry about with them on the march, and fly outside their billets. It has not got the Crown, and therefore would be ranked by some people as "Sinn Fein", I feel sure.²

Feilding's feelings proved accurate. In an incident which took place in the spring of 1918, men of 16 Division were

harassed by other BEF soldiers who shouted, "There go the Sinn Feiners!"³

Bearing in mind the differences between republican and constitutional Irish nationalists, it hardly seems likely that these soldiers were in fact Sinn Feiners. But these political incidents provoke several questions. Did politics undermine the morale of 16 Irish Division, as some army commanders feared?⁴ How did soldiers of the Division react to news of the Easter Rising and did their reaction indicate an undermining of their morale? Was the Division's morale comparable to other B.E.F. divisions; and if comparable, how was this achieved considering the potential problems?

Prior to a specific examination of morale in 16 Division, two background items must be addressed. First, there must be a definition of morale; and the indicators used to determine the level of morale must be outlined.

Morale is the state of mind which, in military situations, determines the willingness of soldiers to fight. "It is a quality of mind and spirit which combines courage, self-discipline, and endurance."⁵ Although morale as a state of mind seems intangible, the level of morale in military units is recognizable. Military historians such as John Baynes and Brent Wilson, have established several indicators which can be utilized to determine levels of morale. Positive attitude, self-respect, health, and behaviour can all be examined to determine the morale of 16 Division.⁶

Positive attitude and self-respect can be evaluated based on qualitative evidence, while the analysis of health and behaviour will involve the examination of both qualitative and quantitative evidence. The quantitative analysis utilizes trench foot and shell shock statistics, the number of men reporting sick on a daily basis, and the number of courts martials, but inferences based on statistics must be supported by qualitative evidence.

Because war diaries and other sources generated by members of 16 Division did not routinely identify specific types of illnesses or casualties, no definitive trench foot or shell shock statistics exist for the division. Therefore, mainly tentative inferences must be surmised regarding these aspects of health in 16 Division. Although the number of men reporting sick was recorded on a daily basis over a four month period in 16 Division's Medical Services war diary, the record ends when the Division was transferred to a new front line position. But the war diaries of 16 Division battalions include scattered samples of numbers of men reporting sick, so the combining of numbers from these sources provides insight into the health of the division. However, it must be acknowledged that these statistics are not complete. Since the courts martial records of the BEF have been closed for a period of seventy-five years, the figures gathered regarding the number of courts martials in 16 Division are patchy. But sufficient material exists to draw conclusions about the behaviour of 16 Division.

Although the statistical evidence is not complete, it does provide a basis for comparing the morale of 16 Division with other BEF divisions. This quantitative comparison, supported by qualitative evidence, allows analysis of morale level in 16 Division.

The second item which must be addressed is the issue of the morale of the entire British Army during the First World War so that a general comparison between the morale of 16 Division and that of other BEF divisions can be undertaken. There is a general consensus among analysts and historians that "the spirit of the BEF was never broken by the strain of the war."⁷ However, it has also been recognized that there were fluctuations in levels of morale brought on by a wide variety of factors. For example, length of time in the line, success or failure in battle, the quality of support services including mail, food, shelter and entertainment, and news from home, could cause inconsistent levels of morale in individuals and entire units.⁸ John Baynes noted: "Within an hour a man could easily say 'This is fun', and 'This is hell', and genuinely mean it both times."⁹ If the morale of 16 Division is generally comparable to other BEF divisions, one should find that 16 Division experienced fluctuations in its level of morale, but that the morale of the division was never undermined.

One of the best indicators of good morale in any organization is a quality of cheerfulness, or a generally positive attitude despite difficulties.

Morale in a military formation...has as its hall-mark a quality of cheerfulness. This does not mean that everyone must wear a perpetual grin, but the impression of men with good morale is one of good cheer.¹⁰

A large number of anecdotes exist regarding attitudes in 16 Irish Division.¹¹ Several comments indicate that there were fluctuations in the positive attitude of the men of 16 Division. Captain O.L. Beater, 9th Dublin Fusiliers, expressed personal despondency in his diary entry of 8 November 1916:

It is cold and threatening rain and I am feeling jolly well fed up with the whole business. Away from one's womenfolk and all refining influences, this job gets on one's nerves, it's so dashed unnatural.¹²

Denys Reitz described a situation which caused a delayed negative emotional reaction among the men of his battalion. A pineapple bomb had hit the section of trench held by the 7th Irish Rifles during the fall of 1917. Four men were killed and soldiers of the battalion were responsible for burying them.

After the internment the bearers and the firing party tramped back along the communication trench quite cheerfully, but next morning the whole Battalion sat around in gloomy silence.¹³

Reitz implied that this melancholy was a product of the Irish temperament, but it seems reasonable to assume that this reaction to the loss of comrades would be experienced by most soldiers, regardless of national origins. In his study of morale, J.G. Fuller pointed out that cheerfulness

was something that had to be struggled for by all soldiers of the BEF.¹⁴ The soldiers of the 7th Irish Rifles did regain their positive attitude. Reitz reported that "by the following day the psychic wave had passed, and everyone was in good spirits once more."¹⁵

The majority of comments gathered regarding attitudes in 16 Division demonstrate that the division remained in good spirits in a variety of situations: on the march, in billets, in the trenches, and before, during, and after battle. From the many positive comments, a few have been chosen to impart a sense of the level of cheerfulness in 16 Division over time. The Irish journalist, Michael MacDonagh, found that the Division had "preserved their good humour"; and that they were "known, in fact, as 'The Light-Hearted Brigade'".¹⁶ Lieutenant J.F.B. O'Sullivan, an Irish Canadian serving with 16 Division, "found the men dog-tired but in remarkably good fettle" as they waited to go over the top at Guillemont on 3 September 1916. O'Sullivan thought that the attitude of the Irish soldiers boosted his own morale:

The recent gruelling torture which had caused more than two hundred casualties would have broken and demoralised many a group. But not these men. It cheered my own drooping spirits to have the honour of leading such a company.¹⁷

Captain Beater observed a cheerful attitude in his men on 10 July 1917 as they trained for the Third Ypres offensive. While marching back the five miles from practice at a rifle

range, "the men [were] in great spirits, singing and whistling all the way".¹⁸

Captain John Staniforth originally volunteered to serve with the 6th Connaughts, but was recommended for Parsons' training program and became an officer in the 7th Leinsters. Captain Staniforth, a Protestant Englishman who had some initial reservations about serving with Irish nationalist soldiers, found that 16 Division soldiers retained a level of good spirits during their trying experiences in the Third Ypres campaign. When the men were holding front line positions at the beginning of August 1917, he found them "cheery as larks", although they had suffered heavy casualties and were "sunk up to their knees in the morass".¹⁹ Colonel Rowland Feilding was a Roman Catholic Englishman from an upper middle class background, who admitted that his Tory schooling had taught him to regard Irish nationalists "as anathemas".²⁰ Feilding assumed command of the 6th Connaughts on 7 September 1916 when the battalion's former commanding officer was killed in action during the battle at Guillemont. After being with the Connaughts for just over a month, Feilding wrote to his wife on 17 October 1916, describing the people with whom he lived. Feilding found both officers and men, who were "practically entirely Irishmen", to be "magnificent - plucky and patient, keen and cheerful".²¹ Rowland Feilding wrote of his admiration for the soldiers as they endured winter weather conditions in the trenches.

I can never express in writing what I feel about the men in the trenches; and nobody who has not seen them can ever understand. Freezing, or snowing, or drenching rain; always smothered with mud; you may ask any one of them, any moment of the day or night, "Are you cold?" or "Are you wet?" - and you will get but one answer. The Irishman will reply - always with a smile - "Not too cold, sir," or "Not too wet, sir". Everybody laughs at everything, here. It is the only way.²²

Apparently the soldiers of 16 Division managed to maintain good spirits through the period of hard work and strain which was endured while the BEF prepared for the German offensive, expected in the spring of 1918. Colonel Feilding had been on a training course during the month of February and found when he returned, on 5 March 1918, "that every one was happy in spite of the tiring and trying time they had gone through". The 6th Connaughts had been in the line forty-two days at that point in time. The "restless hard work" and pressure continued into March, but the men appeared to endure. On 17 March 1918, duties had kept the men from attending the St. Patrick's Day Mass and celebrations "which means much to them". But Feilding recorded that "they accept it all cheerfully, as usual." On 19 March 1918, following fifty-six days in the line, Feilding wrote, "Everyone here is in good spirits, and I think we have nothing to worry about".²³

The preceding comments exemplify the generally cheerful attitude of 16 Division. Although the soldiers of 16 Division were not always happy, the qualitative evidence

indicates that the positive attitude of the division was never undermined.

Self-respect is the second qualitative indicator of morale. Soldiers who have good morale reflect a pride in themselves in two ways which can be examined using qualitative evidence. First, soldiers who are good at their jobs and proud of themselves "will naturally become clean and tidy".²⁴ Obviously, there were problems in maintaining high levels of personal cleanliness in the trenches. But the quality of the turnout and bearing of soldiers during parades and inspections provide a measure of the level of self-respect in 16 Division. Secondly, soldiers with good morale demonstrate pride in themselves by keeping their environment as clean as possible. Conditions of warfare did not allow a spotless environment. The disposal of refuse, the burying of the dead, mud and rats, were all conditions that had to be coped with. But a unit which left its surroundings "unnecessarily filthy was one which had sunk towards really low morale".²⁵ The building, cleaning, and maintenance of billets, latrines and trenches will provide another insight into levels of self-respect in 16 Division.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to point out that the judgement of 16 Division's cleanliness may have been affected by some entrenched notions regarding the cleanliness of Catholic Irishmen. According to historian Terry Denman, British officers generally believed that Catholic Irish soldiers were personally dirty and untidy,

and "none too clean in the trenches". Denman believes that these perceptions were based upon "a traditional prejudice against the 'bog Irish' peasantry".²⁶ For example, Robert Graves and fellow British officers at the Harfleur Bull Ring ranked the Catholic Irish low on the list of troops they considered to be the cleanest in trenches.²⁷ The existence of this prejudice must be acknowledged so that the point of view expressed by some contemporary observers can be understood.

First World War soldiers, and some officers, often grumbled about the emphasis on spit and polish. But good turnout and bearing during inspections and parades were an indicator of self-respect and good morale. Several comments reported poor turnout or personal untidiness in 16 Division. For example, Captain O.L. Beater, a British officer of the 9th Dublins, reported poor turnout on two separate occasions. In one case "there were some very dirty men on parade"; and in another, "half the Company had omitted to clean their boots and several men badly needed a hair cut". Another comment made by Captain Beater was of a more general nature and perhaps indicates his own personal bias:

I don't know why it is that the Irish batmen are so dirty. I suppose it is part of their education which has been grossly neglected. Anyway, our mess waiter, a most excellent man otherwise, has a most unpleasant habit of blowing violently down the spout of the teapot whenever it gets choked up.²⁸

However, Captain Beater must have perceived an improvement

in the 9th Dublins. When the men of his company were preparing for an inspection later, on 6 December 1916, Beater commented, "Considering the short notice we have had, the men are really getting their stuff very clean, in fact they have astonished me".²⁹ Another negative comment was recorded by Captain John Staniforth. Following a wet, hungry night in crowded, rat-infested billets, the 7th Leinsters were informed that they were to undertake a ceremonial review. Staniforth reported that during the review the corps commander was displeased because certain units "had failed to polish their buttons".³⁰ The negative comments regarding 16 Division's turnout and bearing are countered by many positive comments.³¹

Colonel Feilding was proud of his 6th Connaughts, who had "groomed themselves up like new pins" for a Church Parade held on 20 May 1917:

The mud of the trenches had entirely disappeared. The brass was polished: the leather about the drums was well pipe-clayed: even the cookers and water-carts, the harness, chains, and limbers, were shining and resplendent.³²

When Frank M. Laird became an officer of the 8th Dublin Fusiliers, he discovered that the battalion was "known as the "Shining Eighth", on account of its cleaning and polishing achievements".³³ Battalions of 16 Division were often inspected by officers who came from outside the Division. The following four comments serve as examples of the opinions expressed by inspecting officers. General Sir

Hubert Gough, in February 1916, complimented the men of 16 Division "on their smart appearance and soldierly bearing." Sir Alec J. Godly, commanding II Corps, "expressed himself as being very impressed with the excellent turnout and march discipline of the men". When 16 Division joined Fifth Army in June 1917, the 7th Leinsters were inspected by General Watts, GOC XIX Corps, "who expressed great satisfaction at the appearance of the battalion, their exceptional physique and soldierly bearing in marching past". While visiting 16 Division in the spring of 1916, Sir Douglas Haig, commander-in-chief of the BEF, witnessed a Brigade Horse Show. Haig complimented the Division in his diary entry, and then included a comment which reflects the bias of many senior British officers: "Men, horses, and harness were all splendidly clean and the turn-out was excellent. A very difficult thing to get with Irishmen."³⁴ Although there are some negative comments regarding the appearance of the men of 16 Division, the qualitative evidence indicates that the Catholic Irish soldiers generally demonstrated self-respect through the quality of their turn out and bearing.

First World War infantrymen were required to clean, maintain, and sometimes construct facilities in the rear areas, as well as build, clean, and maintain trenches. The work done by 16 Division in rear and forward areas will be briefly examined. Captain Beater recorded negative comments regarding the cleaning of rear areas. Beater believed that a drainage problem was due to the laziness of the Irish

soldiers. He stated: "the average Irish Tommy is such a careless individual, that he would rather choke up the existing drains by dumping his refuse and empty tins in them, than walk ten yards and put them in the proper dump hole." Captain Beater also recorded a complaint from the commander of the 48th Brigade who said that "the Company Headquarters were in a filthy state and that the place must be tidied up."³⁵ However, other comments indicate that units in 16 Division did work to clean and maintain rear areas. For example, the war diaries of the 7th Leinsters and the 6th Irish Regiment report a number of occasions when the battalions were involved in work details responsible for cleaning billets.³⁶ Captain John Staniforth recorded an example of care taken by the Irish soldiers when constructing latrines:

We took pride in our work: we sodded [the latrines], we fixed up seats by lashing tree trunks along, we added a spurious air of security by fixing up a screen of brushwood hurdles and we topped it off by improvising a dozen little shovels made of biscuit tins.³⁷

Soldiers of 16 Division lacked enthusiasm at times for cleaning rear areas. But it does not appear that apathy towards cleaning was a chronic problem.

When 16 Irish Division took over its first independent sector of operations near Hulluch in the spring of 1916, there was a concern regarding its ability to maintain its trench system. "Hickie was admonished by his corps and army commanders about the untidy state of the defenses in the

division's sector."³⁸ However, out of several comments regarding trench construction and maintenance, only one contains a negative reference. Captain O.L. Beater complained in his diary entry of 27 November 1916 that the Royal Irish Rifles had left the dugout and trenches in a "rotten state":

They have not got a very good reputation for keeping trenches in good repair, in fact I consider them a dashed lazy lot. There is very little love lost between the Dublins and the Rifles.³⁹

The other comments contain positive references regarding the construction and maintenance of trenches by 16 Division.⁴⁰ For example, the 7th Leinsters reported: "much good work done in cleaning trenches". The 9th Munsters, upon being relieved, reported that "the trenches had been considerably improved during our occupation".⁴¹ Colonel Rowland Fielding reported two examples which demonstrate the efficiency of the soldiers when repairing trenches that were damaged by enemy shelling. These examples not only indicate the efficiency with which the men responded in making the required repairs, but also demonstrate that repairing trenches could expose the troops to considerable danger. Fielding described a situation where a length of the battalion's breastworks had been blown in by enemy bombardment:

As soon as it was dark all set to work to repair the damage, and, though the Germans used their machine-guns freely, the men laughed, and went on filling sandbags.

One or two wags amused themselves by signalling the "misses" with shovels - as they do on the range; and by daylight the trenches were again presentable.⁴²

In a similar incident, which occurred on 14 December 1916, a bomb had destroyed portions of the battalion's fire-trench. Feilding visited the trench shortly after the bomb had dropped and described the scene:

Officers and men were already hard at work in the rain, quietly repairing the damage done to our trench, and clearing away the remains of the dead; all to outward appearances oblivious to the possibility of further trouble from the trench-mortar trained upon this special bit of trench.⁴³

16 Irish Division also received positive comments regarding trench building and maintenance from officers outside of the Division. General Green, commander of the experienced 45th Brigade that trained 16 Division units when they first arrived on the Western Front, had passed along an "excellent report as to their work on the trenches".⁴⁴ Following the earlier reprimands regarding the state of 16 Division's trenches near Hulluch, the commander of I Corps sent a letter of congratulations to 16 Division on 19 June 1916, which "expressed his appreciation to the entire Division for the excellent work done on the trenches during the recent period."⁴⁵ The initial concerns regarding the untidy state of 16 Division's trenches in the spring of 1916 appear to be the result of particular conditions that made proper trench maintenance difficult. The section of the line near Hulluch was "notorious for the poor conditions of the trenches,

which had been fought over and shelled many times and which were dug in low-lying and often waterlogged terrain".⁴⁶ The evidence does not indicate that there were any major or ongoing trench maintenance problem in sections of the line occupied by 16 Division.

The soldiers of 16 Division were not always spotless and the Division's rear areas and trenches were not always as clean as possible. On the other hand, there is no evidence to indicate chronic apathy towards cleaning. In fact, the positive comments regarding all facets of cleanliness outnumber the negative comments. The qualitative evidence indicates that there were fluctuations in self-respect in 16 Division, but it must be concluded that these inconsistencies do not represent the undermining of morale in 16 Irish Division.

Health is an indicator of morale which can be quantified. The analysis of health in 16 Division will briefly examine shell shock and trench foot, and will then turn to an analysis of the numbers of men reporting sick on a daily basis. Shell shock and trench foot statistics were often utilized by senior British officers as indications of the level of morale in BEF units because it was presumed that both conditions were controllable.⁴⁷ By the end of the First World War, cases of psychiatric breakdown caused by exhaustion, stress, and shell concussion were recognized as legitimate casualties. But it was presumed that incidents of shell shock could be reduced through good discipline and

esprit-de-corps.⁴⁸ Trench foot was caused by prolonged exposure of feet to dampness, a condition which often could not be avoided by First World War soldiers manning the trenches. However, it was well known that tissue damage to the feet was preventable if precautions were taken.⁴⁹ Because shell shock and trench foot have traditionally been perceived as good indicators of morale, this study addresses these aspects of health in 16 Division.

A thorough examination of 16 Division sources has uncovered only four comments that specifically mention trench foot in the Division. Two comments, recorded in November and December 1916, reported that the 8th Dublins and 6th Connaughts had no cases of trench foot because of the use of whale oil and "the system of supplying a dry pair of socks every night to every man".⁵⁰ The other two comments, recorded in August 1917, indicate that battlefield chaos and bad weather combined to cause a large number of trench foot cases in 16 Division during the Third Ypres offensive. Although no hard statistics are available, sources report that "trench foot was common" and there were "many sick - mostly from trench feet".⁵¹ During Third Ypres, soldiers of 16 Division spent long periods of time in water-logged trenches without relief or easy access to support services. In this case, the large number of trench foot cases seemed to be the result of a particular situation and not the result of low morale.

There were several comments regarding shell shock

gathered from 16 Division sources.⁵² These comments reported a total of twenty-nine shell shock cases. Most of the cases were reported in 1916, with eight cases reported in January, one in March and sixteen between July and November. The larger number of shell shock cases reported in the summer and fall of 1916 is comparable to reports of an increased number of shell shock casualties in the entire BEF during this time period. Historian Brent Wilson speculated that these increases may have been due to the increased intensity of bombardments which were experienced during the Somme offensive.⁵³ There were four cases of shell shock reported in 16 Division in 1917, with one case reported in May and three in August. Half of the comments specify that an enemy bombardment had occurred when the shell shock casualties were suffered.

As previously stated, source problems allow only tentative deductions regarding shell shock and trench foot in 16 Division. The paucity of comments regarding trench foot, and the low number of shell shock cases reported in the sources, might lead to the supposition that 16 Division record keepers consciously neglected to report specific cases of these medical conditions, perhaps because they wished to avoid negative judgments regarding the morale of the division. On the other hand, it might be concluded that trench foot and shell shock were simply not major health problems in 16 Division.

The number of men reporting sick on a daily basis can

reflect morale because the decision to report sick is often a choice made based on the individual's state of mind. Soldiers with good morale may choose to struggle on through minor ailments, while soldiers with low morale might use a minor ailment as an excuse to avoid duties. The historian John Baynes remarked: "Everyone knows how much or how little can be made of most illness; it is the will of the man which decides whether he will go sick or carry on."⁵⁴ A statistical analysis of the number of men reporting sick on a daily basis in 16 Division provides concrete insight into levels of health and morale.

The complete absence of illness is obviously an unreasonable expectation. For example, statistics indicate that battalions in Fourth Army had on average, between five and six men reporting sick per day during August and September 1916.⁵⁵ Even units with good morale had a number of men reporting sick on a daily basis. John Baynes concluded that the 2nd Scottish Rifles generally maintained a high level of morale, but this battalion had an average of about six men reporting sick on a daily basis. This number, which was deemed acceptable and a reflection of good morale, will be used for comparative purposes.⁵⁶ If 16 Division's morale was undermined one would expect a consistently higher number of men reporting sick on a daily basis. Table 1 shows the average number of other ranks reporting sick per day per 16 Division battalion during a four month period in 1916.⁵⁷

TABLE 1

AVERAGE NUMBER OF OTHER RANKS REPORTING SICK
PER DAY IN 16 DIVISION BATTALIONS, MAY TO AUGUST 1916

Date May	Av.Sk/ bn/day	Date June	Av.Sk/ bn/day	Date July	Av.Sk/ bn/day	Date August	Av.Sk/ bn/day
1	n/a	1	5.0	1	5.1	1	5.0
2	n/a	2	5.8	2	4.8	2	6.3
3	n/a	3	2.5	3	5.6	3	7.4
4	n/a	4	3.6	4	5.3	4	5.1
5	n/a	5	4.8	5	5.1	5	3.6
6	n/a	6	4.2	6	5.2	6	4.2
7	4.3	7	3.7	7	4.0	7	4.2
8	n/a	8	4.0	8	5.3	8	5.5
9	n/a	9	3.2	9	3.5	9	6.0
10	4.3	10	2.7	10	3.6	10	5.7
11	3.5	11	3.3	11	5.8	11	4.7
12	4.6	12	3.1	12	5.2	12	5.0
13	4.1	13	4.5	13	5.4	13	3.9
14	3.3	14	5.1	14	3.9	14	3.8
15	4.3	15	5.3	15	5.4	15	4.6
16	3.5	16	4.2	16	4.7	16	4.7
17	4.3	17	5.0	17	4.2	17	5.8
18	3.3	18	3.6	18	4.8	18	3.8
19	3.6	19	4.3	19	4.2	19	4.3
20	3.3	20	5.8	20	5.6	20	5.2
21	4.0	21	6.5	21	5.4	21	4.9
22	5.2	22	5.9	22	4.1	22	5.1
23	5.0	23	5.8	23	3.8	23	4.7
24	5.8	24	6.5	24	4.7	24	2.8
25	4.2	25	6.7	25	3.7	25	2.8
26	4.8	26	5.8	26	4.6	26	1.6
27	3.4	27	5.2	27	6.4	27	2.9
28	4.8	28	6.1	28	3.8	28	n/a
29	2.5	29	7.7	29	4.3	29	n/a
30	3.9	30	5.8	30	3.3	30	n/a
31	5.2			31	6.6	31	n/a
Total	4.1		4.8		4.7		4.6
Av.							

On average, between four and five men reported sick per day per 16 Division battalion between May and August 1916. This average compares favorably with the six per day which was accepted as an indication of good morale. It should be noted that 16 Division soldiers had just received the news

regarding the Easter Rising in May 1916. But if this news affected the morale of the Irish troops, it is certainly not reflected in the number of men reporting sick. In fact, May's figures remained extremely consistent and all daily averages were lower than six per day. During the months of June, July, and August, 16 Division was engaged in active raiding programs which were part of the 1916 Somme offensive, but soldiers of the Irish division do not appear to have attempted to avoid raiding duties by reporting sick. There was no significant fluctuations in the daily averages during these three month. Examination of the statistics in Table 1 reveals an extremely consistent level in the daily numbers of men reporting sick throughout the time period. Only on occasion do the figures fluctuate to any degree, with the highest daily average being about eight men reporting sick per battalion on 29 June and the lowest about two on 26 August.

Other figures demonstrate that the statistics in Table 1 were the general norm for 16 Division.⁵⁸ Figures found in the war diaries of the 8th and 9th Dublins show that these two battalions had a daily average of three to four men reporting sick between March 1916 and September 1917.⁵⁹ But these records do reveal one period where there was a significant increase in the number of men reporting sick. Between 14 and 26 December 1917, the amalgamated 8/9th Dublins recorded an average of 14 men per day reporting sick. On three days during this period, unusually high

numbers were logged: on 23 December, 31 men reported sick, on 25 December there were 26 and on 26 December, 23 men reported sick. However, the increase in the numbers of men sick during this period does not necessarily reflect an undermining of morale. The increased numbers may have been due to the desire of soldiers to be out of the line over Christmas. But the 8/9th Dublins' record keeper gave the likeliest explanation, declaring that "the unusual number of sick admitted to hospital during this period was due mainly to the severity of the cold weather". In any case, the daily average soon returned to normal levels. Between 27 December 1917 and 10 January 1918 there was an average of four men reporting sick per day.⁶⁰

Although there were fluctuations in the numbers, the sick statistics of 16 Division were normal and comparable to other BEF divisions. This quantitative evidence indicates that the morale of 16 Division was not undermined.

Behaviour is the other indicator of morale which can be quantified. While qualitative evidence allows a general insight into the conduct of 16 Division, courts martial statistics provide concrete evidence of misbehaviour.

The behaviour of 16 Division must be examined in perspective, however. Appropriate conduct, regulated by self discipline, is the result of good morale. A unit with good morale will not, therefore, have a continually high number of cases of misbehaviour. On the other hand, the total absence of misbehaviour among soldiers is an

unrealistic expectation. John Baynes argued: "Good soldiers must have a bit of devilment in them, and it is no good becoming alarmed at occasional outburst of misbehaviour."⁶¹ In fact, Brent Wilson's study of morale and discipline in the BEF revealed that an ongoing level of misbehaviour was normal. Wilson's collection of 19, 38 and 41 Divisions' courts martial figures demonstrates that these divisions averaged about twenty-four courts martial per month between January 1916 and September 1918.⁶² It should not be surprising then, to discover that 16 Division had a number of courts martial every month. Wilson's study also revealed that BEF divisions experienced fluctuations in the monthly number of cases of misbehaviour. Wilson's analysis found a general pattern: "all divisions experienced an increase in crime after a battle, especially when they were posted to a quieter section", and a decrease in crime when engaged in battle. But as is usually the case, the pattern does not always hold true. Wilson also discovered that there were fluctuations in courts martial statistics which did not seem to fit any particular pattern. Increases in the number of courts martial sometimes appeared to be a reaction to stress, fatigue, weather and other battlefield conditions.⁶³ If behaviour in 16 Division is comparable to other BEF divisions, fluctuations in courts martial statistics should be expected.

At present, the most complete record of courts martial statistics for 16 Division is located in Fifth Army's

Adjutant and Quartermaster's war diary. 16 Division was with Fifth Army for a total of seven months, but the record was completed for only six of these months. Table 2 shows the total number of courts martial cases for six months in 16 Division, in Fifth Army, and in the three divisions traced in Brent Wilson's study. The average number of courts martial per month is also shown.⁶⁴

TABLE 2
COURTS MARTIAL
IN 16, 19, 38 AND 41 DIVISIONS AND FIFTH ARMY.

Month	16 Div.	Fifth Army	19 Div.	38 Div.	41 Div.
June '17	10	175	n/a	10	13
July '17	47	521	n/a	13	26
Aug. '17	21	465	19	12	19
Dec. '17	14	135	14	n/a	42
Jan. '18	25	262	30	28	n/a
Feb. '18	36	280	31	19	25
Av./month	25.5	306	23.5	16.4	25

Note: The monthly average over this particular six months was unusually low for 38 Division, which had an overall average of 27.5 courts martial per month. See Appendix 2 for details.

At the beginning of June 1917, 16 Division participated in the Messines-Wytschaete offensive as part of Second Army and was then transferred to Fifth Army. For the remainder of June and all of July, 16 Division was in a quieter sector, training and preparing for the Third Ypres offensive. The sharp increase in courts martial in 16 Division during July follows the pattern revealed in Brent Wilson's study. Note that the entire Fifth Army experienced a similar dramatic increase in courts martial from June to

July. When 16 Division was engaged in the Third Ypres campaign, courts martial fell to normal levels, which according to Brent Wilson was about "the two dozen a month mark".⁶⁵ This decrease also follows the pattern observed by Wilson. The rising courts martial figures from December 1917 to February 1918 in 16 Division may have been in reaction to a number of factors. The division was in a relatively quiet sector and the weather was bitterly cold. Also, the entire BEF was reorganized during February 1918. Divisions were reduced from twelve to nine battalions through the disbanding of junior battalions and dispersal of troops to regular battalions. During the process, 16 Division lost all but two of its original battalions. The reorganization may have affected esprit-de-corps in all BEF divisions. Note that the entire Fifth Army experienced an increase in courts martial from December 1917 to February 1918.

It is difficult to directly compare the monthly courts martial figures of 16 Division with the other three divisions included in Table 2, as each division experienced somewhat different circumstances. For example, 38 Division was not engaged in the Messines-Wytschaete battle, but did participate in the Third Ypres offensive with Fifth Army. 19 Division was engaged in both offensives within the Second Army, but the courts martial figures for this division are not available for June and July so a comparison is not possible. While 41 Division's figure are available, its circumstances were not exactly the same as 16 Division's.

41 Division was engaged at Messines-Wytschaete, then remained with Second Army to participate in the Third Ypres offensive.⁶⁶ However, the monthly statistics do demonstrate that other BEF units experienced fluctuation in courts martial and the similarity in averages demonstrates that 16 Division's statistics were not beyond the norm. These available courts martial statistics do not permit any definitive conclusion regarding discipline in 16 Division. But the numbers do allow some insight into behaviour and demonstrate that 16 Division was comparable to other BEF units.

Additional figures and comments gathered from primary sources provide further insights into 16 Division's behaviour. Thirteen comments combed from the sources generated by 16 Division record keepers specified particular charges, ranging from minor misbehaviour to the most serious military and civil offenses. The following list of specific cases, compiled from information contained in the thirteen comments, provides a sense of the types of misbehaviour found in 16 Division: eleven men accused of selling cap badges; one man accused of irregular conduct (the type of irregular conduct was not specified in the source); ten men charged with absence without permission; one man accused of refusing to obey an order; one man charged with sleeping at his post; one man accused of shooting a civilian; three men charged with desertion.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the outcome of most of these trials is unknown. However, it is known that

only one member of 16 Division received the death sentence as a result of a courts martial trial. Private J. Carey, 8th Irish Fusiliers, was executed for desertion in September 1916. There were a total of 346 death sentences carried out in the British Army during the First World War.⁶⁸

Although he did not record precise numbers of men involved or specific charges laid, Colonel Feilding did observe an outbreak of "petty crime, especially insubordination", during the first weeks of May 1917, when his men had been on front line duty for a long stretch of time. Feilding noted that the misbehaviour subsided once the soldiers were given an adequate rest period.⁶⁹

Comments of a general nature regarding behaviour in 16 Division, indicate that the Irish troops were "magnificent and willing fighters [but] rather an anxiety in billets".⁷⁰ It appears that much of the anxiety arose out of incidents involving alcohol. Although there are few hard statistics, several remarks indicate that drunkenness was a cause for concern when 16 Division was posted to rear areas. C.A. Brett, a young officer in the 6th Connaughts, was of the opinion that his men, when in billets, "got drunk on the lightest pretext".⁷¹ Captain Beater observed that drinking in rear areas, especially on pay-day, was often at the root of misadventures which led to run-ins with the military police.⁷² Feilding noted that "crime ceased to exist" when his men were posted to billets which were miles away from civilians, who normally sold "poison to the men under the

name of 'wine' ".⁷³ However, it must be recognized that opinions regarding the seriousness of the drinking problem in 16 Irish Division may have been affected by the preconception that Catholic Irishmen were "mad for drink". While comments make it clear that drunkenness was a cause for concern when 16 Division was in billets, it must be realized that it was not a problem unique to the Irish division. In fact, drunkenness in rear areas was a cause for concern throughout the BEF and was the most common offense brought to trial before the Field General Courts Martial.⁷⁴

The behaviour of 16 Division appears to be similar to other BEF units. Again, there is no evidence to indicate that the morale of 16 Division was unusual.

This examination of positive attitude, self respect, health, and behaviour has indicated a number of factors which affected the morale of all BEF units. But the effect of politics on morale has not been examined. The question remains: Did Irish political problems affect the morale of 16 Division? A brief examination of the reaction of 16 Division soldiers to news of the 24 April 1916 Easter Rising will provide insight into the impact of politics on the Irish division's morale.

News of the Easter Rising reached the soldiers on the Western Front within four days. John Staniforth recorded the earliest reference to the rebellion in a letter written on 28 April: "Poor old Dublin. Always in the wars."⁷⁵

Evidence demonstrates that the Irish soldiers of 16 Division were generally shocked and angered by the news. These soldiers believed the rebels were "emotionalists", "poor misguided fools", "labour desperadoes", or "German puppets". One outraged Catholic Irish officer "wished to God the War Office would sent the 16th Division over to Dublin to settle things".⁷⁶ The Irish Catholic soldiers, reflecting the attitudes of the majority of Irishmen in 1916,⁷⁷ did not appear to support the actions of their revolutionary nationalist countrymen.

Some politically conscious Irish officers were certainly depressed and dismayed by the news of the rising. Willie Redmond was brought close to tears upon hearing the news and feared that he might, one day, be considered "a traitor to his country and a leader of traitors".⁷⁸ Another Catholic Irish officer was devastated by the news, believing that the uprising had crushed "our hopes for Ireland" and created a "new suspicion of Irishmen that would not be eradicated".⁷⁹ The depression expressed in these examples does not appear to have been long-lasting or widespread. Most 16 Division soldiers seem to have recovered quickly from the shock, diffusing their anxieties about the Uprising with humour. They "made the best of [the news], and joked a good deal about it, saying there was no danger of great trouble as all the fighting men were in France".⁸⁰

Soldiers of 16 Division also demonstrated their feelings about the Easter Rising through their actions. On the

morning of 1 May 1916, the Germans put up three large placards. One read: "Irishman. Great uproar in Ireland. English guns firing on your wives and children". Another read: "Kut captured. 13,000 English prisoners". The third and largest read: "Irishman! In Ireland revolution. English guns firing on your wives and children. English Dreadnought sunk. English military Bill refused. Sir Roger Casement persecuted. Throw your arms away. We will give you a hearty welcome".⁸¹ Battalions of 16 Division, which successively manned the trenches near these placards, demonstrated their disdain for this attempt to undermine their loyalty. John Staniforth recorded the reaction of the 7th Leinsters when the placards were first put up:

We played Rule Britannia and lots of Irish airs on a melodeon in the front trench to show them we weren't exactly downhearted. It was a company commander who played, and he stuck to it for an hour, although they pushed over all sorts of stuff at him. We also stuck up a notice which annoyed them so much that they threw rifle-grenades at it till they destroyed it. "PLEASE TELL YOUR DESERTERS TO COME OVER SINGLY NEXT TIME, AS THE LAST SIX WERE TAKEN FOR A PATROL AND UNFORTUNATELY FIRED UPON", which was a fact.⁸²

The 8th Munster Fusiliers demonstrated their specific disdain by capturing the placards. On 10 May 1916, Corporal Timothy Kemp and Lieutenant Biggande crawled to the unoccupied enemy sap, seized the placards and returned unharmed. The placards were presented to the King, as war souvenirs, on 25 July 1916.⁸³ The 9th Munsters continued to demonstrate disdain by hanging an effigy of Roger Casement

in a tree on 21 May 1916, which apparently "annoyed the enemy as it was found riddled with bullets".⁸⁴

It can be deduced therefore, that the news of the Easter Rising had an impact on 16 Division, but that most soldiers and officers were critical of the rebellion. Evidence indicates that morale in 16 Division was comparable to other BEF units. But how was this achieved, considering that 16 Division had to deal with the additional political pressures?

There were a number of ingredients which assisted in sustaining morale. The main elements, including leadership, comradeship, and discipline, and a variety other factors, including adequate services, adequate rest and training, and sports and entertainment, contributed to the maintenance of morale in all BEF units.⁸⁵ It is not possible, however, within the scope of this study, to examine all the factors which assisted in the maintenance of morale in 16 Division. Therefore, two factors have been selected for close examination, as each appears to have been of particular importance in the Irish division: leadership and religion.

According to some military historians, leadership was the most important single factor in sustaining morale in all BEF units. Brent Wilson believed that: "Bad officers could destroy troop spirit, while good officers revived it."⁸⁶ In battalions of the Regular Army the officer-other rank relationship was well established and bonds of loyalty were created through mutual loyalty to the Regiment. It was

believed that morale could be created from the top down by imposing strict discipline, which emphasised spit and polish, drill and the rigid separation of the ranks. But this system was not as entrenched in some New Army units because the relatively brief training period given the new recruits did not allow adequate time for the inculcation of regimental traditions.⁸⁷

Contemporary observers noted that the Irish troops responded best to a less rigid, more personal, leadership style. Rowland Feilding, for example, found that the Irishmen "will do anything they are asked to do, even to the death. But they become like mules if they think they are being driven".⁸⁸ Although certain aspects of traditional British Army discipline were imposed in 16 Division, including spit and polish and drill, a more relaxed leadership style prevailed. Sir Francis Vane, an Irish Protestant officer with the 9th Munsters, observed:

A kindly familiarity which might injure discipline in a British regiment, will never be presumed on by the Irish; and if you have to correct them for minor irregularities it is better to do so with a smile than a frown.⁸⁹

Frank M. Laird, who served with the 8th Dublins, described an officer who was admired by the men of his company:

"Captain Frank Thompson had a wonderful way of keeping his company up to the mark, strafing all round and yet leaving everyone in good humour, and himself in high favour".⁹⁰

The leadership style which prevailed in 16 Division may

have been a result of the fact that by 1916 the majority of officers in the division were Catholic Irishmen. A Catholic Irish background was not essential for officers to earn the loyalty of Irish troops, but it seemed that the average Catholic Irish officer was "more democratic, or at least less feudal in outlook, and more friendly than was usual among the officer corps".⁹¹ The Irish journalist Michael MacDonagh recorded an example which demonstrates the leadership style of one Irish battalion commander. An English brigadier-general of 16 Division, going the rounds alone, came suddenly upon a sentry at a remote post. The sentry happened to be a newly arrived Irish recruit, and taken by surprise, challenged the brigadier-general by calling out: "In the name of God, who the divil are you?" Enraged by this inappropriate challenge, the brigadier approached the sentry's battalion commander and asked him "where his damned fools had been picked up". The Irish Colonel apparently replied:

Certainly, the challenge and the salute were not quite proper. But you can imagine what kind of a reception that simple but fearless lad would give to a German; and after all, is not that the main thing just now?".⁹²

Another important aspect of leadership in 16 Division was the fact that a number of officers had been leaders in the Irish civilian community. The historian J.G. Fuller argues that the importation of civilian structures of authority was important because familiar leaders could

provide continuity and create cohesion among the New Army volunteer soldiers.⁹³

A number of well-known Irish Nationalist M.P.s volunteered for service in 16 Division and eventually became officers. The presence of these men appeared to assist in the maintenance of 16 Division's morale. Stephen Gwynn became a company commander at the age of fifty-two, after a struggle with War Office authorities who initially refused to send him out on active duty because of his age. Gwynn led by example, "knee-deep in mud and slush, enthusiastically doing the duty of a boy of twenty; [he was] adored by his Company".⁹⁴ Major Willie Redmond was denied front line duty because of his age by the divisional commander, General Hickie. Instead, Hickie established Redmond as a roving commissioner, responsible for bolstering morale and reporting any grievance that needed attention in any part of the Division. Captain J.A. Farrell, 7th Leinsters, remembered Redmond:

telling us in the most moving and inspiring way, our duty and what we were about to fight for, begging us to remember that not for England alone but for the dear hearths and homes in Ireland were we about to draw the sword."⁹⁵

Major Arthur Ryan believed that Willie Redmond deserved "credit for drawing together, by ties stronger than military discipline, the hearts of all ranks in the 16th (Irish) Division".⁹⁶

Another important group of officers in 16 Division, who

had been leaders in the Irish civilian community, were the Roman Catholic chaplains. Contrary to the behaviour of the majority of established and free church chaplains, who did not spend much, if any, time in the trenches, the Catholic chaplains "sought to inspire faith and courage through personal example" in the front line.⁹⁷ The leadership provided by these individuals appears to have had a positive effect in 16 Division. For example, Frank Laird reported that the Catholic padre, Father William Doyle, was "known and loved through the whole Division for unexampled bravery and equal kindness; and that he was worth several officers in any hot spot where endurance was tested to its height".⁹⁸

The leadership style adopted by the majority of 16 Division officers and the importation of Irish civilian leaders appears to have been important in sustaining the morale of 16 Division. Similarly, the presence of Roman Catholic priests, a significant factor in Irish civilian life, was also important in maintaining the morale of the Irish Division. When Rowland Feilding assumed command of the 6th Connaughts he observed that the men were "intensely religious".⁹⁹ The religious intensity of 16 Division troops seems to have been unusual among BEF soldiers. Most First World War soldiers had become cynical towards organized religion, perhaps because their faith was shattered by wartime experiences, or because they were not impressed by the behaviour of most army chaplains, "who were most involved in patriotic persuasion" and distanced from the

other ranks by their officer status.¹⁰⁰ The poet and World War I officer, Robert Graves, observed: "Hardly one soldier in a hundred was inspired by religious feeling of even the crudest kind".¹⁰¹ Religion, as a coping mechanism which assisted in sustaining morale, seems to have been a factor peculiar to 16 Division.

Several contemporary observers witnessed the religiosity of 16 Division troops and expressed the opinion that religion was an active agent in bolstering the Division's morale. An officer of the 7th Irish Rifles found his men "extraordinarily religious". When censoring his men's mail, he observed: "A very strong religious strain runs through most of their letters".¹⁰² Father William Doyle, chaplain to the 8th Dublins, believed that the soldiers of 16 Division gained particular sustenance from their religion: "The Irish Catholic soldier is the bravest and best in a fight, but few know that he draws his courage from the strong faith with which he is filled and the help which comes from the exercise of his religion". Doyle observed that receiving general absolution prior to assaults had a positive effect on the Catholic soldiers: "The men went off in the best of spirits, light of heart with the joy of good conscience. 'Good-bye Father,' one shouted, 'we are ready to meet the devil himself now'". Father Doyle also noted that although the Catholic chaplains were not supposed to go into the firing line, they were warmly welcomed by the officers, "as a chat and a cheery word buck the men up so much".¹⁰³

Major Willie Redmond, who believed that "the fortitude the men draw from their faith is great and marked", also heard officers welcome the Catholic chaplains. According to Redmond, "a high General officer once declared that good chaplains were as necessary as good Commanding officers" for maintaining the morale of 16 Division. Willie Redmond also observed that when 16 Division battalions were billeted in a village, "the church large enough for the villagers, becomes at once too small". General Hickie told Redmond:

his division never left an area without the local authorities, and notably the cure, coming to him to express their appreciation of the good behaviour of the troops, and their admiration for their earnest devotion to their religion".¹⁰⁴

Although a Catholic, Rowland Feilding seemed constantly surprised and impressed by the remarkable religious devotion of his men: "No one who has not seen it can ever realize the intense devotion of these Irish soldiers who have come to fight in France; they will not shirk what they consider to be their religious duties". The men would flock to Mass even when they were exhausted after long periods of front line duty, and when religious services were held within yards of the German trenches. "It was not a case of driving the men to attend - but indeed of keeping them away." Prior to the Cambrai assault in November 1917, Feilding observed:

For hours that evening the priests were engaged, the men crowding up silently, passing one by one to the canvas Confessionals in the far corners of the old ruin, which was dimly lighted by a candle or two for the occasion".¹⁰⁵

Religion does not seem to have been an overwhelmingly important ingredient contributing to the maintenance of morale throughout the BEF. But for the Catholic Irish soldiers of 16 Division, participation in the rituals of their religion appears to have provided a vital continuity that assisted in sustaining their morale.

Of course many other ingredients affected the spirit of 16 Division, and contrary battlefield conditions often caused fluctuations in morale. But it is apparent that leadership and religion were important factors which sustained 16 Division morale over time, despite the additional pressures arising from political conditions.

The Irish soldiers of 16 Division were not completely divorced from the politics of their homeland. But political incidents do not appear to have had pronounced or long-term ramifications for the morale of the Division. Although the Catholic Irish soldiers were labelled 'Sinn Feiners' by their English comrades-in-arms, the Irish troops were clear on their position in the spectrum of Irish political opinion. When asked his views about the relative aims of the Nationalists and the Sinn Feiners, an Irish corporal told Rowland Feilding: "The Nationalists aim at getting independence by constitutional, the Sinn Feiners by unconstitutional, means". Even though the Irish soldiers chose to demonstrate loyalty to their country by displaying unofficial symbols, Feilding stated: "It does not seem to make any difference to their loyalty and devotion" to their

duty on the Western Front.¹⁰⁶ And even though old political animosities might surface occasionally, causing, for example, the near brawl over 'Boyne Water', it is clear that this was not the norm. Denys Reitz, the officer who witnessed the incident, noted: "Next day [the men involved in the incident] were playing football with the Ulsterites as if nothing had happened".¹⁰⁷ Political conditions and the pressure of war certainly caused variations in the level of morale in the Irish Division. But the analysis of levels of positive attitude, self-respect, health, and behaviour indicates that the morale of 16 Division compared favorably with the morale of the entire BEF, which never suffered a complete collapse of spirit.

This examination has discussed many similarities between 16 Irish Division and other BEF divisions, but it must also recognize some differences. First, it is clear that unresolved Irish political issues exposed 16 Division to potential problems that would not have influenced other BEF divisions. Second, the fact that Irish troops responded best to a less rigid leadership style suggests that 16 Division may have been a less rigidly disciplined unit when compared with British units. In fact, some contemporary observers compared the relaxed relationship between officers and men found in 16 Division to that found among Australian soldiers, who, according to historian J.G. Fuller, did not even "pretend to have any discipline".¹⁰⁸ Despite being undisciplined, and at times blatantly disobedient, the

Australians' combat record was "probably unparalleled during the First World War".¹⁰⁹ But what was the effect of less rigid discipline, combined with potential political problems, on the combat effectiveness of 16 Irish Division? What must be determined is whether the differences between 16 Division and other British units affected the efficiency of the Irish division. The performance of 16 Division while on the Western Front between 1916 and 1918 will be examined in the following chapter.

Endnotes

1. Denys Reitz, Trekking On, (London, 1933), p. 182. On 12 July 1690, at the Battle of the Boyne, the forces of Protestant King William of Orange defeated the Irish-French Army of Roman Catholic James II. Orangemen celebrate this victory, on 12 July, to this day.
2. Rowland Feilding to wife, 20 May 1917, in War Letters to a Wife, (London, 1929), p. 179
3. Major Nightingale to unknown, 24 April 1918, PRO 30/71, Public Records Office, Kew Gardens (hereafter PRO). Nightingale was second in command, 1st Munster Fusiliers.
4. Gough to Edmonds, 3 May 1944, CAB 45/140, PRO. Sir Walter Congreve, CO VII Corps, and Sir Hubert Gough, GOC Fifth Army both expressed the belief that the morale of 16 Division was being undermined by politics.
5. John Baynes, Morale: A Study of Men and Courage, (New York, 1967), p. 108.
6. James Brent Wilson, Morale and Discipline in the British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918, (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1978), pp. 26-27.; Baynes, Morale, pp. 94-97.
7. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, p. 313; Baynes, Morale, p. 5; J.G. Fuller, Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918, (Oxford, 1990), pp. 1-2.
8. Richard Holmes, Firing Line, (London, 1985), pp. 89, 108-133; Baynes, Morale, p. 6; Fuller, Morale and Popular Culture, pp. 61 -109; Wilson, Morale and Discipline, pp. 17-28.
9. Baynes, Morale, p. 6.
10. Ibid., p. 94.
11. A total of thirty-one anecdotes were collected from: War diaries: 8th Munsters, 10 June 1916, WO 95/1971; 7th Leinsters, 3 and 7 January, 8 February 1916, 6th Connaughts, 11 March 1916, WO 955/1970; 48th Brigade, 7 July 1916, WO 95/1955, PRO. Feilding to wife, 25 September 1916, 27 December 1916, 27 February 1917, 29 May 1917, 22 June 1917, 13 and 15 March 1918, War Letters, pp. 121, 140, 159, 182, 197; Reitz, Trekking On, pp. 179, 185; Captain O.L. Beater, Diary, 22 November 1916, Beater Papers, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM); Major William Redmond, Trench Pictures from

France, (London, 1917), p. 87; Captain John Staniforth to parents, 29 December 1915, 20 January and 10 August 1916, 28 July 1917, Staniforth Papers, IWM.

12. Beater, Diary, 8 November 1916, Beater papers, IWM.

13. Reitz, Trekking On, p. 179.

14. Fuller, Morale and Popular Culture, p. 17.

15. Reitz, Trekking On, p. 179.

16. Michael MacDonagh, The Irish on the Somme, (London, 1917), p. 59.

17. J.F.B. O'Sullivan, "The 6th Battalion captures Guillemont", p. 30, O'Sullivan Papers, IWM.

18. Beater, Diary, 10 July 1917, Beater Papers, IWM.

19. Staniforth to parents, 7 August 1917, Staniforth Papers, IWM.

20. Feilding to wife, 8 June 1917, War Letters, p. 192.

21. Ibid., 17 October 1916, p. 128.

22. Ibid., 14 December 1916, pp. 135-136.

23. Ibid., 3, 17 and 19 March 1918, pp. 257, 260, 262.

24. Baynes, Morale, p. 95.

25. Ibid., p. 96.

26. Terence Denman, "The Catholic Irish Soldier in the First World War: the 'racial environment'", Irish Historical Studies, vol. 27, no. 108 (November 1991), pp. 360-361.

27. Robert Graves (2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers), Goodby to All That, (Harmondsworth, 1929; revised edn., 1957), p. 152. "We once discussed which were the cleanest troop in trenches taken by nationalities. We agreed on a descending-order list like this: English and German Protestants; Northern Irish, Welsh, and Canadians; Irish and German Catholics; Scots...; Mohammedan Indians; Algerians; Portuguese...".

28. Beater, Diary, 7 October, 8 and 16 November 1916, Beater Papers, IWM.

29. Beater, Diary, 6 December 1916, Beater Papers, IWM.

30. Staniforth to parents, 6 January 1916, Staniforth Papers, IWM.
31. War diaries, 7th Leinsters, 5 January 1916, 6th Connaughts, 17 February and 17 December 1916, 22 March 1917, 6th Irish Regiment, 26 February, 22 March, 10 April 1917, WO 95/1970; 8th Munsters, 7 August and 23 November 1916, WO 95/1971; 8th Dublins, 20 October, 4 November 1916, WO 95/1974, PRO; Fielding to wife, 17 December 1916, War Letters, p. 136; Beater, Diary, 19 and 21 June 1917, Beater Papers, IWM.
32. Feilding to wife, 20 May 1917, War Letters, p. 178.
33. Frank M. Laird, Personal Experiences of the Great War (an unfinished manuscript)[sic], (Dublin, 1925), p. 105.
34. War diaries, 6th Connaughts, 21 February 1916, WO 95/1970; 9th Dublins, 17 April 1917, WO 95/1974; 7th Leinsters, 26 June 1917, WO 95/1970; Haig, Diary, 5 May 1916, WO 256/10; PRO.
35. Beater, Diary, 28 and 30 October 1916, Beater Papers, IWM.
36. War diaries, 7th Leinsters, 30 December 1915, 15 and 29 January, 12 February 1916; 6th Irish Regiment, 1 June 1917, WO 95/1970; PRO.
37. Staniforth to parents, 30 December 1915, Staniforth Papers, IWM.
38. Denman, "The Catholic Irish soldier", p. 361.
39. Beater, Diary, 27 November 1916, Beater Papers, IWM.
40. War Diaries, 7th Leinsters, 16 February, 26 and 29 March, 7 and 8 June 1916; 6th Connaughts, 1 to 7 January, 17 February 1916; 6th Irish Regiment, 14 July 1916, WO 95/1970; 9th Munsters, 6 April 1916, WO 95/1975; PRO.
41. War diaries, 7th Leinsters, 16 Feb. 1916, WO 95/1970; 9th Munsters, 6 April 1916, WO 95/1975, PRO.
42. Feilding to wife, 17 October 1916, War Letters, p. 129.
43. Ibid., 14 December 1916, p. 134.
44. War diary, 8th Dublins, 26 February 1916, WO 95/1974, PRO.
45. Ibid., 19 June 1916.

46. Denman, "The Catholic Irish soldier", p. 361.
47. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, pp. 34-37, 311.
48. Holmes, Firing Line, pp. 256-257.
49. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, p. 34. Precautions included foot inspections, provision of dry socks and applying whale oil to the feet as a moisture barrier.
50. War diary, 8th Dublins, 26 November 1916, WO 95/1974, PRO; Feilding to wife, 27 December 1916, War Letters, p. 140.
51. War diary, 6th Connaughts, 6 August 1917;, WO 95/1970, PRO; Staniforth to parents, 7 August 1917, Staniforth Papers, IWM.
52. War diaries, 6th Irish Regiment, 21 August 1916, WO 95/1970; 8th Dublins, 19 July, 17 and 18 August, 25 October, 23 November 1916, WO 95/1974; 8th Munsters, 29, 30 and 31 January, 4 September 1916, WO 95/1971; 7th Irish Rifles, 31 July, 23 November 1916, 28 May 1917, WO 95/1975; 8th Inniskillings, 17 March 1916, WO 95/1977; 7th Irish Fusiliers, 20 August 1916, WO 95/1978, PRO. Staniforth to parents, 7 August 1917, Staniforth Papers, IWM; Reitz, Trekking On, p. 34.
53. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, pp. 38-39.
54. Baynes, Morale, p. 96.
55. Major General Sir W.G. MacPherson, Official History of the War: Medical Services, General History, vol. III, (London, 1921), Appendix B, pp. 521-526. On average 5.5 other ranks reported sick per day per battalion in Fourth Army during the months of August and September 1916. This average was calculated in the following manner. The total number sick, 72,287, has been divided by 18 (the average number of divisions with Fourth Army) to determine the average number sick per division. This number was then divided by 12 (the number of battalions per division) to determine average sick per battalion and this number was then divided by 61 (the number of days in August and September).
56. General Jack, Diary, 19 February 1916, in Baynes, Morale, p. 96; also in Wilson, Morale and Discipline, p. 30. "The Medical Officer...says he has never seen such small battalion 'sick parades' as ours. Our daily average of men reporting sick is about 6, and he has been accustomed to 20 to 30."

57. War diary, Assistant Director Medical Services, 16 Division, 7 May to 27 August 1916, WO 95/1960, PRO. For raw numbers see Appendix 1.

58. Feilding to wife, 30 December 1916, War Letters, p. 141. Rowland Feilding reported that when the men were in the line the average daily number of men reporting sick was about "one or two per day for the whole battalion".

59. War diaries, 9th Dublins, 8th Dublins, 8/9th Dublins, WO 95/1974, PRO. For details and specific dates see Appendix 1.

60. War diary, 8/9th Dublins, 14 December 1917 to 10 January 1918, WO 95/1974, PRO. Daily numbers in Appendix 1.

61. Baynes, Morale, p. 95.

62. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, pp. 333, 341, 343, 345, 347. Monthly totals for each division tabulated in Appendix 2.

63. Ibid., pp. 47-48, 210, and passim.

64. War diary, Adjutant and Quartermaster General's Branch, Fifth Army, June to August and December 1917, January and February 1918, WO 95/525, PRO; Wilson, Morale and Discipline, pp. 343, 345, 347.

65. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, p. 235.

66. 41 Division's courts martial figures do follow a pattern similar to 16 Divisions over the months of June, July and August, although the July increase is not as dramatic as 16 Division's. One wonders whether 16 Division's dramatic increase had anything to do with the fact that it had been transferred to Fifth Army, which had a bad reputation. Apparently, "men hated and feared to be assigned to it" and following 16 Division's transfer to Fifth Army company commanders were warned "that the Army to which we at present belong, have it more or less in for us, and intend trying to catch us out on every occasion". Leon Wolff, In Flanders Fields, (Westport, 1958; reprinted 1984), p. 128; Beater, Diary, 3 July 1917, Beater Papers, IWM.

67. War diaries, 6th Irish Regiment, 15 October 1916, 26 and 27 May 1917, WO 95/1970; 8th Dublins, 30 June, 11 July 1917, WO 95/1974; Adjutant and Quartermaster General's Branch, 16 Division, 6 November 1917, 22 January 1918, WO 95/1957, PRO. Beater Diary, 7, 23 and 28 November 1916, 9 December 1916, Beater Papers, IWM; Reitz, Trekking On, pp. 183-184; C.A. Brett, "Recollections, 1914-1918", p. 46, Brett Papers, National Army Museum, London (hereafter NAM).

68. Courts Martial Records, Summary records - death sentences, "Tabular statement relating to men of the British Army who were sentenced to be shot by Courts Martial since 4 August 1914", WO 93/49, PRO.

69. Feilding to wife, 15 and 20 May 1917, War Letters, pp. 175, 178.

70. Second Lieutenant Wallace Lyon, 7th Leinsters, typescript memoirs, pp. 58, 71, Lyon Papers, IWM; MacDonagh, The Irish on the Somme, p. 59.

71. Brett, "Recollections", p. 46, Brett Papers, NAM.

72. Beater, Diary, 6 October and 24 November 1916, Beater Papers, IWM.

73. Feilding to wife, 3 October 1917, War Letters, p. 207.

74. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, pp. 50, 57; Denman, "The Catholic Irish soldier", pp. 353, 360.

75. Staniforth to parents, 28 April 1916, Staniforth Papers, IWM.

76. Irish Catholic officer to family, date unknown; Irish Catholic officer to Harry, date unknown, both published in The Freeman's Journal, 9 and 17 May 1916.

77. "Since most Irish people had relatives or friends fighting with the British army in France, they were hostile to the Easter Week rebels. They considered them cowardly backstabbers. When [the rebels] were herded off to jail, Dubliners cursed, jeered, and even spit on them." Lawrence J. McCaffrey, Ireland from colony to nation state, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1979), pp.140-141.

78. Major Arthur Ryan, in the 'Forward' of Major William Redmond, (London, 1917), pp. 15-16.

79. Irish Catholic officer to family, date unknown, published in The Freeman's Journal, 17 May 1916.

80. Private Dave Mahony, 8th Munsters, statement taken by reporter, Cork Examiner, 18 May 1916.

81. Staniforth to parents, 1 May 1916, Staniforth Papers, IWM; War diary, 8th Munsters, 10 May 1916, WO 95/1971, PRO.

82. Staniforth to parents, 1 May 1916, Staniforth Papers, IWM.

83. War diary, 8th Munsters, 10 May and 25 July 1916, WO 95/1971, PRO; Private Dave Mahony, 8th Munsters, statement taken by reporter, Cork Examiner, 18 May 1916.
84. War diary, 9th Munsters, 22 May 1916, WO 95/1975, PRO. Sir Roger Casement was a republican nationalist who had bought arms from the Germans for the planned rebellion and who unsuccessfully attempted to recruit an Irish brigade for the German Army from among Irish prisoners of war. Casement was captured and hung by the British for treason.
85. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, pp. 7-20; Baynes, Morale, pp. 97-108; Fuller, Morale and Popular Culture, passim.
86. Wilson, Morale and Discipline, pp. 7-8; Baynes, Morale, p. 109.
87. Baynes, Morale, pp. 43, 121; Fuller, Morale and Popular Culture, pp. 42-45, 57. Fuller stated: "to the new recruits, the creed of regiment was hardly more than fiction".
88. Feilding to wife, 14 June 1917, War Letters, p. 196.
89. Sir Francis Vane, Agin the government, (London, 1929), p. 249, in Denman, "The Catholic Irish soldier", p. 359.
90. Laird, Personal experiences, pp. 105-106.
91. John Lucy, There's a Devil in the Drum, (London, 1918), p. 68 in Denman, "The Catholic Irish Soldier", p. 359.
92. MacDonagh, The Irish on the Somme, p. 59.
93. Fuller, Morale and Popular Culture, p. 42.
94. Feilding to wife, 31 October 1916, War Letters, p. 130.
95. Captain J.A. Farrell to John Redmond, date unknown, in postscript of Major William Redmond, p. 63.
96. Major Arthur Ryan, in Forward of Major William Redmond, p. 17.
97. S.P. MacKenzie, "Morale and the cause: The campaign to shape the outlook of soldiers in the British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918". Canadian Journal of History, vol. 25, (August 1990), p. 231.
98. Laird, Personal Experiences, p. 109.
99. Feilding to Wife, 25 September 1916, War Letters, p. 121.

100. MacKenzie, "Morale and the cause", p. 231; Fuller, Morale and Popular Culture, pp. 155-156.
101. Graves, Goodbye to All That, p. 157.
102. G.A. Burgoyne, The Burgoyne Diaries, (London, 1985), pp. 41, 44, in Denman, "The Catholic Irish Soldier", p. 361.
103. Father William Doyle in Alfred O'Rahilly, Father William Doyle, (London, 1930), pp. 404, 433-434 & 437.
104. Major William Redmond, Trench Pictures, p. 113, 135.
105. Feilding to wife, 25 December 1916, 1 January 1917 and 25 November 1917, War Letters, pp. 138, 143, 226.
106. Feilding to wife, 30 September 1916 and 20 May 1917, War Letters, pp. 125, 179.
107. Reitz, Trekking On, p. 182.
108. Fuller, Morale and Popular Culture, p. 51; Sir Francis Vane cited in Denman. "The Catholic Irish Soldier", p. 359.
109. Holmes, Firing Line, p. 321.

Chapter III

Politics and the Performance of 16 Irish Division

"The Catholic Irish took unnecessary risks in trenches, and had unnecessary casualties; and in battle, though they usually reached their objectives, too often lost it in the counter-attack." Robert Graves, Captain, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, c. January to March 1916.¹

"I was aware that the [16] division was not of the highest standard, and Watt [commanding XIX Corps] was equally aware of this fact. Later on, in March 1918, Congreve, commanding the VII Corps, wrote me a private note expressing his anxiety on the reliability of this division ...it was being undermined by political propaganda." General Sir Hubert Gough, GOC, Fifth Army, 3 May 1944.²

The preceding quotations indicate that 16 Irish Division had developed a dubious reputation regarding its performance on the Western Front. Gough's comments in particular suggest that 16 Division performed below standards set by other BEF divisions because it suffered from political problems. The questionable reputation acquired by 16 Division was amplified by perceptions of its performance on 21 March 1918, the first day of Operation Michael, the German offensive which took place between 21 March and 5 April 1918. During the offensive and the ensuing British retreat, 16 Division was virtually destroyed as a combat unit because of extremely high casualties suffered and the division was deleted on 20 April 1918. Surviving 16 Division troops were dispersed to reinforce other BEF divisions and battalion staffs were sent to assist in the training of arriving American soldiers.³ 16 Division

ceased to exist as a specifically Irish formation and any opportunity for the division to redeem its reputation by performing successfully in future battles disappeared.

Allegations of poor performance made by contemporary observers such as Graves and Gough have been perpetuated in accounts of the March retreat which appeared shortly after the war and in recently published examinations.⁴ However, these studies have not specifically focused on 16 Division, and little analytical research has been undertaken either to confirm or to refute impressions that have given the division a negative reputation. Consequently, important questions remain unanswered: How did the performance of 16 Division compare to other BEF divisions prior to 21 March 1918? How did the performance of 16 Division compare to other divisions on 21 March?⁵ And, if 16 Division had performance problems, were these due to political difficulties? These questions will be answered by evaluating the performance of 16 Division during periods of static warfare, 1916-1918; by examining the performance of the division when it was engaged in major assaults and comparing its performance with other BEF divisions engaged in those particular battles; and by examining the performance of 16 Division on 21 March, comparing its performance with other divisions in the front line during that day.

The most dramatic examples which indicate the performance of a division come from battle situations.

However it is apparent that battle is not a frequent occurrence in war.⁶ "A soldier on the Western Front seldom saw action in a large offensive; he passed most of his time in routine trench life."⁷ Therefore, when attempting to examine the overall performance of 16 Irish Division, an analysis of its performance of duties during periods of static warfare is relevant.

Static warfare, or 'routine trench life', involved many activities such as work party or fatigue duties, defensive duties undertaken to repel enemy bombardments and raids, and minor offensive duties including patrolling and raiding. The ability of 16 Division to perform defensive and minor offensive duties during periods of static warfare will be analyzed.

It was said that static warfare "tended to promote inactivity and caused a loss of offensive spirit".⁸ In attempting to retain an aggressive spirit among BEF troops, and to make life uncomfortable for the Germans, GHQ established a policy which encouraged offensive activities during periods of static warfare. The Active Policy was questioned by some professional soldiers. They believed that constant offensive activity actually "decreased the men's fighting spirit" and that raids were a "mistake for they cost many lives for the sake of one or two prisoners".⁹ However, the Active Policy remained in place and BEF divisions were expected to continually patrol the wire in No Man's Land, harass the enemy whenever possible, and

undertake local raids on enemy trenches.¹⁰

According to battalion war diaries, 16 Division apparently established a "thorough and satisfactory system of patrolling" by April 1916.¹¹ Some battalions reported "excellent patrol work" and claimed that they totally controlled No Man's Land during the night.¹² The utilization of hand grenades to bomb German trenches was a method of harassment adopted by 16 Division. For example, men of the 7th Leinsters, "Second Lieutenant D.J. Keating and three bombers, went out and blew in an enemy sap under his nose".¹³ The 7th Leinsters devised another rather unusual method for harassing the enemy. The following incident was described by Captain John Staniforth:

Last night we took a gramophone and gave the Hun a concert. It was a great rag. We played it on the front parapet and up sap-heads quite close to him. As it was a glorious summer night, the music carried beautifully, even to the battalions on the right and left. We played from one to three in the morning. "Let's All Go Out and Find Some Germans" left him cold; he didn't like "We'll All Go Marching to Berlin", and he hated the "Marseillaise" and "Rule Britannia". However, he hated very badly, so it was all right.¹⁴

However, the most significant offensive activity expected during periods of static warfare was raiding. War diaries of 16 Division indicate that a raid was considered successful if troops managed to enter enemy trenches, inflict casualties, and return with prisoners and/or good information about enemy entrenchments. But because GHQ

encouraged raiding, even unsuccessful raids can be considered positive attempts to perform expected offensive duties. Of the thirty-two comments gathered regarding raiding, seventeen record successful raids; nine were reported as unsuccessful and in six comments judgment of success or failure was not recorded.¹⁵ Periods of active raiding by 16 Division appeared to have had positive outcomes. For example, a report on raiding submitted by the 8th Munsters at the end of June 1916, read:

This is the third raid attempted by this Battalion in the course of ten days. The raids are having a demoralizing effect on the enemy. Whilst he is being constantly hunted and hustled, he dares not venture in NO MAN'S LAND, which has now become the hunting ground of our patrols and raiding parties.¹⁶

The numbers of raids carried out by 16 Division compares favorably to the number carried out by other divisions of the British Army. An examination of raiding which took place prior to, and during the 1916 Somme offensive will demonstrate that 16 Division performed its offensive raiding duties with a frequency that matched other divisions.

In June 1916, in preparation for the Somme assault, Fourth Army carried out a total of thirty-eight raids.¹⁷ This was an average of three to four raids per front line division. In the same month 16 Division, as part of First Army, carried out nine diversionary raids. In July and August 1916, while Fourth Army was involved in the major

Somme battles, First Army carried out approximately thirty-seven raids per month, which again is an average of three to four raids per front line division. 16 Division, remaining with First Army throughout July and August, carried out seven raids in July and five in August. The number of casualties suffered by 16 Division in these raids was high, but comparable to those suffered by other First Army divisions. Average casualties for the raids carried out by First Army were 120 per raid. The average casualties for raids carried out by 16 Division were 157 per raid in July and 118 per raid in August.¹⁸ It does not appear that 16 Division troops took unusual risks during raids which caused unnecessary casualties.

Active raiding programs during periods of static warfare were undertaken by 16 Irish Division through March 1918. The division's performance of expected offensive duties, which were part of the Active Policy established by GHQ, appears to have been more than satisfactory.

During periods of static warfare BEF divisions were required to perform defensive duties to retain positions taken in assaults. Divisions endured enemy bombardments and repelled enemy raids. A number of concerns regarding 16 Division's ability to perform defensive duties were recorded. But these concerns may have stemmed from general beliefs which circulated among British officers regarding the basic character of Irishmen. It was believed that the Irish were temperamental, hot-headed, aggressive, and nervy.

This led to the perception that Irish troops "were not as reliable as English troops in defense".¹⁹ It was also believed that the Irish did not endure enemy bombardment as well as British troops and suffered heavier casualties because of their devil-may-care attitude towards trench discipline.²⁰

There is evidence to indicate that some soldiers of 16 Irish Division were reckless when they first arrived in the front line. On 30 January 1916 Captain John Staniforth (7th Leinsters) wrote:

We have got rather a bad name in the English Division to which we were attached in the trenches, because the men would not keep under cover in the daytime and we had to put the sergeant-major with a rifle loaded with candle-grease bullets to keep them in the trenches.²¹

However, foolhardy behaviour diminished as the Irish troops and officers gained experience. For example, on 17 October 1916 Colonel Rowland Feilding reported that during a heavy enemy bombardment the officers of the 6th Connaught Rangers:

handled the men cleverly, with the almost miraculous result that the casualties were so trifling as not to count. [The men] knew they had done well; and in spite of a large number of direct hits on the fire-trench, and many more close shaves, the casualty list had totalled only four wounded, three of them slightly.²²

The trench discipline of 16 Division was tightened through training and experience. Soldiers of the division did not continue to be dare devils in the trenches. As John

Staniforth later noted, "Where would we be if we were really fire-eating mountebanks like that?"²³

There is no evidence to indicate that the Irish troops behaved differently from other BEF soldiers when experiencing heavy shelling. Individuals certainly broke down during heavy bombardments; however, comments indicate that soldiers of 16 Division generally behaved well under fire.²⁴ For example, General T.H. Waites, commander of the 141st Infantry Brigade, wrote of the following incident in a letter to the commanding officer of the 47th Brigade:

While two companies of the 7th Leinster Regiment were assembling in the church square at LES BREBIS preparatory to going into their billets at ST. MAROC they came under fire from 88 shells [there were 10 casualties]. The behaviour of the men was excellent. They showed considerable coolness under fire and marched off up to time and in good order.²⁵

Evidence also indicates that concerns regarding 16 Irish Division's ability to repel enemy raids during periods of static warfare were unwarranted. One of the largest local defensive actions involving 16 Division took place on 27 April 1916, soon after the division had taken over its first independent operational sector near Hulluch. 16 Division experienced a major preliminary bombardment and gas attack, followed by a large German raid.

The gas came over at approximately 5:10 a.m. in a brownish cloud that was "so thick that nothing two or three yards away was visible".²⁶ This was 16 Division's first

experience with gas, but the men were prepared and drove off enemy raiding parties with rifle fire. A second intense bombardment by the Germans began about 6:00 a.m., which was again followed by the release of gas. Although enemy raiding parties managed to enter the trenches of 16 Division at this time, it was reported that "the Irishmen flooded back again irresistibly and scarcely one of the invaders returned home".²⁷ By about 7:30 a.m. the situation had returned to normal. Another gas attack and smaller raid against 16 Division trenches was carried out by the Germans on 29 April 1916. This assault was also successfully repelled by the division.

The casualties suffered by 16 Division during these two raids were high.²⁸ Although some claimed that the division suffered high casualties because of bad gas discipline, evidence does not support this conclusion. 16 Division had clearly maintained discipline and "not a dead man was found without his helmet properly on".²⁹ Evidence indicates that these gas attacks appeared to have been the most severe the army had yet encountered and that the gas masks issued to the men were not sufficient protection against such a high concentration of gas.³⁰ Despite difficulties, 16 Irish Division did not fail in the performance of its defensive duties at Hulluch in April 1916. The division did not give up any ground and inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy.³¹ Haig noted: "The Irishmen did very well".³²

When performing defensive duties under static warfare

conditions, British Army divisions were not always able to prevent enemy raiders from entering the trenches, but BEF troops were normally able to eject invaders after short skirmishes. Comments gathered from 16 Division war diaries indicate that the division's trenches were entered on occasion by enemy raiders, but there is no evidence to indicate that these incidents resulted in a permanent loss of ground. According to the records, 16 Division troops often prevented enemy raiders from entering their trenches in the first place, and always managed to eject the raiders when defenses had been breached.³³ The evidence indicates that 16 Division's performance of its defensive duties during periods of static warfare was similar to other BEF divisions.

The performance by 16 Irish Division of both defensive and offensive duties, which were part of routine trench life, is comparable to standards set by other BEF divisions. Political problems do not appear to have affected the division's performance of these duties. The Easter Rising took place while 16 Division defended against the large German gas attacks at Hulluch in 1916, but this does not appear to have influenced the division's effectiveness. It can be concluded that comments regarding the reliability of 16 Division did not apply to the performance of duties by the division during periods of static warfare.

The reliability of BEF divisions was also judged by their ability to perform during major battles. Evaluation

of performance ability involves the examination of a number of factors. The analysis of 16 Division's performance during major battles will examine whether 16 Division achieved intended objectives in particular battles; why and how the division succeeded or failed in reaching its objective; if 16 Division operated in a manner comparable to other divisions; if casualties suffered by the division were similar to casualties suffered by other divisions; and if political problems effected the performance of the division.

According to the original grand strategic plan, the 1916 Somme offensive was to have been a decisive battle. However, following the failure of two major assaults on 1 and 14 July, the offensive became a battle of attrition involving "the constant struggle for particular objectives".³⁴ In efforts to take high ground held by the Germans and to straighten the British line, several BEF divisions had attempted to take the villages of Guillemont and Ginchy throughout July and August. Because of their failure, 16 Irish Division's first experiences in major offensives took place during the fall Somme battles at Guillemont and Ginchy in September 1916.

On 31 August 1916, 16 Division was transferred from First Army to XIV Corps, Fourth Army and was quickly engaged in offensive action. Previous assaults on Guillemont had moved the British front line very close to the village. Advancing from this line 16 Division's 47th Brigade, operating with the seriously weakened 20 Division, captured

Guillemont on 3 September. The entire 16 Division took over the line from 20 Division on 5 September. In conjunction with 5, 7, 55 and 56 Divisions, the Irish division consolidated and maintained a line beyond Guillemont and prepared for their assault on Ginchy. The 48th and 49th Brigades of 16 Division took the ruined village of Ginchy on 9 September 1916.³⁵ With the acquisition of Guillemont and Ginchy the British line was at last straightened on a seven mile front. This allowed Haig to put into place his plans for a major breakthrough, which was attempted on 15 September.³⁶

Much was written regarding the impetuosity of Irish soldiers when involved in offensive actions. These records leave the impression that Irish infantrymen went forward in wild, undisciplined charges; behaviour which would set them apart from English troops who were reputed to advance and rout out resistance in an orderly fashion. Some reports regarding 16 Division's assaults on Guillemont and Ginchy record that the Irish troops "charged forward with such impetuosity that everything but the zest of the rush was forgotten".³⁷ But other reports indicate that the division's operations were carried out in a manner which was similar to other divisions engaged in the offensives.

The British official historian stated that a British battalion was "obliged to 'mop up' [during the assault on Guillemont] because the impetuous Irishmen [of the 6th Connaught Rangers] had swept on without quelling all

resistance in the vicinity".³⁸ However, it appears that these Irish troops were adhering to the program outlined for initial assault battalions. The battalions, which included the 6th Connaughts and the 10th King's Royal Rifle Corps, were to follow close on the creeping artillery barrage which advanced through Guillemont at the rate of 100 yards per four minutes.³⁹ This program would not have allowed initial assault troops much time to subdue all pockets of resistance. Evidence indicates that men of 16 Division "moved forward in excellent order".⁴⁰ John Staniforth reported: "We stepped outside the parapet to straighten the line and then moved forward at an ordinary walk"; and F.H.T. Tatham, a 16 Division artillery officer who watched the attack, observed that rather than undisciplined rush "the men advanced in an orderly fashion as if they were on the Salisbury Plain".⁴¹

By 12:30 p.m. the first objective of the Guillemont assault was taken along the entire front. The final objective, the line of the Wedge Wood-Ginchy road, was reached before 3:30 p.m. by both British and Irish units that had passed through the initial assault battalions. These troops, including the 6th Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry, the 7th Somerset Light Infantry, the 6th Irish Regiment and the 8th Munsters, took many prisoners and were soon stretching the line to the north just beyond the road.⁴² According to the newspaper correspondent, Philip Gibbs, "the whole attack from first to last was a model of

efficiency, organization and courage".⁴³

The assault on Ginchy was carried out in a similar fashion. The 7th Irish Fusiliers and the 7th Irish Rifles "attacked in four waves going as if they were on parade and in twelve minutes gained their objective".⁴⁴ Some men of the Irish Rifles and the 9th Dublins carried on to the second objective and had to be brought back after the whole village was occupied. The official historian's account implies that these men had impetuously pursued retreating Germans, but other records indicate that the troops had simply advanced to the second intended objective. The men had to be brought back from the second objective because the supporting 55 Division "had not come up".⁴⁵

Following the capture of Ginchy, the Irish troops carried out consolidation activities. They dug nearly a mile of broad, deep, and well-shored trench and repelled several German attempts to re-enter the ruined village.⁴⁶ By the evening of 10 September 1916, relief of 16 Division was completed and the Irish division was immediately transferred to Second Army.

Heavy casualties had been suffered by 16 Division between 1 and 10 September 1916. During the entire operation, which included taking Guillemont and Ginchy and holding the line between the main assaults, the division suffered a total of 4,330 casualties, including 240 officers and 4,090 other ranks.⁴⁷ However, divisions with the right amount of fighting spirit were expected to suffer high

casualties during offensives⁴⁸ and the Irish division's casualty figures were similar to those of other divisions involved in assaults on the ruined villages. In previous unsuccessful efforts to take Guillemont, the six BEF divisions involved took a total of 20,207 casualties, for an average of 3,367 casualties per division.⁴⁹ On 3 September, during the assault on Guillemont the 59th Brigade, 20 Division, suffered nearly 1,400 casualties while the 47th Brigade, 16 Division, suffered just over 1,000 casualties. The 7 Division, during its attempt to take Ginchy suffered a total of 3,800 casualties.⁵⁰ In taking Ginchy on 9 September, 16 Division suffered about 3,000 casualties. The behaviour and performance of 16 Division during the fall 1916 Somme battles resulted in a casualty count that was comparable to those suffered by other BEF divisions during similar operations.

Proceeding according to tactics utilized in similar assaults on the villages throughout August⁵¹, 16 Division had achieved its basic objectives during the attacks on Guillemont and Ginchy. The division captured many prisoners and received praise and honors for its performance. The official communique mentioned the fine behaviour of the Irish troops in the fighting at the ruined villages. Captain E.L.L. Action and Lieutenant V.Z. Farrell of the 7th Leinsters were awarded the Military Cross; Lieutenant J.W. Holland of the 7th Leinsters and Private T. Hughes of the 6th Connaughts were awarded the Victoria Cross for the part

they played during the assaults.⁵² The Irish division performed to standards set by other BEF divisions and proved reliable during its first involvement in a major offensive.

The next major battle involving 16 Irish Division was the successful offensive at Messines-Wytschaete Ridge in June 1917. The ridge dominated the south-eastern portion of the Ypres salient and had been held by the Germans since the beginning of the war. Efforts to take the ridges which overlooked the salient had resulted in enormous casualties: "Already a fourth of all the British killed on land or sea since the beginning of the war had died here".⁵³ The Messines-Wytschaete Ridge had to be taken if Haig's planned grand offensive breakthrough from the Ypres salient was to materialize.

The operation at Messines-Wytschaete, undertaken by the Second Army, appears to have been a model limited offensive.⁵⁴ Only two small sectors of the final objective were not taken and 7,354 German prisoners along with many guns were gathered. This was accomplished with a minimum of casualties.⁵⁵ The excellent staff work of General Herbert Plumer, GOC Second Army, was credited for the success.

The infantry assault was led by IX Corps, which included the 16 Irish Division. 16 Division faced stiff resistance from a garrison at the north end of Wytschaete Wood and was responsible for taking Wytschaete village, which had been converted to a fortress by the Germans and considered the chief problem facing IX Corps.⁵⁶ A

bombardment of the village proved to have been successful and 16 Division quickly mopped up resistance, gaining its objective beyond the St. Eloi-Messines highway by 8:00 a.m.

Battalions of the division gathered many prisoners and guns, while suffering minimal casualties. For example, the 7th Inniskillings took between 100 and 125 prisoners and 2 machine guns; the 6th Connaughts captured 98 prisoners and 2 machine guns while only suffering 2 officers wounded, 4 other ranks killed, 32 wounded, and 2 missing; the 7th Leinsters captured about 60 prisoners and killed from 80 to 100 of the enemy. This battalion's casualties were 8 officers wounded, 15 other ranks killed, and 92 wounded.⁵⁷ It has been estimated that 16 Division took less than 1000 casualties between 1 and 12 June 1917.⁵⁸ This figure compares favorably with casualties taken by other divisions involved in the operation.⁵⁹ The Irish division appears to have performed as proficiently as other divisions involved in the attack.

For the purposes of this examination, the most interesting fact about the Messines-Wytschaete operation is that 16 Division went into action for the first time shoulder to shoulder with 36 Ulster Division. If political problems ever affected the performance of 16 Division it might be presumed that difficulties would arise out of this situation. However, the newspaper correspondent Percival Phillips noted that, "whatever may be party feeling at home, the feeling between the two bodies here is most cordial".⁶⁰

In fact, when Major Willie Redmond of 16 Division, the well-known nationalist M.P., was wounded in the assault, men of 36 Ulster Division carried him from the field and called for a priest.⁶¹ Political problems did not effect the performance of either 16 or 36 Division during this operation.

Following the Messines-Wyttschaete offensive, General Hickie announced "that the 16th Division had been charged with a few others to be storm-troops, an honour earned by the splendid offensive spirit shown by the division since it came to France".⁶² On 14 June 1917, 16 Division was relieved and transferred to Fifth Army, where it began training for the Third Ypres offensive.

General Sir Hubert Gough, commander of Fifth Army which led the Third Ypres offensive, was the Protestant Anglo-Irish officer who had led the Curragh "mutiny" in Ireland in March 1914. Gough and his fellow officers had defied Parliament, declaring that they would not participate in any military effort to impose Home Rule in Ulster. General Gough's Fifth Army had not achieved the hoped for breakthrough from the Ypres salient during the Third Ypres battles that took place between 31 July and 15 August 1917, and the breakthrough attempt which began on 16 August was also thwarted. The frustrated Gough was not satisfied with the performance of 16 Division during this offensive, which became known as the Battle of Langemarck.

On 17 August 1917 Gough reported to Haig that he "was

not pleased with the action of the Irish [16 and 36] divisions of the XIX Corps. [They moved] forward but failed to keep what they had won".⁶³ However, this type of performance was not unusual for divisions engaged in the Third Ypres battles executed by Fifth Army. An analysis of the Battle of Langemarck, in particular, will demonstrate that the performance of 16 Division was comparable to the performance of other divisions engaged in Fifth Army's right operational sector.

Prior to an examination of the Battle of Langemarck, some of the features found in the Ypres salient, which confronted assaulting Fifth Army divisions in the summer of 1917, must be described. These features created conditions that did not favour grand breakthrough attempts. A light rain drizzle, which began about 1:00 p.m. on 31 July 1917, the first day of the Third Ypres offensive, developed into a torrential downpour that turned the flat fine-grained clay of the Ypres salient into a quagmire.⁶⁴ Fifth Army divisions had to advance from the flat Flanders plain, up ridges which were sprinkled with machine gun posts, strongholds, and concrete pillboxes that had been constructed in depth as part of the new German defense scheme. These strongholds were much more numerous than expected by Fifth Army and artillery bombardments were unable to inflict much damage on these emplacements. Although Fifth Army troops were able to advance, they soon ran up against strongly defended positions. The Germans

then mounted intense counter-attacks, which were also part of their new defense-in-depth system, often ejecting Fifth Army troops from positions they had gained.⁶⁵

These conditions appear to have affected divisions engaged in Fifth Army's right operational sector to a greater degree than those engaged in the left sector. For example, during the Battle of Pilckem Ridge, 31 July 1917, the divisions of the XIV and XVIII Corps on the left were able to take their final objectives.⁶⁶ However the divisions of II Corps on the right flank became totally bogged down and were unable to reach their first objectives. And, although brigades of 55 and 15 Divisions in XIX Corps on the centre right managed to reach their final objectives, 55 and 15 Divisions were forced to retreat about a mile following intense German counter-attacks, even though these divisions were reinforced by all available corps reserve troops.⁶⁷ In this battle, divisions on the left operational sector were successful while divisions on the right met with difficulty. Three of the nine divisions leading the assault on the right failed to make any significant advance, while two assault divisions in this sector moved forward but failed to keep what they had won.

Following this initial battle, Fifth Army mounted a series of attacks which achieved virtually nothing. The historian Leon Wolff stated: "So desolate, so meaningless were these August struggles that the record of them in histories and memoirs fills one with a certain weariness."⁶⁸

The Battle of Langemarck, 16 August 1917, was one of these offensives.

One of the leading assault divisions in the Battle of Langemarck was 16 Irish Division. Of the eight divisions which led the assault, only the three divisions in the left sector managed to reach and hold their final objectives. The fourth division in this sector, 48 Division of XVIII Corps on the centre left, was checked in its advance. Units from this division were seen near their final objective, but none of the men returned. The remaining four divisions on the right, including 56 and 8 Divisions in II Corps, and 36 and 16 Divisions in XIX Corps, all advanced with units reaching or within yards of their final objectives. Again, none of these four divisions was able to keep what it had won. All ultimately withdrew to their starting lines.⁶⁹

There are several explanations for why the divisions on the right experienced greater performance problems during the Battle of Langemarck than those on the left. First, the six hundred yard front and the back areas of II and XIX Corps had been constantly harassed by German guns between 1 and 15 August, while those areas of XVIII and XIV Corps had been left in comparative quiet.⁷⁰ This meant that the divisions in the II and XIX Corps areas suffered high casualties prior to the 16 August assault. The CO of 53rd Brigade, 56 Division, for example, pointed out that his unit was not fit for duty because of the severe losses incurred while holding the line from 10 to 12 August. Between 1 and

15 August, while in support and in the line, 36 Division lost approximately 70 officers and 1,500 other ranks.⁷¹ 16 Division suffered comparably high casualties during the same period. For example, the 7th Leinsters suffered 44 casualties in one day while burying and laying cable, and another 300 casualties while on active duty in the front line.⁷² The 7/8th Irish Fusiliers took "heavy casualties" when involved in work parties carrying slabs for the construction of a road.⁷³ 16 Division had taken over front line positions on 4 August, but it had been involved in support duties in the forward areas since the last week of July. The fact that 16 Division was continually employed in forward areas and the front line under almost continuous shell fire resulted in a casualty count that totalled 107 officers and 1,957 other ranks between 1 and 15 August.⁷⁴ Consequently, when 16 Division troops moved forward on 16 August their ranks were so thin that "the operation looked more like a raid than a major operation".⁷⁵

Because the back areas of XVII and XVI Corps had remained relatively quiet, there had been a systematic organization of support infrastructure in the left sector of the Fifth Army front. This meant that the divisions operating on the left had the support necessary to accomplish their tasks on 16 August. For example, troops of 11 Division had access to functional rifles and Lewis guns because armorers' shops had been established well forward in the XVIII Corps sector. The shops cleaned rifles that had

been clogged with mud and passed them forward to troops during the advance. Unfortunately, because of the ceaseless harassment in the back areas of II and XIX Corps, a sound system of support was not available to the divisions operating on the right. Observers in 16 Division's operational sector witnessed troops falling back with "their rifles and Lewis guns jammed with mud".⁷⁶

It is also clear that the divisions on the left of the front received better artillery support on 16 August. In the XIV Corps sector, "the barrage was very thorough, and as it approached the Germans scuttled away in large batches or readily surrendered".⁷⁷ On the right the artillery barrage failed to destroy many of the German strongholds. 16 Division came up against a garrison at Borry Farm, held by approximately one hundred men and five machine guns. This emplacement had not been touched by the artillery barrage. Troops of 16 Division made repeated and costly attempts to take this stronghold.⁷⁸

Finally, it is apparent that German counter-attacks were not as intense on the left flank. The British official historian noted that the "Germans made no serious effort to regain the lost ground opposite" this sector.⁷⁹ Conversely, the counter-attacks upon both the II and XIX Corps were crushing. Shortly before 9:00 a.m., the Germans mounted an intense artillery barrage against 16 and 36 Divisions. This barrage was followed by waves of German infantrymen whose assembly had not been noted by BEF air observers. Without

warning, the German infantry fell upon units of 16 Division which had managed to advance to within yards of their final objective. These advance parties of 16 Division fought until killed or overrun.⁸⁰

It is evident that the performance of 16 Division and other divisions engaged on the right during the Battle of Langemarck should not be compared with the performance of divisions engaged on the left because the conditions under which they operated are not comparable. When examining the performance of 16 Irish Division during this assault, it must be compared with the other divisions operating in the same sector.

The performance of 16 Division was similar to the other three divisions engaged on the right on 16 August 1917: all moved forward and all failed to keep what they had won. The four divisions also suffered comparable casualties. 16 Division suffered a total of 2,157 casualties, 36 Division took 2,036, 8 Division suffered 2,111 and 56 Division suffered a total of 2,175. Table 3 shows the number of officers and other ranks killed, wounded, and missing, the total number of casualties, missing, and killed, and percentages that demonstrate the number of missing and killed as compared to the total casualties for each division.⁸¹

TABLE 3
CASUALTIES SUFFERED
BY II AND XIX CORPS DIVISIONS, 16 TO 18 AUGUST 1917

Div.	Officers			ORs			TC	TM	TK	%TM /TC	%TK /TC
	K	W	M	K	W	M					
16	26	61	28	254	1098	690	2157	718	280	33.3	13.0
36	19	55	7	299	1203	453	2036	460	318	22.6	15.6
56	20	62	13	250	1153	677	2175	690	270	31.7	12.4
8	8	7	12	244	1274	566	2111	578	252	27.4	11.9

Note: K stands for killed; W, wounded; M, missing; TC, total casualties; TM, total missing; TK, total killed; %TM/TC, percentage of total missing to total casualties; %TK/TC, percentage of total killed to total casualties.

An examination of these figures indicates that the casualties suffered by 16 Division were similar in number and nature to the other three divisions engaged in Fifth Army's right operational sector on 16 August 1917. Percentages of missing and killed fall within a comparable range for all four divisions. Although 16 Division had a slightly higher number of missing, a comparison of the number of officers captured on 16 August indicates that most of the missing from 16 Division were either killed or wounded. Of the twenty-eight officers listed as missing from 16 Division, five were taken prisoner; of the seven listed as missing from 36 Division, three were captured; out of thirteen from 56 Division, five were captured; and of the twelve officers listed as missing from 8 Division, six were taken prisoner.⁸²

All of the divisions engaged in Fifth Army's right operational sector in both the Battle of Pilckem Ridge and

the Battle of Langemarck experienced more difficulties than those divisions that were engaged on the left. Clearly, the performance of 16 Division was similar to that of other BEF units during the Third Ypres offensive.

Why then, did Gough chose to single out 16 and 36 Divisions as poor performers in his report to Haig? The answer may lie in Gough's perception of the offensive spirit of the two divisions rather than in their actual performance. In the late afternoon on 16 August, Gough had ordered the XIX Corps to renew the assault in an attempt to gain touch with the XVIII Corps. After receiving reports indicating that no brigade in either 16 or 36 Divisions "was able to muster as many as five hundred men", the corps commander General Watts informed Gough that he could not carry out the ordered attack.⁸³ Perhaps this refusal to engage in a renewed assault coloured the offensive-minded Gough's views of the performance by 16 and 36 Divisions.

Haig's analysis of the failure of the 16 August offensive was fairly sympathetic to the divisions involved and quite critical of upper echelon commanders. Haig recorded the following comments in his diary on 17 August 1917:

The cause of the failure to advance on the right centre of the attack of the Fifth Army is due, I think, to commanders being in too great a hurry!! Three more days should have been allowed in which (if fine and observation good) the artillery would have dominated the enemy's artillery and destroyed his concreted defenses! After Gough has got

at the facts more fully, I have arranged to talk the matter over with him.⁸⁴

The handling of 16 Division during the 16 August offensive became a political issue when casualty figures became known. Prime Minister David Lloyd George was concerned that Irish M.P.s might attack the government because of reports which alleged that Irish divisions sustained high casualties due to bad handling. He requested a report from GHQ regarding the issue.⁸⁵ Politics entered the examination of military operations in this instance but the political concerns came after the fact and did not affect the performance of 16 Irish Division. The battered 16 Division was relieved on 17 August 1917, and transferred to the Third Army where it was to rest and recuperate in a reasonably quiet sector of the British front line.

The last major assault undertaken by 16 Irish Division was a subsidiary operation that was part of the Cambrai offensive, executed by General Byng, GOC Third Army, on 20 November 1917. The main assault at Cambrai was lead by the Tank Corps, followed by the six infantry divisions of the III Corps. Meanwhile, divisions holding the front line on the flanks of III Corps were to undertake diversionary operations designed "to pin the Germans to their ground", and to keep them in doubt as to the character and scope of the main assault.⁸⁶

According to the official historian, 16 Division took part in one of the more important subsidiary operations.⁸⁷

The division's objective was Tunnel Trench, a 1,800 yard segment of the Hindenburg Line. At zero hour on 20 November, all three brigades of 16 Irish Division advanced and entered Tunnel Trench as soon as the barrage lifted. The assault took the Germans by surprise, and although the division had to repulse several counter-attacks, the operation was ultimately a success. The Irish division took its objective and approximately 718 prisoners, while suffering relatively light casualties.⁸⁸ Over the next few nights 16 Division expanded its sector, taking Jove Mebus and an additional 700 yards of enemy trench.⁸⁹ The Irish division was relieved on 30 November 1917 and was transferred from VI Corps, Third Army, to the VII Corps, Fifth Army.⁹⁰

The part that 16 Division played in the Cambrai offensive was relatively minor. But it is relevant to examine the subsidiary operation because it demonstrates that the Division's dismal experiences during Third Ypres had not undermined its ability to perform. General Byng did not register any complaints regarding the performance of 16 Division and General Haldane, commanding VI Corps, commended the division for its good service: "The work of the Division, both in the trenches and behind the line, has been admirable and might well serve as a model of how such duties should be performed".⁹¹

The performance of 16 Division during major assaults compared favorably with that of other BEF divisions. The

division only failed to take and hold its objective in one battle, but as demonstrated, its performance during Langemarck was not unusual or below standard for divisions participating in Third Ypres. Gough was clearly unhappy with 16 Division, but his perception of its performance may have been clouded by considerations that did not have much to do with its abilities. 16 Division had served with First, Second, Third, and Fourth Armies during 1916 and 1917. A survey of the records indicates that none of these army commanders registered complaints about 16 Division's performance during this time period. Nor is there evidence to support the notion that 16 Division's performance in major assaults was affected by political problems.

Criticisms of 16 Irish Division's ability to perform on the defensive on 21 March 1918 had the most damaging and long lasting effect on the division's reputation as an effective combat unit. The entire Fifth Army, and four Third Army divisions, gave way before the impressive German offensive, Operation Michael, losing 98.5 square miles on the first day of the retreat.⁹² But 16 Irish Division was singled out for poor performance on 21 March. Haig wrote:

Our 16th (Irish) Division, which was on the right of the VII corps and lost Ronssoy Village, is said not to be so full of fight as the others. In fact, certain Irish units did very badly, and gave way immediately the enemy showed.⁹³

Sir Walter Congreve, VII Corps commander, later stated that 16 Division's "reserve Brigade did not fight at all and

their right Brigade very indifferently".⁹⁴ These comments left the impression that 16 Division's performance was well below that of other BEF divisions holding the line on 21 March. In fact, rumours circulated that "as soon as the Boche attacked the whole [16] division, every officer and man, put down their arms and walked over to the Boche".⁹⁵ The following analysis will prove the fallacy of this allegation and will demonstrate that the performance of 16 Division was similar to other BEF divisions.

Before detailing the British defense on 21 March, the pre-battle conditions of 16 Division must be outlined. Other BEF divisions experienced similar pre-battle conditions. Although the entire British Army was reorganized during February 1918, the redistribution of troops did not improve the manpower situation for 16 Division. As was the case for all BEF divisions following the reorganization, the Irish division now had only three battalions per brigade. And compared to the average battalion trench strength in Third and Fifth Armies on 17 March 1918, which stood at 42 officers and 950 men⁹⁶, 16 Division battalions remained undermanned. For example, the pre-battle strength of the 2nd Irish Regiment was 18 officers and 514 men; the 2nd Dublins had 23 officers and 643 men; and the 2nd Munsters 22 officers and 629 men.⁹⁷ An officer of the 7/8th Inniskillings reported that: "as long as the line has to be held so thinly, posts are almost certain to be cut off in the event of a strong raiding party

coming over".⁹⁸ The under strength 16 Division confronted the better part of three German divisions on 21 March 1918.⁹⁹

Because it had been decided in early 1918 that the British Army would stand on the defensive, a new defense system had been introduced. Each BEF division's sector was divided into three zones. The Forward Zone, a line of outposts, should be held with only enough strength to force a German bombardment and cause casualties among enemy storm troops. Defenders could withdraw from this zone to the Battle Zone, as the assault intensified. The Battle Zone, which should contain a sturdy set of defense positions, formed the main line of defense and was to be held at all costs. Reserves would stand in the rear, prepared to deliver counter-attacks into the Battle Zone.¹⁰⁰ Although the new defense system was theoretically sound, there were several problems with its implementation.

In general, BEF divisions were unfamiliar with operations involving strictly defensive activities. An officer of 16 Division noted that "our troops had been trained almost entirely for attack".¹⁰¹ Because of the shortage of experience and the absence of training, 16 Division along with other BEF divisions lacked the tactical sophistication required for the proper implementation of the new system.¹⁰²

There appears to have been some confusion regarding the new defense system among commanding officers as well. A 16

Division company captain recalled that his battalion "received numerous orders and counter-orders related to holding various lines".¹⁰³ The deployment of troops in 16 Division's sector was also a problem. The Division had more battalions in its Forward Zone than any other division defending the line on 21 March. Most Fifth Army divisions had placed three battalions, or 33 percent of their strength in the advanced areas.¹⁰⁴ But, Sir Walter Congreve, VII Corps commander, ordered five battalions of 16 Division, or 55 percent of its strength, into the Forward Zone. With three battalions in reserve, there was only one battalion left to defend 16 Division's Battle Zone. The divisional commander, General Hull, objected to this deployment.¹⁰⁵ However, the strong manning of the Forward Zone was judged necessary by Congreve because it was believed that the short field view from 16 Division's front line might allow the enemy to gather unobserved in the defile created by the Schelde Canal located just behind the German front line, near the division's operation sector.¹⁰⁶ In settling the dispute between the divisional and corps commanders, General Gough, GOC Fifth Army, supported Congreve stating: "The Germans are not going to break my line".¹⁰⁷

For the new system to function properly, well developed defense positions were required. Unfortunately, little work had been done on the defenses in the sector which had recently been taken over by the Fifth Army. Much of the work in preparing proper defenses was carried out by

infantrymen, and 16 Division troops laboured to improve the defenses in their sector. By 21 March, the main system of trenches in the Battle Zone between Epehy and Lempire was good, though thinly held.¹⁰⁸ However, the Division's right flank, bordering 66 Division, was weak. There was virtually nothing but wire strung across the east-west corridor which ran between the Irish division's right flank Forward Zone outposts and Templeux village, located in 66 Division's operational sector.¹⁰⁹ More importantly, no trenches or strongpoints existed in 16 Division's Battle Zone from Ronssoy village south to the divisional border. Apparently, 16 Division headquarters believed that 66 Division's machine gun battalion would cover the gaps in the defenses in this area.¹¹⁰

Other features made the defense of 16 Division's operational sector difficult. The nearly four mile section of front line held by the Division formed a pronounced salient. This would allow German troops to pressure the division from the north, west, and south, simultaneously. The Irish division's Battle Zone was in a relatively good position, running along the top of a narrow ridge. But this meant that 16 Division's Forward Zone, containing 55 percent of its manpower, lay on a gentle slope fully exposed to enemy view, and ultimately to the crushing enemy bombardment.¹¹¹ The Irish division's left or northern flank butted securely against Epehy and the border with 21 Division. However, a valley and the Cologne tributary on

the right flank created a diagonal border with 66 Division, which made combined efforts difficult. Valleys which ran from east to west were particularly problematic features as they formed natural pathways along which the enemy could advance.¹¹² General Hull realized that the valley on his right flank was a problem, but he lacked sufficient reserve manpower to keep it permanently guarded.¹¹³

Soldiers of the BEF divisions holding the line on 21 March had lived under very exhausting conditions. Infantrymen did not acquire adequate rest because they were called upon to work on defense positions even while in billets. Many divisions had been in forward positions without relief for long periods of time.¹¹⁴ Constant work, combined with the strain of expecting the German attack, left 16 Division sorely in need of rest and recuperation. However the division was informed that it would not be relieved until the expected attack had materialized.¹¹⁵ By 21 March, 16 Division had been in the line for fifty-eight days and the men were extremely fatigued.¹¹⁶ Because physical exhaustion reduces the decision-making capacity of officers and dulls the response of soldiers, it was unfortunate that adequate rest had not been allowed.¹¹⁷

The men of 16 Irish Division also had to cope with an additional irritation that did not affect other BEF divisions. The Germans, clearly aware of the political crisis in Ireland, harassed Irish troops by sending over

propaganda leaflets encouraging desertion.¹¹⁸ Although Gough believed that 16 Division had been undermined by political propaganda, he was not in a position to observe the reaction of the men to this harassment. Officers of 16 Division reported that the German efforts did not affect the performance of the Irish troops.¹¹⁹ Despite fatigue, stress, and attempts to subvert their loyalty, the men of 16 Division seemed to remain "in good spirits; ... as always, patient and cheerful and magnificent".¹²⁰

On the morning of 21 March 1918, the fog, which had settled along the entire line, was so dense that visibility was reduced to between ten and fifteen yards in 16 Division's sector.¹²¹ This fog lay heaviest and persisted longest in low lying areas, such as the valley that ran along the border between 16 and 66 Divisions. Fog had two negative impacts for the defenders. It shielded German storm troopers as they advanced along valleys and between Forward Zone outposts. It also undermined the planned defense system in the Zone because outposts were unable to utilize crossfire from machine guns to break up the enemy advance. Troops manning outposts were often unaware that an infantry assault was underway until they were completely surrounded. Even when soldiers saw shadowy figures they were reluctant to open fire, uncertain of the identity of the fog-shrouded forms.¹²² As an officer of 16 Division observed, "nature was against us that day".¹²³

The heavy German bombardment, which began about 4:30

a.m. and continued for about five hours, inflicted severe damage and casualties on the BEF Forward Zone. Communication lines were cut and in some Forward Zone garrisons practically every man became a casualty.¹²⁴ 16 Division's exposed Forward Zone was "practically annihilated" by the artillery bombardment.¹²⁵ Immediately when the barrage lifted, enemy storm troopers advanced into the BEF Forward Zone.

To analyze the performance of 16 Division on 21 March the progress of the fight in the Irish division's operational sector will be compared with progress in other divisional sectors. The analysis will then determine the manner in which the division lost ground by briefly examining anecdotal accounts and comparing 16 Division casualty figures, particularly the number of fatal casualties and the number taken prisoner, with casualties suffered by other divisions.

The enemy did not conduct frontal attacks against 16 Irish Division. Instead assaults against the division's flanks quickly penetrated forward positions, especially on the far right.¹²⁶ There German storm troops advanced through the scattered outposts and along the valley, under the cover of dense fog. This far right sector of 16 Division's Forward Zone was lost between 9:30 and 10:00 o'clock. The remainder of the division's Forward Zone fell between 10:00 and 10:30 a.m., except for a section in the north. There the 2nd Munsters repelled German assaults

until about 11:15, when Malassise Farm was enveloped by enemy troops advancing from the east, south, and southwest.¹²⁷

Thus, 16 Division's Forward Zone was rapidly penetrated and lost, but other divisions had comparable experiences. 51 Division had lost most of its Forward Zone by 10:00¹²⁸ and 14 Division, with two valleys penetrating its sector, lost its whole front line shortly after 9:00 o'clock. 36 Ulster Division had their advanced defenses overrun within twenty minutes and 66 Division lost all three trenches in its Forward Zone between 10:30 and 11:00.¹²⁹ By 11:00 a.m., forty-nine miles of British Forward Zone had been lost.¹³⁰ The progress of the battle in 16 Division's sector during the initial phase was similar to that in other division's sectors.

Because of the heavy bombardment and the initial storm troop assaults, very few men from battalions situated in the Forward Zone returned from their positions. This resulted in the loss of an estimated 30 percent of the Fifth Army's infantry strength by the end of the first hour and a half of fighting.¹³¹ Because of the heavy deployment of battalions in 16 Division's Forward Zone, the Irish division lost an estimated 48 percent of its infantry in the same period. The decision to heavily deploy 16 Division troops in forward positions in hopes of observing the gathering of enemy troops caused losses that had a significant impact on the division's ability to hold its Battle Zone.

16 Division's right flank was in serious trouble early in the battle. The enemy had quickly penetrated the division's right sector along the weakly held east-west corridor, and began assaults on the Battle Zone on this flank by 10:00. Ronssoy village was attacked from the south, south-east, and south-west before 11:00 a.m., by enemy units that had moved both northward out of 66 Division's sector and along the east-west corridor. By 11:30, the Germans had entered the village, and by noon they had taken possession of it. From this vantage point on the right, the enemy attempted to roll up 16 Division's Battle Zone trenches.

Lempire, slightly east of Ronssoy, had been assaulted from three sides because 16 Division's Battle Zone formed a sharp salient around the village. With the fall of Ronssoy, Lempire was completely surrounded, but the garrison there managed to hold out until about 1:00 o'clock. Surviving troops from 16 Division's right operational sector withdrew to the Brown Line at the rear of the Battle Zone and were repelling assaults by about 2:00.

One battalion of the 47th Brigade attempted a counter-attack towards Ronssoy in the mid-afternoon, but they were forced to withdraw and joined the rest of the Brigade which had been deployed along the Brown Line east of St. Emile.

Once Lempire-Ronssoy had fallen, the enemy began advancing northward into the left sector of 16 Division's Battle Zone at about 2:00 o'clock. The Germans were not

able to press back to the rear of the Battle zone in this sector until approximately 4:00 o'clock. Several units held out longer in the division's Battle Zone in front of Epehy, and one held out until 22 March.

To summarize, the fighting in 16 Division's Battle Zone on the right began approximately 10:00 a.m. and the enemy pushed to the rear of the zone in this sector by about 2:00 o'clock. On the left, fighting in the Battle Zone began between 12:00 noon and 2:00 p.m. and was pushed to the rear by about 4:00.¹³²

The progress through 16 Division's Battle Zone was similar to progress in other divisional sectors. For example, 51 Division was fighting in its Battle Zone at Louveral Ridge by 10:00 o'clock. Similarly, 51 Division, 59 Division, 36 Division, and the right brigade of 34 Division, were pressed to the rear of their Battle Zones by the end of the afternoon. Also, 14 Division was pushed to the rear of its Battle Zone on the right by 11:00 a.m. and the entire division was pushed to the rear by 2:00. In fact, 14 Division was pushed entirely out of its Battle Zone by 5:30. Other examples were 24 and 66 Divisions which lost portions of their Battle Zones by 2:00 p.m., but managed to retain lines within the zone until nightfall.¹³³

All but four of the BEF divisions which were assaulted on 21 March had lost significant ground by the end of the day. There were differences in the degree to which the other divisions were pushed back, but these contrasts can be

accounted for by the differences in the conditions under which each division operated. 16 Division had problems which can be accounted for by two particular conditions. First, the weakness of the divisional border and defenses on the right flank gave easy access into 16 Division's entire sector. And secondly, 16 Division had lost almost half of its strength prior to the assaults on its Battle Zone because of the deployment of troops in the Forward Zone ordered by the VII Corps commander. This clearly undermined the division's ability to resist assaults in its main line of defense.

Anecdotal accounts indicate that despite unfavorable conditions, 16 Division did not give up ground without considerable resistance. When asked to obtain facts regarding the fighting ability of 16 Division by the Cabinet committee which was deliberating the imposition of conscription in Ireland during the time of the March retreat, Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, reported: "The 16th Irish Division, although it suffered heavy losses, was holding the ground well".¹³⁴

According to witnesses, battalions of the 49th Brigade on the right struggled valiantly. Although the forward companies of the 2nd and 7th Royal Irish Regiment were severely mauled by the enemy bombardment, several outposts held out until the early afternoon.¹³⁵ In Ronssoy, the 7/8th Inniskillings were routed only after "severe fighting" and suffering "heavy casualties".¹³⁶ Individuals'

accounts regarding the performance of the 48th Brigade record that the men "fought magnificently". The resistance at Malassise Farm, Ridge Reserve Trench, and Tetard Wood are of particular interest. Colonel Hartigan and his 2nd Munsters "fought splendidly" at Malassise Farm and "prevented the enemy getting into the south edge of Epehy". A company of 2nd Munsters "put up a determined resistance throughout the day" in Ridge Reserve Trench, managing to bring down two enemy aircraft. Lieutenant Whelan and C Company, 2nd Munsters, "made a splendid resistance" at Tetard Wood. Whelan managed to hold out there until about noon on 22 March. By this time, the unit was totally surrounded and had run out of ammunition. Whelan buried his empty revolver before surrendering, but suffered gas wounds during the defense and died in captivity several days later.¹³⁷ David Campbell, GOC 21 Division, praised the 2nd Munsters for their good work near Epehy and "agreed that his machine guns could never have stayed so long" without the efforts of this battalion.¹³⁸

Two battalions of the 47th Brigade had originally been ordered to counter-attack towards Ronssoy. The counter-attack was cancelled, but the 6th Connaughts did not receive the counter order. This battalion actually managed to advance from the Brown line to Ronssoy Wood without any support on its flanks. Forced to withdraw, the 6th Connaughts then took up a position in front of St. Emile near the railway embankment which ran toward Epehy. The

battalion, reduced to the size of a company, continued to hold out in this position until completely enveloped at 4 p.m. on 22 March.¹³⁹

While anecdotal records provide indications of good performance by members of 16 Division, the comparison of casualty figures serves as concrete evidence to support the argument that the Division performed comparably to other BEF divisions. The analysis will first compare the number of fatal casualties taken by each 16 Division brigade with the average number of fatal casualties taken by Fifth Army brigades. On average, Fifth Army divisions suffered 461 men killed.¹⁴⁰ This is an average of 154 men killed per brigade. 16 Division's 47th Brigade, which Congreve claimed had not fought at all, suffered 115 men killed. The 49th Brigade, which had fought indifferently according to Congreve, suffered 245 men killed. 16 Division's 48th Brigade suffered a total of 203 men killed.¹⁴¹ The number of fatal casualties does not give a total picture regarding the performance of a division. But, if a division's attempt to resist can be appraised by the number of men killed, 16 Division's performance was certainly comparable to other Fifth Army divisions.

The picture regarding the performance of 16 Division on 21 March can be rounded out by a comparison of the number of prisoners taken from the division with the number taken from other BEF divisions.

Before analyzing 16 Division figures, it is important

to recognize that on 21 March 1918 the BEF had the highest number of prisoners taken during any World War I battle. The historian Martin Middlebrook has estimated that a total of 21,000 British troops were captured, most from battalions manning the Forward Zone.¹⁴² The explanation for the large number of prisoners lies in the type of battlefield conditions experienced by the troops. The historian Roger Noble, who has studied incidents involving the surrender of Australian troops, outlined the circumstances that lead to capitulation.¹⁴³ Lack of visibility, the severing of communications, terrain that does not allow a good field of view, and nerve-shattering noise create conditions of chaos and undermine cohesion among soldiers. When troops are cut off from support and cannot receive orders, ammunition, and reinforcement, their sense of isolation becomes complete. Even well-disciplined units with good morale lost their will to fight when faced with severely limited alternatives.¹⁴⁴ Soldiers manning the Forward Zone, in particular, on 21 March experienced precisely these types of battlefield circumstances. For example, when the 2nd Inniskillings, 36 Ulster Division, found themselves completely surrounded at Boadicea Redoubt, and felt unable to do anything useful to halt the German advance, they negotiated a surrender. According to the German captors, the defenders had not suffered heavy casualties and approximately 16 officers and 500 men "filed out of the redoubt [and from surrounding defense positions] in good order".¹⁴⁵

Did 16 Division have an unreasonable number of men captured when compared to other BEF divisions? The following statistics will answer this question. Table 4 shows the number of fatal casualties suffered by the entire BEF on 21 March, the number prisoners taken, and the killed-to-captured ratio for the entire army. Table 5 shows the same statistics for 16 Division and the eleven other BEF divisions that had at least two of their three brigades engaged in the Forward and Battle Zones on 21 March.¹⁴⁶

TABLE 4

FATAL CASUALTIES, PRISONERS TAKEN AND
KILLED TO CAPTURED RATIO FOR THE BEF, 21 MARCH 1918

	Killed	Prisoners	Ratio
B.E.F.	7,512	21,000	1:2.8

TABLE 5

FATAL CASUALTIES, PRISONERS TAKEN AND KILLED
TO CAPTURED RATIO IN TWELVE BEF DIVISIONS, 21 MARCH 1918

Division	Killed	Prisoners	Ratio
59	807	3,142	1:3.9
66	711	2,842	1:4
36	267	2,392	1:8.9
14	307	2,238	1:7
6	602	2,116	1:3.5
16	572	1,769	1:3
18	182	1,160	1:6.4
30	245	899	1:3.7
61	361	899	1:2.5
24	276	812	1:2.9
51	309	696	1:2.3
21	305	435	1:1.4

A comparison of these figures indicates that the number of men taken prisoner from 16 Division was comparable to other divisions holding the line on 21 March. Five of the twelve divisions had more men taken prisoner than 16 Division. And although 16 Division had more men captured than six of the twelve divisions, the Irish division's killed-to-captured ratio is only slightly higher than the ratios of 61 and 24 Divisions and is lower than those of 30 and 18 Divisions. It must be remembered that most of the BEF troops taken prisoner on 21 March were captured in the Forward Zone. The larger number of men taken prisoner from 16 Division is not surprising when the heavy deployment of battalions in the division's forward areas is taken into account. 16 Division's killed-to-captured ratio is only marginally higher than the ratio for the entire BEF and is lower than seven of the divisions listed in Table 3. Therefore, it can be concluded that the men of 16 Division did not simply lay down their weapons and walk over to the enemy. The Irish division put up resistance that compares favorably with other BEF divisions.

Certainly, 16 Division experienced great difficulties on 21 March. However, the division did not experience problems because troops generally lacked the will to fight. Difficulties arose out of general and particular battlefield conditions. Analysis demonstrates that the performance of 16 Irish Division compares favorably with the other divisions holding the British line on 21 March 1918.

This examination has argued that the performance of 16 Irish Division was up to standard from 1916 to 1918. The records indicate that the performance of the Division compared favorably with that of other BEF divisions during periods of static warfare and in major assaults. On 21 March 1918 16 Division's performance was similar to other divisions which were holding the front line on that day and the difficulties it encountered were not brought on by political problems. The evidence does not confirm the allegations of poor performance made by contemporary observers and perpetuated in secondary accounts of the March retreat. Therefore it must be concluded that 16 Irish Division does not deserve the negative reputation given to it by Gough, Congreve, and recent historians.

Endnotes

1. Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That, (Harmondsworth, Penguin edn, 1957), p. 152.
2. Gough to Edmonds, 3 May 1944, CAB 45/140, Public Record Office, Kew Gardens (hereafter PRO).
3. Terry Denman, "The 16th (Irish) Division on 21 March 1918: Fight or Flight?", The Irish Sword, vol. 69 (1989), p. 285; War diaries, 16 Division, 18 April 1918, WO 95/1956; GHQ, 20 April 1918; WO 95/26, PRO. Casualties suffered by 16 Division during the retreat totaled 7,149. The division was rebuilt by August 1918, but contained only one Irish battalion.
4. W. Shaw-Sparrow, The Fifth Army in March 1918, (London, 1921), p. 150, and G. Dewar and J. Boraston, Sir Douglas Haig's command, (London, 1921), p. 99, in Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 286; Martin Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, (London, 1978), p. 326; G. Dallas and D. Gill, The Unknown Army, (London, 1985), pp. 83-84; Tim Travers, The Killing Ground, (London, 1987), p. 234.
5. Analysis of performance on the one day, 21 March 1918, reveals the best comparative information because "it was the nature and results of the first day's fighting which set the seal on what was to follow". A quarter of the casualties suffered by all BEF units during the entire retreat were suffered on the first day of fighting and roughly a tenth of the ground that was ultimately lost was taken on the first day. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, pp. 9, 308-309, 322, 347.
6. Richard Holmes, Firing Line, (London, 1985), p. 75.
7. James Brent Wilson, "Morale and Discipline in the British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918", (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1978), p. 120.
8. Ibid., p. 121.
9. Sir George Milne, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, opinion expressed during the Kirke Committee Report in January 1932, in Wilson, "Morale and Discipline", p. 135.
10. Ibid., pp. 121 & 127.
11. War diary, 8th Munsters, 14 April 1916, WO 95/1971, PRO.

12. War diaries, 8th Munsters, 23 August 1916, WO 95/1971; 9th Dublins, 19 May 1916; WO 95/1974, PRO.

13. War diary, 7th Leinsters, 15 Dec. 1916, WO 95/1970, PRO.

14. Captain John Staniforth (7th Leinsters) to parents, 20 August 1916, Staniforth Papers, Imperial War Museum, London (hereafter IWM).

15. War diaries, 16 Division, 20 June 1916; 19 February 1917, WO 95/1955; 8th Munsters, 10 May, 4, 19, and 25 July, 7 August 1916, WO 95/1971; 9th Munsters, 24 June 1916, WO 95/1975; 6th Irish Regiment, 19 June, 1916, 5 April 1917, WO 95/1970; 8th Dublins, 10 July, 29 October 1916, WO 95/1974; 9th Dublins, 24 February 1917, WO 95/1974; 7th Irish Rifles, 4 January 1917, WO 95/1975; 8th Inniskillings, 17 July 1916, WO 95/1977; 6th Connaughts, 5 June 1917, WO 95/1970; 7th Leinsters, 16 October 1917; WO 95/1970, reported successful raids. War diaries, 16 Division, 4 June 1916, WO 95/1955; 6th Irish Regiment, 22 July and 21 August 1916, WO 95/1970; 8th Dublins, 1 August 1916, WO 95/1974; 9th Dublins, 6 and 28 June, 22 August 1916, WO 95/1974; 7th Irish Rifles, 28 June, 1 August 1916; WO 95/1975, reported unsuccessful raids. War diaries, 47th Brigade, 29 June 1916, WO 95/1969; 8th Munsters, 20 July 1916, WO 95/1971; 9th Dublins, 5 August 1916, WO 95/1974; 7th Irish Rifles, 23 May 1917, WO 95/1975; 7/8th Inniskillings, 30 October 1917, WO 95/1977; PRO; Staniforth to parents, 29 June 1916, Staniforth Papers, IWM, report raids and do not comment on success or failure.

16. War Diary, 47th Brigade, 29 June 1916, WO 95/1969, PRO.

17. Wilson, "Morale and Discipline", p. 162.

18. Wilson, "Morale and Discipline", p. 162. First Army carried out 166 raids between 1 July and 15 November 1916, a period of 4.5 months or 20 weeks, which is approximately 37 raids per month. ($166 / 4.5 = 36.8$) There were 11 divisions in the front line during July and August therefore each division carried out an average of 3 to 4 raids. ($37 / 11 = 3.36$) First Army suffered an average 1,000 casualties per week during the period, which is about 120 casualties per raid. ($1000 * 20 / 166 = 120.4$). Figures for number of raids and casualties taken by 16 Division in June, July and August taken from: War diaries, 16 Division, 4 and 20 June 1916, WO 95/1955; 47th Brigade, 29 June 1916, WO 95/1969; 8th Munsters, 4, 19, 20, and 25 July, 7 August 1916, WO 95/1971; 9th Munsters, 24 June 1916, WO 95/1975; 6th Irish Regiment, 19 June, 22 July and 21 August 1916, WO 95/1970; 8th Dublins, 10 July, 1 August 1916, WO 95/1974; 9th Dublins, 6 and 28 June, 5 and 22 August 1916, WO 95/1974; 7th Irish Rifles, 28 June, 1 August 1916, WO 95/1975; 8th

Inniskillings, 17 July 1916, WO 95/1977; PRO; Staniforth to parents, 29 June 1916, Staniforth Papers, IWM.

19. Terence Denman, "The Catholic Irish Soldier in the First World War: the 'racial environment'", Irish Historical Studies, 108 (November, 1991), pp. 356-357; also Martin Middlebrook stated: "it seems possible that [Celtic divisions] did not have the temperament for defense", Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 326.

20. Haig, Diary, 16 August 1917, WO 256/21, PRO; Denman, "The Catholic Irish Soldier", p. 357.

21. Staniforth to parents, 30 January 1916, Staniforth Papers, IWM.

22. Colonel Rowland Feilding to wife, 17 October 1916, in War Letters to a Wife, (London, 1919), pp. 128-129.

23. Staniforth to parents, 17 March 1918, Staniforth Papers, IWM.

24. War diaries, 7th Leinsters, 24 January 1916, WO 95/1970; 6th Connaughts, 28 January 1916, WO 95/1970, PRO.

25. War diary, 7th Leinsters, 17 January 1916, WO 95/1970, PRO.

26. Sir James Edmonds, Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916, vol. I, (London, 1932), p. 195.

27. Correspondent for the Daily Mail in, "Brave Irish Troops -The 16th Division - Germans Beaten Back", Freeman's Journal, 5 May 1916, p. 2.

28. Total casualties were 720, including 7 officers killed and 15 wounded; 225 other ranks killed and 473 wounded. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1916, vol. I, p. 196.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.; Haig, Diary, 5 May 1916, WO 256/10, PRO.

31. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1916, vol. I, pp. 195-196. Some 200 enemy dead were counted lying in and about 16 Division trenches.

32. Haig, Diary, 5 May 1916, WO 256/10, PRO.

33. In November 1917, the 7th Leinsters boasted that "no Hun had ever entered their trenches except as a prisoner". This battalion was disbanded in February 1918. War diary,

7th Leinsters, 18 Nov. 1917 and 23 February 1918, WO 95/1970. Eleven comments were gathered from 16 Division war diaries regarding defense against enemy raids. In two comments it is not clear whether the enemy entered the trenches during the raid: War diaries, 16 Division, 9 May 1916, WO 95/1955; 9th Munsters, 30 May 1916, WO 95/1975. In five comments it is clear the enemy entered the trenches and were repelled: War diaries, 6th Irish Regiment, 9 May 1916, WO 95/1970; 7th Irish Rifles, 8 March 1917, WO 95/1975; 7/8th Inniskillings, 5 and 17 March 1918, WO 95/1977; 16 Division, 9 March 1918, WO 95/1955. In four comments it is clear that enemy raiders were prevented from entering the trenches: War diaries, 9th Dublins, 9 June 1916, WO 95/1974; 7th Irish Fusiliers, 25 June 1916, WO 95/1978; 7th Leinsters, 17 April 1916 and 9 March 1917; WO 95/1970, PRO.

34. John Terraine, The Smoke and the Fire, (London, 1980), p. 121.

35. War diary, 16 Division, Summary of Operations, Somme offensive, 29 August to 11 September 1916, WO 95/1955, PRO.

36. Captain B.H. Liddell Hart, The Real War, (Boston, 1930; reissued 1964), p. 244; Christopher Martin, Battle of the Somme, (London, 1973), p. 85.

37. W. Beach Thomas, correspondent for the Daily Mail, in the Freeman's Journal, 12 Sept. 1916, p. 2.

38. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1916, vol. II (1938), p. 255.

39. Ibid.

40. War diary, 6th Irish Regiment, 3 September 1916, WO 95/1970, PRO.

41. Staniforth to parents, 12 September 1916, Staniforth Papers, IWM; F.H.T. Tatham in Denman, "The Catholic Irish Soldier", p. 356.

42. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1916, vol. II, p. 256.

43. Philip Gibbs, correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, in The Freeman's Journal, 12 September 1916, p. 2.

44. War diary, 7th Royal Irish Fusiliers, 10 September 1916, WO 95/1978, PRO.

45. Edmonds, France and Belgium, vol. II, p. 275; War diaries, 9th Dublins, 9 September 1916, WO 95/1974; 7th Irish Rifles, 9 September 1916, WO 95/1975, PRO.

46. W. Beach Thomas, in the Freeman's Journal, 13 September 1916, p. 4; Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1916, vol. II, p. 275.
47. War diary, 16 Division, Somme Operations, 29 August to 11 September 1916, WO 95/1955, PRO.
48. Travers, The Killing Ground, p. 22.
49. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1916, vol. II, pp. 166, 184, 193, 200 & 260.
50. Ibid., pp. 257 & 267.
51. Travers, The Killing Ground, p. 176.
52. Freeman's Journal, 12 Sept. 1916, p. 2.; Edmonds, France and Belgium, vol. II, p. 255; War diary, 7th Leinsters, 1 and 8 October 1916, WO 95/1970, PRO.
53. Leon Wolff, In Flanders Fields, (New York, 1958; reprinted 1984), p. 83.
54. Ibid., pp. 103-104; Liddell Hart, The Real War, p. 330.
55. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II (1948), pp.81-82 & 85. Between 1 and 12 June 1917 the entire Second Army suffered only a total of 24,562 casualties.
56. Ibid., pp. 65, 68 & 69.
57. War diaries, all 7 June 1917, 7th Inniskillings, WO 95/1976, 6th Connaughts, WO 95/1970; 7th Leinsters WO 95/1970, PRO.
58. Henry Harris, The Irish Regiments in the First World War, (Cork, 1968), p.110.
59. The Anzac Corps took the heaviest casualties, with a total of 12,931 or an average of 4,130 per assault division; IX Corps took a total of 5,263 casualties, averaging 1,754 per assault division; the X Corps took 6,597 casualties which is an average of 2,199 per assault division. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II, pp. 77-78.
60. Percival Phillips, correspondent for the Daily Express in The Freeman's Journal, 9 June 1917, p. 4.
61. Major Arthur Ryan, in Forward of, Major William Redmond, (London, 1917), p. 18.
62. War diary, 7th Leinsters, 4 July 1917, WO 95/1970, PRO.

63. Haig, Diary, 17 August 1917, WO 256/21, PRO.
64. John Terraine, The Road to Passchendaele, (London, 1977), p. 337; Wolff, In Flanders Fields, p. 82. Troops and equipment were easily bogged down and reports indicated that men were suffocated by the mud.
65. Liddell Hart, The Real War, p. 340; Wolff, In Flanders Fields, p. 144; John Terraine, The Road to Passchendaele, p. 218; Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II, p. 179.
66. Wolff, In Flanders Fields, pp. 145-146. By the end of the day, the XIV and XVIII Corps were ordered to withdraw from forward positions because the two thousand yard deep bulge created by the failure of II Corps to advance, could not be held without serious losses.
67. Wolff, In Flanders Fields, pp. 141-149; Edmonds, France and Belgium, vol. II, pp. 157-159 & 166-174.
68. Wolff, In Flanders Fields, p. 154.
69. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II, pp. 190-201.
70. Ibid., p. 184.
71. Ibid., pp. 191 & 195.
72. War diary, 7th Leinsters, 31 July 1917, WO 95/1970, PRO; Staniforth to parents, 7 August 1917, Staniforth Papers, IWM.
73. War diary, 7/8th Irish Fusiliers, 4 August 1917, WO 95/1978, PRO.
74. War diaries, 6th Connaughts, 6 August 1917, WO 95/1970; 8th Inniskillings, 3 to 8 August 1917, WO 95/1977; 9th Dublins, 7 to 9 August 1917, WO 95/1974; 7th Inniskillings, 19 August 1917, WO 95/1976; PRO; Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II, p. 195.
75. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II, p. 195.
76. Ibid., p. 197-198 & 200.
77. Ibid., p. 200.
78. War diaries, 7th Irish Rifles, 17 August 1917, WO 95/1975; 8th Inniskillings, 22 August 1917, WO 95/1977, PRO; Philip Gibbs in The Freeman's Journal, 23 August 1917, p. 5; Edmonds, France and Belgium, vol. II, p. 196.

79. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II, p. 201.
80. War Diaries, 7th Inniskillings, 19 August 1917, WO 95/1976; 8th Inniskillings, 22 August 1917, WO 95/1977; 9th Dublins, 16 to 18 August 1917, WO 95/1974; 7th Irish Rifles, 16 to 17 August 1917, WO 95/1975; PRO; Edmonds, France and Belgium, vol. II, pp. 196-197.
81. Statistics in the text and Table 3 taken from: Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II, pp. 194 & 197-198.
82. Messrs. Cox & Co., List of British Officers taken prisoner in the various Theatres of War between August 1914 and November 1918, (London, 1919; this edn., 1988), pp. 35-128, passim.
83. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. II, p. 197.
84. Haig, Diary, 17 August 1917, WO 256/21, PRO.
85. M.P.A. Hanky to General Sir William Robertson, 19 September 1917, WO 106/407/27, PRO.
86. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1917, vol. III (1948), p. 95.
87. Ibid., p. 97.
88. Ibid., pp. 97-98.
89. War diary, 7th Leinsters, 28 November 1917, WO 95/1970, PRO.
90. Denman, "Fight or Flight?", pp. 273-274.
91. General Haldane quoted by Feilding to wife, 9 December 1917, War Letters, pp. 240-241.
92. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, pp. 308 & 347. The BEF lost "over 1,000 square miles of ground" by 5 April 1918.
93. Haig, Diary, 22 March 1918, WO 256/28, PRO.
94. Congreve to Edmonds, 6 January 1927, CAB 45/192, PRO.
95. Major Nightingale to unknown, 24 April 1918, Nightingale Letters, PRO 31/71; PRO. Nightingale was second in command of the 1st Munsters.
96. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 85.
97. Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 284.

98. War diary, 7/8th Inniskillings, 17 March 1918, WO 95/1977, PRO.

99. Denman, "Flight or Fight?", p. 278; Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. I (1935), p. 180; Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 382. The XXIII Reserve Corps, part of the German Second Army, launched three assault divisions, including 18, 50 Reserve and 79 Reserve Divisions, against 16 Division and the left flank of 66 Division. Three other German divisions waited in support: 9 Reserve, 13 and 199 Divisions.

100. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, pp. 22-29 & 74-75; Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 277.

101. G. Peirson (48th Brigade) to Edmonds, 1 August 1927, CAB 45/193, PRO.

102. Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 277.

103. Captain E.P. Hall, 2nd Leinsters, cited in Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 82.

104. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. I, p. 130; Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 80.

105. Major General W.B. Hickie, who had commanded 16 Division since arrival in France, had fallen ill and was sent home to Ireland on 10 February 1918. General Sir Amyatt Hull replaced Hickie.

106. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. I, p. 130; Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 121.

107. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 121.

108. F.W. Ramsay (CO, 48th Brigade) to Edmonds, date unknown, CAB 45/193, PRO.

109. J.A. Watts (CO, 7th Irish Regiment) to Edmonds, CAB 45/193, PRO; Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 278.

110. Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 278.

111. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. I, pp. 179-180; Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 275-276.

112. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. I, p. 134.

113. L.C. Jackson (GSO 1, 16 Division) to Edmonds, 25 January 1927, CAB 45/193, PRO.

114. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 77.

115. Feilding to wife, 5 and 6 March 1918, War Letters, pp. 257 & 259; Lieutenant A.E. Glanville (2nd Dublins), Diary, no date but c. March 1918, A.E. Glanville Papers, IWM. Glanville wrote: "In view of expected Boche attack for Amiens we are never done working. We are told we will not be relieved till it comes off, so we pray it may come off soon."
116. Feilding to wife, 5 March and 3 April 1918, War Letters, p. 257 & 284.
117. Holmes, Firing Line, pp. 124-125.
118. Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 274.
119. M.C. Harrison (CO, 2nd Irish Regiment) to Edmonds, 16 January 1928, CAB 45/193, PRO.
120. Feilding to wife, 11 and 19 March, War Letters, pp. 259 & 261-262. "The men continue, as always, in spite of what is beginning to seem an almost interminable period of restless hard work and hardship, to be patient and cheerful and magnificent." "Every one [sic] here is in good spirits, and I think we have nothing to worry about."
121. Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 278.
122. Edmonds, Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1918, vol. II (London, 1935), p. 166.
123. Colonel Goodland (1st Munsters) to Edmonds, 11 May 1928, CAB 45/192, PRO.
124. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. II, p. 166.
125. A.O.C. Patman (7th Irish Regiment) to Edmonds, 12 December 1927, CAB 45/192, PRO.
126. Ramsay to Edmonds, date unknown, CAB 45/193, PRO.
127. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. II, pp. 180-181; Denman, "Fight or Flight?", pp. 280 & 282-283.
128. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 224.
129. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. II, pp. 174, 176 & 179.
130. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 203.
131. Ibid., p. 204.

132. Details regarding 16 Division's fight in the Battle Zone from: War diaries, 16 Division, Appendix A: Report on operations, 21 March to 25 March 1918, WO 95/1956; 7/8th Inniskillings, Report regarding 21 March 1918, WO 95/1977; PRO; Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. II, pp. 191-192, 203-204; Denman, "Fight or Flight?", pp. 279-283; Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, pp. 224, 274.

133. Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. II, pp. 184, 189, 198-199, 203; Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, pp. 224, 271-274.

134. Sir William Robertson, CIGS, Report regarding the fighting ability of 16 Division, specific date unknown but c. 21 March to 5 April 1918, CAB 23/5, PRO. The Cabinet committee asked for this report "with a view to throwing light on the probable fighting value of conscripted Irishmen".

135. J.M. Terry (2nd Irish Regiment) to Edmonds, 22 August 1928, CAB 45/193; Patman (7th Irish Regiment) to Edmonds, 12 December 1927, CAB 45/192; PRO.

136. War diary, 7/8th Inniskillings, Report regarding 21 March 1918, WO 95/1977, PRO.

137. Ramsay (GOC 48th Brigade) to Edmonds, date unknown, CAB 54/193; F.J. MacGrath (2nd Munsters) to Edmonds, 13 February 1928, CAB 45/192; M.M. Hartigan (CO 2nd Munsters) to Edmonds, 1 December 1927, CAB 45/192; PRO.

138. David Campbell (GOC 21 Division) cited in Hartigan to Edmonds, 1 December 1927, CAB 45/192, PRO.

139. Feilding to wife, 24 March 1918, War Letters, p. 265; F.T. Chamier (6th Connaughts) to Edmonds, 3 April 1928, CAB 45/192, PRO.

140. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 315.

141. Officers died in the Great war (London, 1919); and Soldiers died in the Great war (London, 1921), in Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 284.

142. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, pp. 322, 332-333.

143. Roger Noble, "Raising the White Flag: The Surrender of Australian Soldiers on the Western Front", Revue Internationale D'Histoire Militaire, vol. 72 (1990), pp. 55-71.

144. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 336.

145. Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, pp. 334, 337-338. According to Middlebrook, "four battalions in the Forward Zone collapsed and surrendered without a single one of their officers being killed. The four battalions were the 8th King's Royal Rifle Corps, 2/8th Lancashire Fusiliers, 2/2nd Londons and 2nd Royal Inniskillings." The records do not contain any evidence which indicates that incidents of this nature occurred among 16 Division battalions.

146. Sources used for calculations of figures in the tables are: Edmonds, France and Belgium, 1918, vol. II, p. 491; Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, pp. 315, 321; Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 284; Cox and Co.'s, List of British Officers taken prisoner, pp. 19-130, passim. For an explanation of calculations see Appendix 3.

CONCLUSION

During the 1918 March retreat, 16 Division was virtually destroyed as an effective combat unit and ceased to exist as a specifically Irish formation. Although the division was rebuilt by August 1918, it contained only one Irish regiment. Obviously, this did not mean an end to the Catholic Irish presence within the BEF. Surviving 16 Division troops were dispersed to Regular Irish battalions, which continued to serve with various divisions until the end of the war.

Following the Armistice, thousands of demobilized Catholic Irish soldiers returned home to a political situation that had undergone a startling transformation during their absence. Lack of support from British authorities had undermined the moderate Irish nationalist position¹ and Irish public opinion, which had supported the action of the men who had volunteered to serve with 16 Division in 1914, now favoured the more radical republican form of Irish nationalism which was critical of Irish participation in the BEF. Rather than being welcomed home, the returning Irish ex-soldiers found that they were viewed with suspicion by many of their countrymen.

Discharged Irish soldiers encountered open hostility, particularly during the Anglo-Irish conflict of 1919 to 1921,² and many had problems finding employment. Some ex-servicemen alleged that:

"There were a large number of firms where the employers were very unwilling to take on discharged soldiers under any circumstances, and that there were other firms where the employers were quite willing to employ discharged soldiers but the foreman always managed to turn down ex-soldiers and put in their places, in many cases, Sinn Feiners".³

The reaction of former Irish soldiers to the new political milieu in Ireland seems to have reflected the various attitudes found among the rest of the Irish population. Some ex-servicemen, incensed by the treatment accorded their countrymen in their absence, joined the IRA and lent their military experience to the fight for Irish independence. Others, perhaps disillusioned and disgusted by the hostility they encountered, reenlisted in the BEF. Ex-servicemen also joined the ranks of the new Free State Army and it has been speculated that these veterans played a decisive role in the defeat of the anti-Treaty forces during the bitter civil war which followed the establishment of the Free State in 1922.⁴

Whatever their ultimate fate, the Catholic Irish ex-servicemen unfortunately experienced a homecoming which might be compared to the recent experiences of American soldiers returning from Vietnam. It is clear that returning former Irish soldiers were plunged into a political situation that contrasted sharply with the situation they had left in 1914.

The political conditions which had evolved over time in Ireland had allowed Catholic Irish support for the British

war effort in 1914. With the apparent resolution of the Home Rule question in hand, and backed by the majority of public opinion, John Redmond and other constitutional nationalists had felt able to encourage nationalist Irishmen to enlist in 16 Division. Despite the tensions and controversy produced by the conflicting political objectives of the Irish nationalists and British authorities during the creation of 16 Irish Division, this formation emerged as an effective and cohesive combat unit within the BEF.

Although the Catholic Irish soldiers of 16 Division had not been totally immune to the politics of their homeland while serving on the Western Front, the political conditions they were familiar with were those that had prevailed in pre-war Ireland. Politically conscious Irish soldiers were dismayed by the news of the Easter Rising and, like the majority of their countrymen, were critical of the rebellion. But, unlike the rest of the Irish population, the Irish soldiers did not directly experience the harshness with which the rebellion was suppressed, and therefore did not experience a similar disillusionment which had undermined support for the moderate nationalist position in Ireland. The Catholic Irish soldiers of 16 Division seem to have continued to believe that their decision to support the British war effort was correct because there is no evidence to indicate that the morale of 16 Division was ever undermined. In fact, the evidence indicates that morale in 16 Division was comparable to other BEF units even though

the division had to deal with additional political pressures. Leadership and religion appear to have been two important factors which assisted in sustaining this level of morale.

It is also apparent that political problems had not undermined the effectiveness of 16 Irish Division in combat. Evidence demonstrates that the performance of 16 Division during periods of static warfare and in major assaults was up to standard and that the difficulties encountered by the Irish division on 21 March 1918 were similar to those experienced by other BEF units, and were not brought on by political problems as implied by some commanding officers. The evidence in fact indicates that the performance of 16 Division on 21 March compared favorably with the other BEF divisions holding the line on that day.

One issue must be addressed, however, before a satisfactory final conclusion can be reached. Although Catholic Ireland had obviously supported the British war effort in 1914, and although it is clear that there was no concrete evidence to indicate that politics had influenced the loyalty and effectiveness of the division, it is also clear that British officers generally viewed 16 Irish Division with suspicion when it was on active service on the Western Front. While many British officers believed that Catholic Irish soldiers were ferocious fighters on the offensive, they persisted in the belief that these soldiers were more unruly, more dirty, more mad for drink, and more

unreliable on defense, than other BEF soldiers.⁵ British and Anglo-Irish officers such as Gough and Congreve, were convinced that political problems had undermined the reliability of 16 Division. These opinions obviously damaged the reputation of 16 Irish Division. Why did these officers persist in these beliefs, despite the lack of any concrete evidence to support their opinions?

Because there clearly were no concrete examples that could have supported their claims, it must be deduced that it was the political perspective of the British officers themselves which aroused their suspicions of 16 Division. It seems that the political perspective of some officers had affected the objectivity of their reports in evaluating the performance of 16 Division. One Catholic nationalist officer alleged:

"The enormous majority of British Army officers detest us Irish Nationalists and are trying to build up a case against us against the time when peace is restored and the polemical battle for and against Home Rule is renewed."⁶

Whether or not there was any truth to this allegation, it does seem possible that political prejudices provoked the belief that Irish Catholic nationalists could not possibly demonstrate loyalty to their homeland and fight effectively within the BEF at the same time. Perhaps this type of prejudice coloured the opinion of the Anglo-Irish unionist General Sir Hubert Gough in regards to the reliability of 16 Division. It also appears that general prejudices against

the Catholic Irish, which had developed as a result of the sometimes hostile relationship between Ireland and England during preceding centuries, had tarnished the perspective of many British officers when evaluating the division.⁷

Unfortunately, it appears that prejudice and intolerant political philosophies affected the way in which British authorities handled offers of Catholic Irish support for the war effort right from the beginning. It seems likely that the War Office had resisted the proposals of Irish nationalists, while granting similar special conditions to 36 Ulster Division, because of entrenched notions regarding the loyalty of Irish nationalists. British authorities seemed incapable of receiving Catholic nationalist support without suspecting the spirit in which it had been offered and were only willing to accept Catholic Irish support for the war effort on terms that met British political objectives. It appears as though entrenched prejudices and traditional views of "the wild Irish" had prevented British authorities from perceiving the opportunity which existed because of the special wartime conditions - an opportunity which, if handled appropriately, might have bound Ireland with closer ties to the Empire. Perhaps if War Office authorities had granted special recognition to 16 Irish Division, the Irish population would not have come to suspect the motivations of British authorities in regards to the various issues that arose in wartime Ireland. Instead, suspicion bred suspicion, and the hoped for new relationship

between Ireland and Great Britain was eventually undermined and ultimately collapsed completely.

It seems that entrenched beliefs about the unreliability and rebelliousness of all Irishmen prevented British authorities and British army officers from recognizing the difference between moderate and radical Irish nationalists, and this lack of perception provoked suspicions regarding the loyalty of 16 Irish Division.⁸ However, with the benefit of evidence provided by this analysis it can be concluded that the Catholic Irish soldiers of 16 Division reflected the moderate nationalist position as regards the war effort and that they continued to do so throughout their service on the Western Front. Remaining isolated and relatively out of touch with the political events that had transformed Irish public opinion during the course of the war, 16 Irish Division was not influenced to any obvious extent by politics when on active duty on the Western Front between 1916 and 1918.

Endnotes

1. F.X. Martin, "1916 - Myth, Fact and Mystery", Studia Hibernica, no. 7 (1967), pp. 58-62.
2. Martin Staunton, The Story of the Munster Fusiliers, 1914-1918, (unpublished manuscript based on M.A. thesis, Dublin University College, 1988), pp. 249-250.
3. Captain R. Magill, Notes from meeting of the Federation of Discharged Soldiers, c. September or October, 1918, NATS 1/260, PRO.
4. Staunton, The Story of the Munster Fusiliers, pp. 248-251; Henry Harris, The Irish Regiments in the First World War, (Cork, 1968), pp. 201-203.
5. Terence Denman, "The Catholic Irish Soldier in the First World War: the 'racial environment'", Irish Historical Studies, vol. 27, no. 108 (November 1991), pp. 354 -364, passim.
6. Captain Hervey de Montmorency to John Redmond, 24 January 1915, MS 15261(2), Redmond Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin.
7. Denman, "The Catholic Irish soldier", pp. 352-354, 364-365.
8. Recall the incident in the spring of 1918 when British troops harassed 16 Division, calling them "Sinn Feiners". Major Nightingale to unknown, 24 April 1918, PRO 30/71, Public Records Office, Kew Gardens.

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CAB 45/192	Letters to Sir James Edmonds

CAB 45/193	Letters to Sir James Edmonds
CO 904/164	Military reports on Ireland, 1916
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PRO 30/71	Major Nightingale Letters
WO 32/4307	Royal Commission on Rebellion in Ireland
WO 93/49	Summary records of Courts Martial trials and convictions
WO 95	BEF War Diaries
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APPENDIX 1

Table 6 shows the total number of other ranks reporting sick per day in 16 Division during May through August 1916. These raw numbers were taken from 16 Division Medical Services war diary, WO 95/1960, PRO. The average number of other ranks reporting sick on a daily basis per battalion was calculated by taking the total raw number of ORs reporting sick per day and dividing this by 12, which was the number of 16 Division battalions.

TABLE 6

TOTAL NUMBER OF OTHER RANKS REPORTING SICK
PER DAY IN 16 DIVISION DURING MAY THROUGH AUGUST, 1916

Date May	No. Sick	Date June	No. Sick	Date July	No. Sick	Date August	No. Sick
1	n/a	1	60	1	61	1	60
2	n/a	2	70	2	57	2	75
3	n/a	3	30	3	67	3	89
4	n/a	4	43	4	63	4	61
5	n/a	5	57	5	61	5	43
6	n/a	6	50	6	62	6	50
7	52	7	44	7	48	7	50
8	n/a	8	48	8	64	8	66
9	n/a	9	38	9	42	9	72
10	52	10	32	10	43	10	68
11	42	11	40	11	69	11	56
12	55	12	37	12	62	12	60
13	49	13	54	13	65	13	47
14	39	14	61	14	47	14	46
15	52	15	63	15	65	15	55
16	42	16	50	16	56	16	56
17	51	17	60	17	50	17	69
18	39	18	43	18	58	18	45
19	43	19	52	19	50	19	51
20	39	20	69	20	67	20	62
21	48	21	78	21	65	21	59
22	62	22	71	22	49	22	61
23	60	23	70	23	45	23	56
24	70	24	78	24	56	24	33
25	50	25	80	25	44	25	33
26	58	26	70	26	55	26	19
27	41	27	62	27	77	27	35
28	58	28	73	28	45	28	n/a
29	30	29	92	29	52	29	n/a
30	47	30	69	30	40	30	n/a
31	64			31	79	31	n/a
Total	1143		1744		1764		1477

Table 7 shows the total numbers of officers and other ranks reporting sick per month in 16 Division during May through August, 1916. These totals were calculated based on statistics taken from 16 Division Medical Services war diary, WO 95/1960, PRO. The ratio of officers to other ranks reporting sick has also been calculated and included in Table B.

TABLE 7
TOTAL NUMBER
OF OFFICERS AND ORS REPORTING SICK PER MONTH IN 16 DIVISION
AND RATIO OF OFFICERS TO ORS FOR FOUR MONTHS IN 1916

Month	No. sick per bn.		Ratio
	Off.	ORs	Off./ORs
May	36	1143	1:31.8
June	58	1744	1:30.0
July	74	1764	1:23.8
August	59	1477	1:25.0
Totals	227	6128	1:27.0

Table 8 shows the total number of officers and ORs reporting sick per month and the average number of ORs reporting sick per day in the 9th Dublins for the months November 1916 through April 1917, and June 1917 to September 1917. Because the war diary only reported the total number of officers reporting sick per month, the number of ORs has been estimated utilizing the ratio of officers to ORs from Table B. This ratio is 1:27. The average number of ORs reporting sick daily was calculated by taking the total monthly estimate and dividing by the number of days in the month. The number of officers reporting sick was taken from War diary, 9th Dublins, WO 95/1974, PRO.

TABLE 8
NUMBER OF OFFICERS
AND OTHER RANKS REPORTING SICK AND DAILY AVERAGE OF
OTHER RANKS SICK FOR TEN MONTHS IN THE 9TH DUBLINS

Month/year	Officers	Other Ranks	Av. # ORs/day
Nov. '16	4	108	3.6
Dec. '16	1	27	0.8
Jan. '17	4	108	3.5
Feb. '17	6	162	5.8
March. '17	5	135	4.4
April '17	1	27	0.9
June '17	2	54	1.8
July '17	3	81	2.6
Aug. '17	2	54	1.8
Sept. '17	1	27	0.9
Tot./ Av.	29	783	2.6

The statistics in Tables 9 and 10 were taken from War Diaries, 8th Dublins, 8/9th Dublins, WO 95/1974, PRO.

TABLE 9
NUMBER OF MEN REPORTING SICK IN 8TH DUBLINS ON DATES IN 1916

March	No. Sick	June	No. Sick	July	No. Sick
11th	5	21st	6	2nd	3
12th	1	22nd	1	3rd	3
13th	4	23rd	3	4th	5
14th	3	24th	3	5th	4
16th	2	25th	8	6th	4
21st	3	27th	3	8th	6
24th	1	28th	6	9th	4
Average	2.7		4.3		4.1

TABLE 10
NUMBER OF MEN REPORTING SICK
IN 8/9TH DUBLINS ON DATES IN DECEMBER 1917 AND JANUARY 1918

Date	No. Sick
14 Dec. '17	12
15 Dec. '17	13
16 Dec. '17	12
17 Dec. '17	14
18 Dec. '17	5
19 Dec. '17	6
20 Dec. '17	11
21 Dec. '17	12
22 Dec. '17	12
23 Dec. '17	31
24 Dec. '17	6
25 Dec. '17	26
26 Dec. '17	22
27 Dec. '17	4
28 Dec. '17	6
29 Dec. '17	1
5 Jan. '18	5
6 Jan. '18	3
7 Jan. '18	6
8 Jan. '18	4
9 Jan. '18	2
10 Jan. '18	4

APPENDIX 2

TABLE 11
TOTAL MONTHLY COURTS MARTIALS FOR 19, 38, AND 41 DIVISIONS
FROM JANUARY 1916 TO SEPTEMBER 1918

Month/Yr.	19 Division	38 Division	41 Division
Jan. '16	n/a	19	n/a
Feb. '16	n/a	41	n/a
Mar. '16	58	52	n/a
Apr. '16	46	27	n/a
May '16	39	34	n/a
Jun. '16	23	34	n/a
Jul. '16	5	25	39
Aug. '16	41	16	30
Sep. '16	30	44	16
Oct. '16	16	33	5
Nov. '16	16	30	21
Dec. '16	24	18	19
Jan. '17	17	28	23
Feb. '17	10	n/a	22
Mar. '17	13	n/a	18
Apr. '17	16	30	23
May '17	18	n/a	11
Jun. '17	n/a	10	13
Jul. '17	n/a	13	26
Aug. '17	19	12	19
Sep. '17	20	17	14
Oct. '17	32	42	12
Nov. '17	22	65	n/a
Dec. '17	14	n/a	42
Jan. '18	30	28	n/a
Feb. '18	31	19	27
Mar. '18	17	41	27
Apr. '18	6	26	10
May '18	19	17	15
Jun. '18	47	24	13
Jul. '18	33	30	20
Aug. '18	38	19	16
Sep. '18	21	4	n/a
Average/month	24.9	27.5	20

APPENDIX 3

METHODS FOR CALCULATION OF CASUALTIES ON 21 MARCH 1918:

The fatal casualty figures for the twelve BEF divisions in Table 5 have been taken from: Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 315. Middlebrook determined these figures based upon a publication of the War Graves Commission: Soldiers died in the Great War, (London, 1921) and Officers died in the Great War, (London, 1919).

The estimated number of prisoners taken from the 36, 59, 14, and 6 Divisions come from: Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 321. Using a calculation where he deducted a figure for the men who were missing and later returned to duty (a figure based on the Official History's documentation) and a further figure for missing men known to have been killed (known from the War Graves Commission registers), Middlebrook estimated and listed those divisions which lost more than 2000 prisoners during the first day.

The figure for the estimated number of prisoners taken from the other eight divisions listed in Table 3 been calculated in the following manner. First, the numbers of officers taken prisoner per division on 21 March were gathered from: List of British Officers taken prisoner in the various theatres of war between August 1914 and November 1918, (London, 1919; recent edn., 1988), pp. 19-131, passim. Secondly, an average ratio of officers to other ranks was calculated using statistics from various sources. Ratios that show the number of officers captured to number of other ranks captured in 36, 14, 59 and 6 Division were calculated using List of British Officers taken prisoner and Middlebrook's, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 321. The ratios are: 36 Division, 1:37; 14 Division, 1:27; 59 Division, 1:31; 6 Division, 1:28. Next, using statistics from, Denman, "Fight or Flight?", p. 284, ratios based on the known strengths of the three 16 Division battalions, were calculated: 2nd Dublins, 23 officers, 643 men, ratio is 1:27.9; 2nd Royal Irish Regiment 18 officers, 514 men, ratio is 1:28.5; 2nd Munsters 22 officers, 629 men; ratio is 1:28.5. Then, a ratio was calculated for all Third and Fifth Army battalions based on the average battalion trench strength found in Middlebrook, The Kaiser's Battle, p. 85. The average battalion trench strength was 42 officers and 950 men, ratio is 1:23. Using the eight ratios thus generated an average ratio of officers to men was calculated. The average ratio is 1 officer to 29 men. Finally, using the actual number of officers taken prisoner from each of the eight divisions and the average ratio of officers to men, estimates of numbers of prisoners has been calculated for each division. Table 12 shows the actual number of officers taken prisoner in the eight divisions and the estimated number of soldiers captured based on this actual number of officers captured.

TABLE 12
ESTIMATED OTHER RANKS CAPTURED BASED ON ACTUAL NUMBER OF
OFFICERS CAPTURED IN EIGHT DIVISIONS ON 21 MARCH 1918

Division	Actual no. officers captured	ratio	Estimated no. ORs captured
66	98	1:29	2842
16	61	1:29	1769
18	40	1:29	1160
30	31	1:29	899
61	31	1:29	899
24	28	1:29	812
51	24	1:29	696
21	15	1:29	435