

2016 Annual Military Heritage Award

**A Brief Outline of the Development British Military
Pensions in Ireland, 1914 - 1922**

Submitted by

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The landscape of North Western Europe is dotted with beautifully laid out graveyards that act as monuments to the sacrifice of the First World War. The thousands of servicemen whose bodies were lost or remained unidentified are commemorated on impressive structures such as the Thiepval Monument on the Somme battlefield. Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect responsible for that structure also designed the War Memorial Gardens at Inchicore to commemorate the Irish dead. There and in numerous graveyards, an altar of hard wearing stone can be found with the inscription 'Their name liveth for evermore' carved to remind us of what many consider to be a lost generation. Several aspects of the War are instantly recognisable such as images of men struggling through mud or lines of gas victims. Gas held a particular horror for most soldiers but significantly it did not kill large numbers although the effects could last for years.¹ The most prolific killer was artillery firing high explosive shells. Referring both to gas and especially artillery, Lt. Arthur Heath recorded the horror and loathing of frontline soldiers for these weapons.

The Germans have used a particularly cruel kind, but if you could use something equally deadly but more humane, after all that would be a better way of killing men than tearing them limb from limb, as the guns do. I'm trying to harden myself to the sight of mangled bodies, but don't find it at all easy...

It is all very well to talk of a clean death in battle, but it's not a clean death that the artillery deals. It means arms and legs torn off and men mangled out of recognition by their hulking bullies of guns.²

But for all those killed by the new weapons, there were many more who were injured and survived to return home. Men wounded by the myriad of weapons and who

¹ Anthony Saunders. *Trench warfare 1850-1950* (Barnsley, 2010) p. 153.

² Arthur George Heath. *Letters of Arthur George Heath* (Oxford, 1917). pp 87 & 133.

survived to live with varying degrees of disability, are the focus of this research. Specifically it seeks out those servicemen who returned to that part of Ireland that was to become the Free State, to a country undergoing traumatic changes.

There is great awareness of the concept of a lost generation. But for men and women disabled because of war service it can be argued that they were and still are a forgotten generation. It is well said that

Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write. When historians do take note of disability, they usually treat it merely as personal tragedy or an insult to be deplored and a label to be denied, rather than a cultural construct to be questioned and explored.³

This essay will outline briefly the origins and early years of the system that evolved to deal with the unprecedented numbers of servicemen who were discharged as disabled because of the Great War.

Military pensions in these islands can be traced back to An Acte for Relief of Souldiers (*sic*) in 1593, through legislation during the English civil wars, to the establishment of veterans hospitals in Kilmainham and Chelsea. Briefly during the Napoleonic Wars a more enlightened and generous policy prevailed but this was terminated by Treasury intervention. Therefore as the BEF embarked for France in 1914, servicemen had no legal entitlement to a pension for disabilities acquired through military service. The First World War changed that situation as pensions for injuries and illnesses were introduced throughout the British Isles on a statutory basis.

³ Douglas G. Baynton, Disability and the justification of inequality in American history in Paul K. Longmore & Lauri Umansky (eds), *The new disability history, American perspectives* (New York, 2001) p. 52.

Previously the granting and administrative authorities for pensions were the Commissioners of the Chelsea, Kilmainham and Greenwich Hospitals. During the 1820s Kilmainham became subordinate to Chelsea despite being an older establishment. Until the outbreak of the First World War a soldier seeking a disability or a service pension made a personal application to the Chelsea Commissioners. Cases were assessed individually but the process was subjective and open to abuse or malpractice as there were no fixed rules to follow. The amount of pension awarded was usually extremely low. Even after widespread public concern about the welfare of soldiers during the Second Boer War, a disabled private could expect no more than 10s/6d weekly as a Chelsea pensioner. Those not lucky enough to be granted an official pension had to rely on the goodwill of charitable organisations.

Two groups in particular were to play an important part in the First World War pension story. The first was the Royal Patriotic Fund created in 1854 to help widows and orphans of British servicemen killed in the Crimea. The second was the Soldiers and Sailors Family Association formed in 1885 to support the families and other dependants of troops sent to the Sudan.

The events of 1914 produced a great wave of patriotism and led men from all walks of life to enlist. The inadequate pay, allowances and lack of pensions for the military quickly became a matter of public concern. As the war dragged on recruitment declined. This happened throughout the United Kingdom, not just in Ireland. At first a campaign of persuasion was tried by advertising improved pay, conditions and pensions. However the system of granting pensions initially remained unchanged. It was realised that a more organised and benevolent approach to the treatment of disabled soldiers and their dependants was necessary.

There was awareness in government circles that the neglect and hardship experienced by service families during the South African War should and could not be repeated.

As a first step, within days of the declaration of war a series of letters were sent from the Local Government Board in London to local authorities in Britain and Ireland.

The letters outlined the intention of central government that a War Distress Committee be formed in each borough, urban district and county area to offset any distress that might arise as a consequence of the war. This was very much in accordance with the long established custom of relief being devolved to local level.

In correspondence dated 10 August the Local Government Board for Ireland anticipated some areas where distress might be encountered but did not commit itself to definite concerns or indeed to any solutions to any of these non-specific concerns.⁴

The secretary to the Local Government Board for Ireland wrote to each council chairman that,

You should take immediate steps to establish such a Committee, of which you will be Chairman. The Committee should comprise representatives of local authorities, trades unions and philanthropic organisations. It is important that some of the members should be women.⁵

The letter concluded by stating that,

A national relief fund is about to be organised, and it is intended, should distress arise, that the local distribution of the sums made available shall be entrusted to the Committees, over which the Mayors and the Chairmen of Councils will preside.⁶

There are several elements in the letters that demonstrate what were to be recurring themes in subsequent pension and allowances legislation. They were indicative of the

⁴ Local Government Board to Local Authorities, 10 August 1914. Louth County Archive, LCC/MB/002/008. Also Local Government Board to Local Authorities, 10, 12, 21 August 1914. Waterford Board of Guardians correspondence book 1914.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

uncertain response to the emerging crisis of the aftercare of unprecedented number of casualties and their dependents.

The imprecise language is perhaps the most immediate point of interest. Even taking into account a modern interpretation of the text, a degree of ambivalence rather than instruction is apparent. The wording of the correspondence suggests that Distress Committees be formed rather than directing that they must be established. Similarly the representative composition of the committees is suggested to the Chairmen and could easily be interpreted as optional, not mandatory.

Only with regard to the inclusion of women as committee members do the wishes of central government and the Local Government Board seem clear cut. At a time when women were not prominent in public administration, their inclusion in a government-sponsored scheme can be considered a progressive step, albeit one in line with their already well established involvement in charitable enterprises. The compulsory inclusion of women in the all aspects of pension administration was to become an important feature of subsequent legislation that made the inclusion of women mandatory on the War Pension Committees that formed the core of the pension system. This aspect of the contribution of women to the war effort has been neglected heretofore.

The letter concludes with a reference to a national relief fund and that money made available shall be entrusted to local committees. It does not point out that money for the fund came public subscription to a private charitable body.⁷ In effect it indicated that the government intended and indeed had the authority to appropriate private contributions given to lessen hardships caused by their own actions or inactions. It illustrated again the deep-seated attitude towards the relief of hardship and poverty.

⁷ *The Times*. 7 August 1914.

Relief was the bailiwick of private charities or was funded by local councils setting and collecting the local Poor Rate. The main concern of government was to concentrate on critical issues of national policy such as winning the war. The importance of this series of letters is that they helped develop a facility within councils to deal with responsibilities delegated to them by central government. The administration of war pensions and allowances became one such undertaking.

The first step in improving the situation for wounded soldiers and sailors was the report of a committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board to examine the provision of employment for disabled servicemen. It was presented to Parliament in May 1915. It highlighted some important issues and proposed some noteworthy changes. These can be summarised into the following points.⁸

The state had primacy in regards to war disabled.

A liberal view of state responsibilities towards the war disabled.

Provision of correctly fitted prosthetic limbs.

Proper treatment for those of 'unsound mind' in an institution other than an asylum.

Provision of suitable and sufficient training for the war disabled.

The establishment of a central committee to meet the needs of war disabled.

A feature of the report was an analysis of discharges from the military from the outbreak of war to April 1915.

⁸ Report of the committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board upon the provision of employment for sailors and soldiers disabled in the war. (London, 1915).

	Army.	Navy.	Total.
<i>Eyesight cases</i> - - - - -	245	9	254
<i>Wounds and injuries to leg</i> (necessitating amputation) -	205	10	215
" " <i>arm</i> (" ") -	170	6	176
" " <i>hand</i> (" ") -	15	6	21
<i>Wounds and injuries to leg</i> (not necessitating amputation) -	277	9	286
" " <i>arm</i> (" ") -	272	3	275
<i>Wounds and injuries to hand</i> (not necessitating amputation of complete hand) - - - - -	224	11	235
<i>Wounds and injuries to head</i> - - - - -	123	4	127
<i>Herniæ</i> - - - - -	96	5	101
<i>Miscellaneous wounds and injuries</i> (not included in above) -	129	6	135
<i>Chest complaints</i> - - - - -	298	4	302*
<i>Rheumatism</i> - - - - -	116	6	122
<i>Heart disease</i> - - - - -	284	—	284
<i>Epilepsy</i> - - - - -	47	—	47
<i>Nervous diseases</i> - - - - -	54	11	65
<i>Insanity</i> - - - - -	29	—	29
<i>Deafness</i> - - - - -	134	—	134
<i>Frostbite</i> - - - - -	6	—	6
<i>Miscellaneous disabilities</i> - - - - -	150	13	163
Total - - - - -	2,874	103	2,977

* Including 200 cases of tubercle of the lungs.

The report revealed that 49% of army and 47% of navy disability discharges were due to wounds; the remainder were due to illnesses of mind or body. Over 10% of discharges were as a result of chest complaints and three quarters of those were diagnosed as tubercle of the lungs. Just less than 10% were due to heart disease.⁹ This combined 20% rate of disability among predominantly regular and reservist servicemen allows for some deductions to be made. The first is that modern warfare imposed great physical hardship on soldiers as armies fought all year round, often in inclement weather conditions. Consequently it became more likely that the health of some soldiers would break down. Another is that as many recalled reservists were from that section of society that existed in a precarious state of health anyway, there was a greater likelihood that they would succumb to the rigours of trench life. The figures for discharges due to non-battle disabilities, even at this stage of the war, were

⁹ Ibid. p. 3.

surprising and challenged the widely held perception that combat casualties dominated the First World War. While it is accepted that the conflict produced more combat deaths than non-combat, it remains apparent that disease and physical breakdown did not disappear. Rather it seems that while improved medical facilities reduced the number of fatalities suffered, they did not prevent illness or disease rendering significant numbers of personnel unfit for further service. Preconceptions of the post-war life and experience of many veterans is thus challenged.

This unexpected finding demanded further research that has led to an awareness of the poor standard of health among the general population in the early twentieth century, especially among men of military age. An examination of potential recruits later in the war illustrates this. In the UK between November 1917 and October 1918, two and a half million men were medically examined for military service. Only 36% were found to be robust enough for all military activities, 22.5% were fit enough for service that did not include real physical exertion, leaving the remainder eligible for office work only or refused admittance to the military altogether.¹⁰

To conclude this aspect of the outline, a look at the official figures of officers and men discharged for disability from the outbreak of war until 31 March 1918 confirms the trends found in the 1915 figures. The last line of the chart below show that wounds and injuries account for 42.4 % of pensions awarded, while disease accounts for the remaining 57.6%.¹¹

¹⁰ JM Winter, 'Britain's Lost Generation of the First World War' in *Population Studies* Vol 31 No 3 (Nov 1977), p.455

¹¹ First annual report of the Minister of Pensions, to 31st March, 1918. London, 1919) p. 140.

APPENDIX XI.

NAVY AND ARMY—RETURN OF OFFICERS AND MEN PENSIONED FOR DISABILITY FROM THE
BEGINNING OF THE WAR TO THE 31ST MARCH, 1918, SO FAR AS
CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO NATURE OF DISABILITY.

	Officers.		Warrant Officers, Petty Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Men.		Total.	Per- centage of Gross Total.
	Navy.	Army.	Navy.	Army.		
Eyesight cases	36	82	1,086	8,059	9,263	2·9
Wounds and injuries to legs (necessitating amputation)	3	76	203	8,367	8,649	2·7
Wounds and injuries to arms (necessitating amputation) ..	1	30	108	4,531	4,670	1·5
Wounds and injuries to legs (not necessitating amputation)	15	272	392	37,047	37,726	11·9
Wounds and injuries to arms (not necessitating amputation)	—	108	341	27,184	27,633	8·7
Wounds and injuries to hands (not necessitating amputation)	4	22	283	14,080	14,389	4·5
Wounds and injuries to head ..	7	147	539	12,188	12,881	4·1
Hernia	5	31	138	2,429	2,603	0·8
Miscellaneous wounds and in- juries	3	328	316	16,553	17,200	5·3
Chest complaints	55	278	2,767	34,099	37,429	11·8
Tuberculosis	37	193				
Rheumatism	33	187	941	19,499	20,660	6·5
Heart Disease	52	341	1,548	31,402	33,343	10·5
Epilepsy	6	47	217	3,016	3,286	1·0
Nervous diseases—						
Shell shock	—	127	1,293	16,228	18,596	5·9
Neurasthenia	87	505				
Miscellaneous	70	280				
Insanity	26	97	492	1,659	2,274	0·7
Deafness	12	42	406	6,071	6,531	2·1
Frost bite (including cases of amputation of feet or legs) ..	—	4	—	2,920	2,924	[0·9
Miscellaneous diseases:—						
Bright's disease	16	83	1,139	55,582	57,663	18·2
Debility	5	166				
Ulcer of stomach	12	64				
Varicocele	3	27				
Enteric and malaria	19	178				
Spinal	11	24				
Appendicitis	4	45				
Other diseases	62	223				
	590	4,007	12,200	300,914	317,720*	100

* Of this total, wounds and injuries account for 135,014, or 42·4 per cent., and disease for 182,706, or 57·6 per cent.

The Local Government Board report was a precursor for the Naval and Military War Pensions Act, 1915 enacted on 10 November that year. The Act established a Statutory Committee of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation that

For the purposes herein-after mentioned relating to pensions and grants and allowances made in respect of the present war to officers and men in the naval and military services of His Majesty and their wives, widows, children and

other dependants, and the care of officers and men disabled in consequence of the present war....¹²

The Royal Patriotic Fund was a charitable organisation founded under royal patronage during the Crimean War but the extent and ranking of that patronage had declined over time as the organisation strayed from its original mandate. In spite of this, those controlling the Fund had maintained close connections with successive administrations to the extent that it was revitalised from the unevenly managed organisation that it had become by an Act of Parliament in 1903. Why an organisation best described as semi-official was chosen to manage such an important issue is unclear. Possible reasons include using the expertise and experience of an organization familiar with the needs of servicemen and their dependents. In addition after the 1903 Act there was a measure of government control. There was also a degree of distance from central authority that would allow what is now known as plausible deniability. Finally it was very much in line with traditional devolution of pension and welfare administration to private or local organisations.

The Statutory Committee consisted of twenty-seven members.

- Twelve appointed by the King including the chairman and vice-chairman, some to be women and at least two representatives of labour
- Six government appointees (Admiralty, Army Council, Treasury, 3 from Local Government Boards [England, Ireland, Scotland]).
- One National Health Insurance Joint Committee appointee.
- Two Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association appointees.
- Six General Council of the Corporation appointees including some women.

The government had proposed a quorum of six but was strongly opposed during the parliamentary debate to prevent a strong administration based faction with agendas

¹² Naval and Military War Pensions, &c., Act, 1915, Para 1(1).

that were not in accordance with the rest of the Committee. Likewise an attempt to restrict female representation was countered by parliament substituting the words ‘some women’ instead of the proposed fixed number.¹³ Balanced female representation was a reasonable proposal in accordance with the well-established role of women in welfare issues and even recognition of their expanding contribution in the war effort.

The Act provided for the establishment of local committees at county, county borough and every borough or district with a population of not less than 50,000 inhabitants. In addition to the duties already outlined the local committees had to make provision for the health, training and employment of discharged disabled officers and men and to provide grants to widows, children or other dependants of deceased officers and men for training and employment.¹⁴

From early 1916 throughout Ireland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, local authorities worked to form War Pension Committees as described in the Act. There were delays as the Statutory Committee, with the Prince of Wales as Chairman, established guidelines for councils to work to.¹⁵ Local authorities responded at different rates to the new legislation depending on local priorities, staffing levels and the availability of suitable candidates to serve as committee members. Thus far the examination of twenty-one local authority records in Ireland show that Carlow County Council acted first when on 29 February 1916 twenty individuals from a variety of organisations were appointed to the Local War Pensions Committee.

¹³ Ibid. Para 1(2)

¹⁴ Scheme for allowances from Navy and Army funds to dependants of deceased sailors and soldiers presented to both houses of Parliament 1 December 1915. Para 3(1).

¹⁵ Parliamentary debates, *Statutory Committee* (London, 2015), available at Hansard online (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1916/jan/04/statutory-committee#S5CV0077P0_19160104_CWA_1) Para 812. [25 July 2015].

However it was later that summer before the final composition of the county committee was approved. Their first meeting was held on 15 June 1916.¹⁶

On 14 March Dublin Municipal Council discussed the example of a model scheme that had been circulated to all local authorities by the Statutory Committee.¹⁷

Wicklow County Council took until May to consider whether they would adopt a scheme under the Act.¹⁸ Meanwhile in the same month the Secretary of Louth County Council wrote to the Secretary of the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association in Drogheda appreciating names submitted for the War Pensions Committee and bemoaning the difficulty he had finding suitable people to nominate.¹⁹

Many urban councils were not sufficiently populous to form their own committees and were often absorbed by larger county councils or formed sub-committees of County War Pension Committees. For example among urban councils examined there is no surviving record that Kingstown Urban District Council discussed the subject at all, but evidence found from late 1917 indicates that the town was represented on the County of Dublin War Pensions Committee by two of their councillors.²⁰ Similarly Bray UDC formed a sub-committee of the Wicklow War Pensions Committee.²¹

Longford and Tipperary South chose not to form committees. Longford County Council addressed the issue of a Local War Pension Committee in August 1916 and then did nothing. The topic dragged on until a committee was finally formed in July 1918, almost two years after the council first raised the matter.²²

¹⁶ Minutes of Carlow County Council 29 February 1916.

¹⁷ Minutes of Dublin Municipal Council 14 March 1916.

¹⁸ Minutes of Wicklow County Council 15 May 1916.

¹⁹ Louth County Council letter book 22 May 1916. LCC/ADM/LB/1/8.

²⁰ Minutes of Kingstown Urban District Council 6 December 1917.

²¹ Minutes of Wicklow County Council 18 Nov 1918.

²² Minutes of Longford County Council 16 Aug 1916 & 2 July 1918.

It is useful at this stage to look at the composition of some of the local committees to gain an awareness of who it was that undertook what could be an onerous task. Local Committees averaged twenty-eight members of whom the County or Municipal Council nominated twelve. Several councils appointed their own members to the new committees. Wicklow is unique in that all twelve council appointees were women who were confirmed in their position on 14 August 1916. Significant numbers of women served on committees across the country and many had personal reasons for doing so. For example the Countess of Rosse was a member of the King's (Offaly) County Committee from August 1916.²³ Her husband had been seriously wounded serving in the BEF the previous year.²⁴ Likewise a son of the Vice-Chairman of Louth Local War Pensions Committee, Lady Bellingham, had died on active service during 1915.²⁵ Many other groups with sizeable female membership such as the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association, the Soldiers and Sailors Help Society, the Women's National Health Association and The British Red Cross were strongly represented on War Pension Committees.

Two difficulties faced the committees as they settled into their work. The first was the imprecise wording of the legislation as to funding. It was written that 'Out of funds at their disposal' the committees were to

Supplement inadequate pensions, grants or separation allowances.

Award grants or pensions where they were not payable from public funds.

Make advance payments against pensions, grants or separation allowances to be awarded.²⁶

²³ Minutes of King's County Council, 25 August 1916.

²⁴ King's County Chronicle, 12 August 1915. p. 2.

²⁵ Minutes of Louth County Council, 27 May 1915 & 27 July 1916.

²⁶ Naval and Military War Pensions, &c., Act, 1915, Para3.

But the source of funding remained vague and uncertain and it quickly became apparent that local authorities were expected to shoulder the burden of the administrative expenses involved.

In practice the Statutory and Local Committees introduced another layer of official but non-governmental administration alongside the existing pension sections of the Admiralty, Army Council and Chelsea Commissioners. The Committees were obliged to process claims made directly to them, but also had a duty to investigate and verify claims lodged by veterans or their dependants with the existing bodies. The Committees were also obliged to carry out any other duty assigned to them by those organisations. By default the reciprocal applied. The Admiralty, Army Council and Chelsea Commissioners could decline to delegate tasks as they saw fit. This complicated inter-departmental arrangement in the financing and administration of pensions, grants and allowances combining central and local government along with private associations made it very likely that the whole process would develop into a labyrinth of bureaucracy. In practice this is exactly what many veterans found.

The second difficulty faced by the committees was caused by events in France. It was the late summer or autumn before most committees were organised sufficiently to get down to work. Meanwhile the losses of the Somme offensive taxed the military support services as an estimated 420,000 British and Dominion casualties were sustained between July and November of that year.²⁷ While the wounded and sick moved through the hospital system and the final tally of dead was made, the implications of the financial assurances given to servicemen and their families became apparent. It was also evident that the system for pension administration was not meeting the needs of disabled veterans or the requirements of government.

²⁷ Chris McCarthy, *The Somme, the day by day account* (London, 1993) p. 11.

With the formation of a new coalition in December 1916 government departments were re-organised with the creation of five new ministries. The Ministry of Pensions was one of these. The Ministry of Pensions Act 1916 and subsequent legislation passed all powers, duties and functions in respect of war pensions to an appointed government Minister. Even so many of his decisions were subject to outside influence. Most importantly financial matters were consolidated under Treasury oversight.

A significant piece of wartime pension legislation was the Naval and Military War Pensions (Committees) Act, 1917 passed on 20 December. This ordered the inclusion of two disabled veterans and the widow or other female dependant of a deceased serviceman in each local, district or sub-committee. The only stipulation was that each had to be in receipt of a War Pension. This was a significant step forward as the new committee members had first hand experience of the difficulties faced by disabled veterans and their families and were the people that the organisation had been developed to support. The additional members were not optional. Any committee that did not comply would have new members appointed by the Minister.²⁸ The addition of new committee members was helpful as the work tempo increased as casualties from Passchendaele battles came through the medical system. Later still, the losses from the German Spring Offensives in 1918 added to the workload. This increase can be illustrated by an examination of the work of one committee for one week in 1917 and a corresponding week in 1918. The City of Dublin War Pensions

²⁸ Naval and Military War Pensions (Committees) Act, 1917. Para 1(3).

Committee was one of the biggest in the country. It presented the following statistics to the Dublin Municipal Council.²⁹

Week ending 25 August 1917		Week ending 24 August 1918	
Women (Sub-Committee A)		Women (Sub-Committee A)	
Grants	£120 11s. 2d.	Grants	£307 0s. 8d.
Applicants	413	Applicants	1,131
Men (Sub-Committee B)		Men (Sub-Committee B)	
Grants	£161 17s. 5d.	Grants	£960 19s. 1d.
Applicants	211	Applicants	770
Total 1917		Total 1918	
Grants	£282 8s. 7d.	Grants	£1,267 19s. 1d.
Applicants	624	Applicants	1,901

Hindsight makes the dates significant but it cannot be determined how aware the Committee were of events in Belgium and France. 25 August 1917 is less than one month into the Third Battle for Ypres. It still had over two months to run. Likewise by August 1918 the British Army was recovering from the heavy losses suffered earlier in the year. The two Irish divisions in Northern Europe were engaged in both of these engagements suffering particularly heavy casualties in the latter. Such events were impossible to predict from the Committee offices at 42 York Street, but they encountered the consequences almost every day. In that year the number of female applicants increased almost threefold and male applicants increased over three and one half times the August 1917 figure. The overall weekly average shows a three-fold increase during this period.

The establishment of the Ministry of Pensions did finally provide some impetus to the need to find suitable work for disabled veterans. Good medical care, retraining and a decent job were all that many servicemen expected. Unfortunately both government

²⁹ Dublin Municipal Council Minutes, 7 Oct 1918.

and private schemes to fulfil their needs did not meet the demand. When the war ended there was no shortage of demobilised able-bodied men available for most jobs.

There was also great reluctance on the part of many employers to give work to disabled veterans because of safety or productivity concerns.

Several well-known companies made positions available to disabled veterans. These included firms such as Read and Company of Parliament Street, Dublin, one of the oldest retail premises in the city having been in the same premises since the seventeenth century. Another was Weir and Sons of Grafton Street.³⁰ The firm's owner had a personal interest in the welfare of ex-servicemen. His eldest son, Captain Andrew Herbert (Bertie) Weir served in the Dublin Fusiliers and had been gassed in 1917. He survived the war otherwise intact.³¹ Other companies offering training or employment were located in Cork, Limerick, Kildare, Waterford and Tipperary.

There were also firms across Antrim, Armagh and Derry. These had the advantage of the King's Roll, a government scheme dating from 1920 that allowed the use of a special Coat of Arms as a company letterhead provided that at least 5% of the workforce were disabled veterans. Some 30,000 companies joined the scheme in the United Kingdom but it was not extended to southern Ireland because of the increasing boycott of, and hostility towards British authority from the summer of that year.³²

The number of jobs or training opportunities that survived the transition to the Irish Free State and the subsequent civil war has not been determined yet.

Post-war Pension Committees carried on even as many local authorities started a campaign of non co-operation with the Dublin based government. During 1922 two regional Committee areas, Ireland South and Ulster, superseded the original War

³⁰ John Galsworthy (ed.) *Reveille*. (London, Feb. 1919), pp 548-9.

³¹ No author. *Weir and sons, Dublin Limited 1869-1994* (Dublin, 1994) pp18-9.

³² Deborah Cohen. *The war come home, disabled veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (London, 2001) pp 39-40.

Pension organisation in Ireland. The southern region had representatives in all counties and permanent offices in Dublin, Cork, Mullingar, Limerick and Waterford.³³

Pensions continued to be paid in cash at local Post Offices. The pensioner presented an Identity Certificate that was checked against an Allowance Book by the Postmaster. Every three months pensioners completed a Life Certificate to ensure payment for the next quarter but this was later changed to half yearly certificates to reduce administrative costs.³⁴

Article 5 of the Anglo-Irish Treaty required the Free State government to pay a fair and equitable share of the cost of war pensions but it never did so.³⁵ Even with a more stable financial position in the new state, it appears unlikely that there was ever a will to fund pensions. This requirement of the treaty was waived in 1926, with the full costs being borne by the British Exchequer. Irrespective of where they lived, there is evidence that the bureaucracy of applying for a pension and the amount of pension awarded often aggrieved veterans. Those in the Free State also felt disquiet with regard to their treatment in their native land which in time led to an enquiry by Dáil Eireann in 1929.³⁶

This essay is a brief introduction to an area of Irish military heritage that has long been neglected. An examination of available literature shows a preponderance of tales of derring-do and military prowess with casualties often as a footnote. Research is uncovering the story of the Irish Great War veterans who did not come home to parades or adulation but rather to doubt, indifference or sometimes hostility. The

³³ Composition and functions of British War Pensions advisory committee, Ireland. PIN56/15, National Archives Kew.

³⁴ Notes on War Pensions issued by the Ministry of Pensions for the guidance of War Pension Committees. (London, 1923), pp 22-3.

³⁵ Treaty between Great Britain & Ireland, signed 6th December, 1921, at London, Article 5.

³⁶ Report of the Committee on claims of British Ex-servicemen (Dublin, 1929).

veterans unable or with limited ability to work were supported by a system of pensions and medical assistance established by the erstwhile enemy of the state that they now found themselves living in. This financial and medical support, however imperfect, was available without fail irrespective of the political climate between the Free State and the United Kingdom. The full story of these veterans is still unfolding.

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