

Ireland and the Difficulties of World War I Memory

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Abstract

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World War I was a great watershed in European history. The war left an indelible mark on every combatant nation. The memory of this conflict influenced European history for the rest of the twentieth century. While many memory works have discussed the creation of war memory in Britain, France and Germany, few have discussed the war memory of Ireland. In 1914 Ireland was rife with political tension between nationalists and unionists who disagreed over the fate of Irish independence from Britain. The onslaught of World War I intensified these political divisions and further divided the Irish people. Such divisions caused great difficulty for the Irish in forming a collective memory of the war. Whereas Britain surrounded itself with war memorials and testaments to the soldier's sacrifice, Ireland (specifically southern Ireland) failed to create a similarly coherent war memory. This thesis will explore the experiences of nationalist soldiers during the war to illustrate the fragmentation of the southern Irish which prevented the soldiers from forming a united war memory to pass on to the public. I will also discuss how the Northern Irish monopolized the memory of the iconic World War I battle on the Somme which prevented the southern Irish from incorporating the

battle's memory. By examining the difficulties of creating a national war memorial in the post war period and the subsequent memorial building boom in the 1990's, this thesis will show how influential politics were in the failure to create a war memory.

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Chapter One: The Fragmentation of Memory and the Irish Soldier Experience

World War I historiography lacks research on the role of nationalist Irish soldiers. While soldiers of other nationalities have received extensive attention, Irishmen have not. Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and even Ernst Jünger are well known names in the realm of WWI studies. Where are the poems and literary works of Irish soldiers in the Great War canon? Assuredly there were many Irish soldiers who wrote of their experiences. WWI research covers the minute details of each battle, cataloging each gruesome death. Historians are aware of the conditions in the British trenches and how the Germans survived gas attacks. We know why and how the French fought, and what they did on leave. As members of the British Army, Irish servicemen played an integral part not only in the war effort but also in Irish politics. Given their service in the world's largest army and their tense terms of service, why has history neglected the nationalist Irish soldier? We know little of their service or war experience. Military service for Irishmen was voluntary, so what motivated Irishmen to join the Empire's army? Once in the British Army, how did Irishmen navigate the muddy political waters in Ireland? For Irish nationalists, political tensions in Ireland over Home Rule deepened the complications of serving in the British Army.

Although historians disagree over WWI Irish enlistment numbers, a rough estimate puts the number at 210,000.¹ While this is paltry compared with British enlistment numbers, it is important to remember that each of these men voluntarily took up the mantle of war. The experiences of these soldiers have been forgotten by history for too long. This neglected piece of Irish historiography is essential to understanding Irish history in the twentieth century and

¹ Keith Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

the formation of Irish memory of WWI. Indeed, the troubles of twentieth century Irish history stem from this pivotal moment. Understanding the experience of Irish soldiers within the context of Ireland's political turmoil is paramount to understanding the Irish experience in the twentieth century. The experience of Irish soldiers during the war gives great insight into the fragmentation of the southern Irish and how this fragmentation prevented a coherent collective memory of the war.

Upon their return home, Catholic nationalist soldiers were greeted by yet another war wherein they had to choose sides. This time, the lines were not as clearly drawn. Their weapons were no longer raised against Germans but against fellow Irishmen. Not only were the WWI veterans confronted with political violence and turmoil upon their return, but they also had to reconcile the part they played by serving in the British Army. As nationalists, these Irishmen were not greeted as war heroes even though they were on the victor's side. These ex-soldiers confronted disdain and disregard from their countrymen. Were they patriots or traitors? Some soldiers felt the need to join organizations like Sinn Fein or the Irish Republican Brotherhood in an effort to expunge their record of British military service. The complex situation experienced by nationalist Irish soldiers upon their return coupled with the part they played in postwar conflicts makes the war experience of Irish soldiers worthy of study. By understanding the experience of these soldiers during the war, one gains an understanding of the complex political and social situation in Ireland during the war. The war experience of nationalist soldiers provides the foundation for understanding the part they chose to play in postwar conflicts. This chapter examines the writings of nationalist Irish soldiers in order to

illustrate the fragmentation of the nationalist party which prevented nationalist soldiers from forming a united opinion of the war and their place in it.

To better understand the political ramifications of nationalists serving in the British Army, one must first understand the political situation these men experienced during the war. While the world grappled with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the nationalists struggled to assert Irish independence. The outbreak of WWI forestalled the implementation of the Home Rule bill, passed in 1914. Some nationalists worried the British government would rescind their approval of the bill if the nationalists did not support the war effort. Party leader John Redmond urged the Irish Volunteers, the nationalist militia, to aid the Allied cause. Redmond and his followers firmly believed support of the Allied cause would lead to enforcement of the Home Rule Bill during or after the war. While many nationalists and Irish Volunteers believed as Redmond did, others did not. These Irish Volunteers believed independence would be secured only by fighting in Ireland for freedom. This small group of Irish Volunteers urged Irish neutrality yet was infiltrated by the Irish Republican Brotherhood and later took part in the Easter Rising. The majority of the Volunteers took Redmond's side and renamed themselves the National Volunteers. Many of these men formed the ranks of the 10th (Irish) and 16th (Irish) divisions within the British Army. The splintering of the nationalist party made understanding the nationalist position on the war difficult for Irish soldiers. They questioned whether they or the nationalists at home were the true warriors for Irish independence, especially after 1916.

Many Redmondite nationalists enlisted to prove their dedication to Home Rule.

Redmond felt there was no better way to show the British government how dedicated and mature the Irish could be. He also realized the political power inherent in having soldiers to send to Britain's aid. Yet even though he publicly approved the enlistment of Irish troops, he did not call for soldiers until after the 1914 passage of the Third Home Rule bill.² Once the bill went through, Redmond wholeheartedly encouraged Irishmen to enlist:

It would be a disgrace for ever to our country, and a reproach to her manhood, and a denial of the lessons of her history, if young Ireland confined their efforts to remaining at home to defend the shores of Ireland from an unlikely invasion and shrunk from the duty of proving on the field of battle that gallantry and courage which has distinguished our race all through its history.³

Redmond avoided mention of anything British; instead he implored Irishmen to fight for a new independent Ireland as a show of good faith in the Home Rule bill. Redmond was extremely popular and a great number of nationalists took his words to heart.

In addition to grappling with the fragmentation of their party, nationalists had to cope with the formation of Irish regiments. Within the British Army, Irish recruits made up separate Irish regiments. These regiments were initially divided along religious and, consequently, political lines. Most regiments were designated as Irish (Catholic) or Ulster (Protestant). The British Army possessed three Irish volunteer divisions, the 10th (Irish), 16th (Irish) and 36th (Ulster). While these divisions were segregated for the most part, at times Catholics and Protestants served side by side at the front. As high casualties depleted the ranks, the religious divisions were diluted. Thus, not only did nationalist soldiers contend with political schisms

² Ibid, 15.

³ Ibid, 14.

within their own party at home, they also had to confront the concept of fighting next to a unionist. Unlike their French or British counterparts, when Irish nationalists went to the front they fought more than German machine gun fire.

For nationalist Irishmen, service in the British Army was a more complicated situation than they anticipated. They were simultaneously confronted with the horrors of trench warfare and also increasing political tensions at home. As the war progressed, Irish servicemen on leave confronted the disapproving glare of their fellow Irishmen. Particularly after the Easter Rising in 1916, many Irish felt service in the King's army meant betrayal of their country and scorned Irish soldiers for serving in the Empire's army. After all, this was the same army that had brutally repressed the Irish for centuries.

With contention surrounding service in the British Army, one wonders why nationalists enlisted. The reasons were complex and numerous. Money was a predominant motivator. Military pay was fifteen shillings a week which usually went to the serviceman's family. This pay was more than most Irishmen made in a month. This "economic conscription"⁴ funneled many Irishmen, nationalist and unionist, into the British Army. James Connolly, an Irish ex-serviceman and politician, believed "British colonial exploitation had so depressed employment and wages in Ireland that men had no alternative to joining up."⁵ According to Connolly, there was no voluntary enlistment, only financial destitution and conscription:

Fighting at the front today there are many thousands whose soul revolts against what they are doing, but who must nevertheless continue fighting and murdering because

⁴ Ibid, 19.

⁵ Ibid, 19.

they were deprived of a living at home, and compelled to enlist that those dear to them might not starve.⁶

Abject poverty was a profound motivator for Irishmen, regardless of their politics. Although politics and religion were deeply held values, putting food on the table was more important.

Concepts of duty and honor also deeply influenced some Irish nationalists to join the British Army. World War I obliterated any genuine belief in the meanings of duty and honor. Yet, for some, in 1914 these words still rang true. For some Irishmen these concepts were deeply ingrained. The idea of being perceived as a coward or staying at home while friends enlisted deeply threatened many Irishmen's concept of masculinity. During this era men continued to cling to such concepts, however illusory they appeared in hindsight.⁷ The façade of duty and honor was paramount to maintaining one's dignity in the face of family and friends. Many Irishmen would rather die maintaining the illusion of masculinity than live perceived as a coward. The fact that many Irishmen enlisted with friends, brothers or in groups is evidence of this point. Take, for instance, the case of Dublin Rugby clubs. The President of the Irish Rugby Football Union issued a call to duty for all rugby players. Over two hundred Dublin rugby players enlisted. This show of camaraderie and duty to each other persuaded the commanding officer of the 7th Dublin Fusiliers to open D Company to all Dublin rugby players who wished to serve together. He issued this statement in the Dublin newspapers:

To the Irish Rugby Football Union Volunteers, I am keeping my Battalion open for you to join. Come in your platoons. 'Mess', 'drill', and work together, and, I hope, fight the common enemy together.⁸

⁶ Ibid, 19.

⁷ Myles Dungan, *They Shall Not Grow Old, Irish Soldiers and the Great War*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 12.

⁸ Ibid, 23.

The footballers who answered the call came from the middle to upper classes. D Company was therefore comprised of lawyers, doctors, professors, bankers, university students, civil servants and insurance agents.⁹ For these men the monetary reward of service had nothing to do with enlistment. They enlisted with their friends and comrades, men they held in high regard. They enlisted out of duty to their friends. These men would not let their friends go to battle alone, not simply out of duty but also to preserve their own masculinity and reputation.

The concept of duty was not restricted to serving with and for their fellow Irishmen. Irish soldiers often enlisted out of duty to Ireland. It is important to remember that Ireland had been an official part of the British Empire since 1801. Although it was not necessarily popular to serve, there was a long tradition of Irish military service in the King's army. Serving in the British Army was, even for many nationalists, serving Ireland. The *Evening News* in Waterford quoted an anonymous soldier on October 26, 1914:

In deadly combat we are Irishmen [and also] we are British soldiers and proud of the name . . . it is sufficient to show that though loving and fighting for the Empire to which he is proud to belong, the Irish soldier still cherishes his true nationality and glories in the name of Ireland.¹⁰

If Britain were under attack then so was Ireland, for who would protect Ireland if the Empire fell? Propaganda speeches and posters played on nationalist sympathies by emphasizing the plight of "little Catholic Belgium," a small Catholic nation besieged by warfare. Many nationalists made the correlation between Ireland's lack of independence and the domination of Belgium by Germany. Typical war pamphlets read, "What has happened in Belgium might by

⁹ Ibid, 23.

¹⁰ Thomas P. Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers? The times and world of a southern Catholic Irishman (1876-1916) enlisting in the British army during the First World War*, (Liverpool: University Press, 1995), 37.

now be taking place in Ireland but for the British Fleet and the Allied Armies.”¹¹ Propaganda such as this hit home, stirring certain nationalists to enlist as later soldier narratives will demonstrate.

Once Belgium attained victim status in the British and Irish press, Germany and Austria were quickly perceived as the aggressors. This enabled some nationalists to view their military service as a noble duty that sought to rectify a great wrong done to an innocent country. Writer Tom Kettle firmly believed that the role of the British military during the war absolved the British of all prior imperial wrongs. Kettle enlisted because he truly believed it was his duty to protect Ireland and Belgium. The war was in defense of the integrity of small nations:

It is impossible not to be with Belgium in the struggle. It is impossible any longer to be passive. Germany has thrown down a well-considered challenge to all the deepest forces of our civilization. War is hell, but it is only a hell of suffering, not a hell of dishonor. And through it, over its flaming coals, Justice must walk, were it on bare feet.¹²

Once in the British Army many of these Irishmen maintained loyalty to the army regardless of their nationalist beliefs. This was evident at Limburg prison camp in Germany. Irish Catholic prisoners of war were given the opportunity to form an Irish brigade within the German army. As inducement to join, the Germans offered them better food and less physical labor. The Irish soldiers requested all British troops receive these concessions or they would not accept positions within the German army, stating “in addition to being Irish Catholics, we have the honour to be British soldiers.”¹³ Ultimately only 53 out of the 2500 prisoners of war

¹¹ Jeffrey, 12.

¹² T.M. Kettle, *The Ways of War* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917), 107.

¹³ Thomas P. Dooley, *Irishmen or British Soldiers?* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 1.

accepted the offer.¹⁴ Irish prisoners of war were difficult to subvert. This shows considerable pride in both their nationality and in the army they served.

The reasons for nationalist enlistment in the British Army were numerous and complex. Financial inducement, political affiliation, duty, honor and masculinity motivated Irishmen to take up their weapons as members of the British Army. Yet this information is, for the most part, secondhand. The nationalist soldiers themselves hold the key to understanding their experience. To get to the heart of why Irishmen served and to better understand the complexity of their service, one must delve into the writings of individual Irish soldiers. By examining their writings from the war years, one gains a better sense of their motivations and opinions towards the war. Much of our knowledge regarding the experiences of trench soldiers comes from the writings of the soldiers themselves. Writers encapsulated the war experience for their country and were instrumental in forming postwar memories of the conflict. British writers, as citizens of the victorious nation, had the opportunity to consider the darker aspects of the war, whereas defeated German writers had to find meaning from their loss. Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Ernst Jünger illustrated different yet complementary pictures of warfare. Owen, tragically killed during the war, forced his readers to see the blood-stained fields, whereas Jünger described the carnage to illustrate the heroism of soldiers in the face of slaughter. Each of these soldiers secured his place in the hallowed halls of WWI literature by showing the gruesome face of battle. Their writings are valuable in determining not only how the war affected those who waged it, but also how their experiences shaped the collective memory of the war.

¹⁴ Ibid, 1.

Irish writers evinced a particularly Irish tone that illustrated their deep loyalty to Ireland. Regardless of why they joined the British army, these Irish servicemen served for the Ireland they loved. Time and again these men spoke of serving for Ireland rather than Britain or its Empire. The writings and poetry of Patrick MacGill, Francis Ledwidge, and Tom Kettle reflect the splintering of the nationalist party and how this fragmentation played out at the front. Their poems, narratives and memoirs illustrate the complexities of serving in the British Army. The experiences and writings of Patrick MacGill, Francis Ledwidge and Tom Kettle offer three different perspectives of the war and military service. Although Ledwidge and Kettle were vocal nationalists, MacGill chose to keep his politics private. While MacGill focused on the task at hand, Ledwidge used his poetry to escape his surroundings. Kettle confronted opposition to nationalist service in the British Army. All three men illustrate the fragmentation of the nationalist party which prevented the soldiers from forming a united opinion of the war and their place in it. Without a unified viewpoint of the war, the soldiers were unable to provide a unified collective memory of the war to those at home. The fragmentation inherent in the nationalist party played out, not only on the front, but also in the memory of the war in the post war era.

Patrick MacGill was a writer prior to the war, and he worked as a reporter for *The Daily Express* until 1913, when he became an editor with the Chapter Library at Windsor Castle.¹⁵ He enlisted in the 2nd London Irish Battalion as a rifleman, and later served as a stretcher-bearer. During the war MacGill wrote extensively, beginning with *The Amateur Army* about his experience at training camp, published in 1915. While this book expressed the everyday events

¹⁵ Jim Haughey, *The First World War in Irish Poetry*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 104.

of training camp, MacGill's *The Great Push*, published in 1916, took an entirely different approach to the war. In his many publications, MacGill expressed incredulity at the ugliness of the war, yet did not incorporate any insight as to his feelings towards his position in the war effort. MacGill focused on the frontline experience rather than politics. He made no outward effort to reconcile his position in the British Army with his Irishness. For MacGill, the war was about fighting for the man next to him whether or not he was Irish. He endeavored to give the reader an honest account of the war experience.

In his preface, MacGill stated that *The Amateur Army* was meant for those who had or might serve. The book detailed the inner workings of training camp and improvements made by enlisted men as they progressed through their training. MacGill did not differentiate between British or Irish soldiers; soldiers were soldiers regardless of their birthplace. Prior to the war he had no inclination towards military service and believed this was the case for many of his fellow soldiers. MacGill believed few men could explain why they served and did not attempt to explain his own enlistment. In this way MacGill told a very different story of the war than his fellow soldier writers. MacGill failed to describe any concern for "Little Catholic Belgium" or worry over what his countrymen would think of his service. For MacGill, the only thing that mattered was explaining his new life in the army. While MacGill shed no light on the motivation for his enlistment, his detailed account illustrates the war experience of a soldier without any illuminating political background.

The Amateur Army depicted a man quite happy with his army training life. MacGill wrote affectionately of his rifle, calling it his new best friend. He held the young officers in high

regard and greatly admired them. There were three aspects that appealed to him about his new military life. First, the rifle's reply to the pull of his trigger finger; second, the gossip of his fellow soldiers and third, the marching of thousands of men moving steadily forward.¹⁶ The book focused on the intricacies of training: night exercises, mimic warfare, general inspections, leave, sick parade and the endless waiting inherent in military life.

The overarching theme of MacGill's first war account was dedication to his soldierly duties. He focused on the development of the men both as soldiers and as a team. MacGill dedicated an entire chapter to "The Coffee shop and Wankin" wherein he described the local coffee shop as a soldier hangout. This coffee shop was a place for soldiers to relax and bond. Here MacGill also conveyed the carefree existence of a soldier in training. They were all eagerness. His narration was a perfect time capsule of a moment on the precipice of war because the soldiers had no clue what horrors would befall them within a few short months. Between this description and his detailed love for his rifle, MacGill illustrated a life which revolved around relationships: especially relationships between his fellow soldiers and officers. These relationships were tested when his unit moved to the front and were visible in his book *The Great Push*.

MacGill did not struggle with reconciling his Irish identity with his position in the British Army. Like many Irishmen, he felt no difficulty serving in the British Army. He lived in Scotland immediately before the war, and perhaps this enabled him to see his British compatriots simply as fellow soldiers rather than British. Although he enlisted in the 2nd London Irish Battalion, there were also English and Scots in his unit. The standing joke was that only he and the

¹⁶ Patrick MacGill, *The Amateur Army*, (London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1915), 71.

colonel were true Irishmen. Yet the lack of fellow Irishmen did not appear to bother MacGill. To him, a soldier was simply a soldier and nationality did not matter as much as dedication to the unit.

The Amateur Army was filled with MacGill's excitement for active duty and the worry-free existence of training camp. *The Great Push*, on the other hand, illustrated the darker aspect of his war experience and detailed the Battle of Loos in 1915. Much of MacGill's book was written in the trenches and in the hospital after he sustained an arm injury. The immediacy of his writing expressed the gruesome nature of the war in which he was so eager to engage.

Like many war writers, MacGill did not shy away from brutal details. He did this not to shock his readers, but to illustrate the horrific conditions of war to the fullest extent. As a stretcher-bearer, MacGill frequently witnessed the cruel and random reality of warfare. Throughout the book he sadly noted there was only so much he could do to stem the tide of death because there were so many to help and so little time. As MacGill was summoned to aid the wounded, he recalled the gruesome sight and his feeling of insignificance in the face of such wanton killing:

The harrowing sight was repellent, antagonistic to my mind. The tortured things lying at my feet were symbols of insecurity, ominous reminders of danger from which no discretion could save a man. My soul was barren of pity; fear went down into the innermost parts of me, fear for myself. The dead and dying lay all around me; I felt a vague obligation to the latter; they must be carried out. But why should I trouble! Where could I begin? Everything was so far apart. I was too puny to start my labors in such a derelict world. The difficulty of accommodating myself to an old task under new conditions was enormous.¹⁷

¹⁷ Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1916), 89.

This passage conveys MacGill's moment of human fear. He saw the horrors of death and felt he could do nothing to stop it. By sharing his almost debilitating fear, MacGill showed the reader what war does to a man. The Battle of Loos was the first major offensive of the British Army. Its lack of success cost numerous lives, many of which MacGill attempted to save.

The Great Push also indicated a lack of animosity from Irishmen such as MacGill and many of his fellow soldiers toward the men across no man's land. Throughout the book, MacGill described numerous instances and conversations that conveyed ambivalence toward the Germans. After a successful charge into the German trenches, MacGill found an officer's chambers. Curious if the German trenches were as comfortable as rumors indicated, MacGill looked around. On a four poster bed he found a dying German officer. Rather than kill or torture the officer, MacGill gave the man morphine tablets. MacGill also assisted the officer in pulling a family picture from his pocket so he could look at it while he died. MacGill prevented any other British soldiers from entering the room so the soldier could die in peace. This lack of animosity indicates MacGill's compassion despite the destruction around him. Soldiering was just a job to him. It was not his passion and he felt no genuine dislike or anger towards his enemy. This instance also indicates an adherence to compassion and honor even amid the horrors of war. MacGill saw the Germans as fellow veterans of the same senseless bloodshed:

Of those who are England's enemies I know, even now, very little. I cannot well pass judgment on a nation through seeing distorted lumps of clotting and mangled flesh pounded into the muddy floor of a trench, or strewn broadcast on the reverse slopes of a shell-scarred parapet. The enemy suffered as we did, yelled with pain when his wounds prompted him, forgot perhaps in the insane combat some of the nicer tenets of chivalry.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid, 101.

According to MacGill, war was a useless machine grinding up young men for the aspirations of kings.

This lack of animosity towards the German enemy was characteristic of many of MacGill's comrades. After returning from leave in Ireland, Rifleman Pryor commented that in Ireland all the women and old men had a fierce hatred of the Germans. Pryor believed if these people were in the trenches they could not be kept from going over the top.

"We have no particular hatred for the men across the way," said Pryor. "My God the trenches tone a man's temper. I believe we are the wrong men, we able-bodied youths with even tempers. It's the men who are past military age who should be out here."¹⁹

This quote from Rifleman Pryor indicates a reversal in the eagerness of war from the older men to the younger. Typically young men are portrayed as blood-thirsty for war. As Pryor stated, the trenches temper a man and the eager young men from *The Amateur Army* were no longer eager to participate in such a bloodletting.

For much of the book MacGill focused on the senselessness of the carnage and his duties as a stretcher-bearer. He refrained from commenting on struggles in Ireland and did not mention the political tension of serving in the army. For MacGill there was little tension. He was completely comfortable with his dual identity of Irishman and British soldier. Nevertheless, there were moments where MacGill took pride in his Irishness. When the Germans mounted a counter-attack after the British Army took Loos, men from the forward trenches retreated into MacGill's trench and continued to retreat in order to escape the assault. As disorganization and fear set in, the men from the forward trenches continued to retreat although no official order

¹⁹ Ibid, 258.

was issued. As the retreating men rushed past MacGill and his unit, his fellow Rifleman Bill Teake yelled at the men, telling them they were cowards and to stand their ground. MacGill wrote disparagingly of the retreating men and criticized their lack of discipline. When the colonel ordered the men to fight to the last, MacGill noted that unlike Scottish and British regiments, the Irish held their ground and stated that “the Irish had their backs to the wall, no man deserted his post.”²⁰ Embellishments of battlefield bravery and heroism frequent many war narratives. While MacGill may have embellished the bravery of the Irish soldiers, it is important that he included the story in his narrative. This demonstrates obvious pride in his fellow Irishmen. Although he felt at home in the British Army, MacGill was proud to be an Irishman. Assertion of his nationality was a way for MacGill to maintain his deep reliance and respect for his unit and also to show that in the face of terror an Irishman holds his ground.

While MacGill presented a different aspect of Irish soldier life in the British Army, he also exemplified an Irish view. Many Irishmen did not struggle with reconciling their Irish heritage with service in the British military; growing up in the Empire’s shadow made service in their military understandable. Perhaps because MacGill was not a strong nationalist or unionist he felt no need to justify his service. He believed in the concepts of duty, honor and patriotism and realized they were illusions which only have as much meaning as men believe them to have. These concepts were necessary to soothe a man’s soul during the terror of battle; without them all he had was naked fear which MacGill believed would lead to lunacy.

Duty, patriotism, vanity, and dreams come to the help of men in the trenches, all illusions probably, ephemeral and fleeting; but for a man who is as ephemeral and fleeting as his illusions are, he can lay his back against them and defy death and the

²⁰ Ibid, 175.

terrors of the world. But let him for a moment stand naked and look at the reality of the terrors that engirt him and he becomes a raving lunatic.²¹

MacGill believed human life was fragile and temporary. To him, the bolstering ideals of duty, honor, and patriotism were as fragile and fleeting as human life, so why not allow men to prop themselves up by such ideals? Human life was as illusory as these ideals so it made sense to MacGill that men would cloak themselves in illusions to make the war bearable. This cloak of illusions protected soldiers from the harsher reality that the war was completely destroying everything around them. They had to believe they were dying for a cause, any cause, as long as it meant their fragile lives were not wasted in vain.

From MacGill's accounts one sees that despite his lack of overt political opinions, he illustrated the experience of many Irish soldiers. In many ways MacGill is exemplary of the average Irishman who, for whatever reason, joined the British military and served in a predominantly nationalist unit. While it would be helpful to understand the motivation behind MacGill's enlistment, the fact that he avoids the topic altogether indicates the possibility that he sympathized with the nationalist cause but had grown weary of it in the face of battle. For many men, the face of battle chases away ideology. Although no source openly states MacGill was Catholic, he was raised in County Donegal which was predominantly Catholic. Had MacGill been staunchly Protestant he could have requested placement in the 36th Division. Therefore, it is probable that MacGill was Catholic and that he also initially supported the war effort. It is also probable that, having witnessed the intense splintering of the nationalist party, MacGill may have believed keeping his politics to himself was the only way to avoid possible recrimination after the war. Because the nationalist party failed to provide a coherent outlook

²¹ Ibid, 183.

on Irish involvement in the war, MacGill had no way of knowing how his service would be viewed by the party after the war.

While MacGill concealed his politics, Irish poet Francis Ledwidge subtly conveyed his inner turmoil through his war poetry. While his work is often included in Great War poetry anthologies, many scholars question whether or not it should be included because his poetry does not speak about the war directly. Instead of capturing the gruesome scene so popular with his fellow war poets, Ledwidge chose to escape the atrocities of war through poetry. Once the reader delves into Ledwidge's poetry it is a beautiful, lyrical world. Although Ledwidge never overtly writes about the war, his escapist poetry is evidence of his attempt to reconcile his place in the war while striving to remember his homeland. It is also indicative of his attempt to reconcile his place in an ever changing Irish political landscape.

A working class poet from County Meath, Ledwidge was later regarded by his patron, Lord Dunsany, as the "poet of the blackbirds" because of Ledwidge's frequent evocation of the bird. Dunsany believed the peasantry made better poets because of their daily use of diction worthy of poetry.²² Ledwidge served on the Navan rural district council and board of guardians and was a known nationalist. Scholars disagree on the motivation behind Ledwidge's enlistment. Some scholars believe he enlisted due to goading from fellow council members. Other scholars cite a fierce hatred of imperialism as demonstrated by Germany's military aggression towards Belgium as Ledwidge's motivation.²³ Some believe Ledwidge enlisted because he thought the war was part of a struggle to prevent the world from falling into evil.

²² Francis Ledwidge, *The Complete Poems of Francis Ledwidge, Introductions by Lord Dunsany* (New York: Brentano's, 1919), 8.

²³ Dungan, 119.

His breakup from girlfriend Ellie Vaughey shortly before the war, whose parents did not approve of the match due to his involvement with the Irish Volunteers, may also have had an impact on Ledwidge's enlistment. Some claimed that Ellie Vaughey's subsequent marriage to another man and premature death shortly after sent Ledwidge into a tailspin wherein he desired nothing more than to escape Ireland and his personal sadness.²⁴ One can reasonably conclude that a combination of these factors led to Ledwidge's enlistment. Ledwidge enlisted in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in October 1914. Three years later he died during the Third Ypres offensive at Passchendaele.

The Complete Poems of Francis Ledwidge was published posthumously by Lord Dunsany in 1919. In addition to being Ledwidge's patron, Dunsany also served in the British Army. Given his familiarity with Ledwidge's work, it seems only natural Dunsany would write the introduction to the book. Lord Dunsany urged the reader to pick up the book not just because Ledwidge was a peasant but because with poetry he had risen higher than a peasant. Although Dunsany was a firm supporter of Ledwidge's work, he felt it necessary to repeatedly point out Ledwidge's peasant status. This was most likely due to the fact that Dunsany was a convinced unionist and Ledwidge was a noted nationalist. By attributing Ledwidge's success to his peasant status rather than his personal abilities, Dunsany conveyed Ledwidge as quaint and unsophisticated. This condescension indicates Dunsany's prejudice against Ledwidge's nationalist beliefs. By conveying Ledwidge as unsophisticated, Dunsany made a larger statement about the nationalists; that they were peasants believing in a quaint dream.

²⁴ Haughey, 76.

While Dunsany never overtly criticizes Ledwidge's politics, he does so subtly. Rather than openly stating Ledwidge's nationalist beliefs, Dunsany chose to make it appear that Ledwidge enlisted out of foolish fancy for a lost cause. In the introduction Dunsany makes his own political leanings known while patronizing Ledwidge's. He stated that "rather than attribute curious sympathies to this brave young Irish soldier I would ask his readers to consider the irresistible attraction that a lost cause has for almost any Irishman."²⁵ The "lost cause" reference is evidence that Dunsany believed nationalist service in the war would not alter Ireland's position in the British Empire. Here Dunsany attempted to portray Ledwidge as swept up in the fervor of war rather than a dedicated political activist. Ledwidge was a key organizer for his local Irish Volunteer corps prior to the war. Once the nationalist party split, Ledwidge stayed with John Redmond's faction and chose to enlist. Dunsany begged the reader not to read into Ledwidge's "curious sympathies" by which he meant nationalist sympathies. When this book was published, there was a great deal of animosity towards Irish World War I veterans by some nationalists. By downplaying Ledwidge's politics, Dunsany hoped to keep the reader's focus on the beautiful poetry rather than the politics which caused Ledwidge to enlist. It was easier to convey Ledwidge as swept up in the fervor of war than to portray him as a confirmed nationalist. Dunsany wished to preserve Ledwidge's legacy as a poet and realized such a task was impossible if Ledwidge was pegged as a nationalist.

Despite the politics that seeped into Dunsany's introduction, he viewed Ledwidge's work as beautiful in its depiction of the rural. Dunsany believed the world, in all its chaos, was much in need of such beauty. He also believed Ledwidge stayed true to his inspiration: Ireland.

²⁵ Ledwidge, 15.

Many of Ledwidge's poems described the Irish countryside. While the book was divided into sections concerning his service in the war, the poems themselves are rarely expressly about the war. He wrote about spring, love, and blackbirds. It is only in the last section entitled by Dunsany as "Last Songs" that Ledwidge dealt with the war more expressly.

On the surface, Ledwidge's poetry eloquently portrayed the Irish countryside. Deeper examination of his poetry leads the reader to glimpse the darker aspects which were inspired by the war. When describing pastoral scenes, Ledwidge injected bleak tones. There are no sunsets or sunrises in his war poetry, only twilights.²⁶ Regardless of how desperately Ledwidge strove to escape the war, he could not. While he wrote of sheep, pastoral landscapes and blackbirds, machine gun fire sounded nearby. His attempt to capture beauty was not only escapist. Ledwidge also hoped to preserve the beauty war threatened to obliterate

As a nationalist in the British Army, Ledwidge underwent some soul searching. Believing in Irish independence yet serving under Ireland's oppressor caused Ledwidge great strife in addition to what he witnessed on the battlefield.²⁷ While some Irish soldiers like Patrick MacGill did not seem to suffer difficulties reconciling their British and Irish identities, Ledwidge did. After the Easter Rising, Ledwidge had increased difficulty reconciling his position within the British Army. As a nationalist he resented his lack of participation in the Easter Rising. Ledwidge felt the Rising more accurately expressed his dedication to nationalism than his service in the army.²⁸ The execution of the Rising leaders Thomas McDonagh and Joseph Plunkett deeply affected Ledwidge who regarded both men as friends and fellow poets. In

²⁶ Haughey, 81.

²⁷ Ibid, 87.

²⁸ Ibid, 89.

honor of Thomas McDonagh, Ledwidge wrote a poem of the same name. Although only three stanzas long, “Thomas McDonagh” conveys the deep sadness Ledwidge felt for the death of his friend and his guilt for not participating in the Rising. In true Ledwidge style the poem is full of birds, rain, daffodils and pastures. Yet even with these uplifting words, the poem illustrates abject sorrow. The poem describes how McDonagh, from his grave, will not hear the sadness of the world around him:

He shall not hear the bittern cry
In the wild sky, where he is lain
Nor voices of the sweeter birds
Above the wailing of the rain.

This was Ledwidge’s eulogy not only for McDonagh but also for the death of his belief in the justice of the war. From the Rising onward, Ledwidge had increased difficulty viewing the war as necessary and believed his service would be cause for recrimination after the war.²⁹ Many nationalist soldiers felt similarly after the Rising. They had enlisted out of dedication to Irish freedom, yet their fellow Irishmen were fighting for the same freedom on Irish soil. The Rising was a difficult subject with which many nationalist soldiers grappled. Were they, the soldiers, the real patriots, or were the Rising participants the true defenders of Irish freedom?

Through Ledwidge’s poetry one sees a conflicted man. “Soliloquy” detailed the feeling of being on the verge of battle, knowing death in battle was more glorious than leaving behind a poem. He pointed out that for an ordinary man death in battle secured a place in history.

It is too late now to retrieve

²⁹ Ibid, 85.

A fallen dream, too late to grieve
A name unmade, but not too late
To thank the gods for what is great;
A keen-edged sword, a soldier's heart,
Is greater than a poet's art.
And greater than a poet's fame
A little grave that has no name.³⁰

In "Ireland", Ledwidge allowed his politics to shine through the pastoral imagery. Ledwidge calls to Ireland, knowing his voice is recognized because he is Irish even if far from home. Ireland bids him go to war and so he does. The next stanza illustrates the mindset of Ledwidge once he has been at war:

And then I left you, wandering the war
Armed with will, from distant goal to goal,
To find you at the last free as of yore,
Or die to save your soul.³¹

From this stanza one sees that Ledwidge believed his service would ultimately help free Ireland. Dying to free his homeland was a worthy cause in Ledwidge's eyes. With "Ireland" one sees Ledwidge's attempt to reconcile his position within the British Army. By throwing himself wholeheartedly into the war effort, believing it was for Irish independence, Ledwidge attempted to absolve himself of the guilt he felt for not participating in the Rising. This was his way of determining his position as a nationalist in the war. He was trying to paint himself as a true nationalist.

³⁰ Ledwidge, 88.

³¹ Ibid, 243.

The attempt by Ledwidge to piece together his fragmented identity was similar to other nationalist attempts to piece together their fragmented selves. Even for a group pledged to the ideal of Irish independence the war proved to be grounds for disagreement and conflict. Once nationalists faced No Man's land they were confronted with whether or not war was truly the best way to achieve independence. Ledwidge's struggles personify the difficulties of the nationalist party as a whole. He was a man convinced of the just nature of the war in 1914 yet the Easter Rising decimated Ledwidge's firm belief in serving the British Army. Ledwidge's great effort to reconcile his position as a nationalist in the British Army led him to produce poetry that ranged from patriotic to anti-war. This struggle is indicative of the experiences of many nationalists and the nationalist party as a whole. The splintering of the party prevented nationalist soldiers from knowing how best to serve Irish independence. This caused men like Ledwidge constant conflict as to whether their place as nationalists was at home or at war.

While Ledwidge used his poetry to cope with his position in the war, another nationalist used his writings to justify the position of nationalist soldiers in the war effort. As one of the most well known Irish writers of the period, Tom Kettle published extensively prior to the war and was a news correspondent for the London *Daily News*. His nationalist leanings were no secret. The creation of the Ulster Volunteers in 1913 made the formation of the Irish Volunteers almost inevitable.³² Tom Kettle was one of the first prominent men to sit on the Provisional Committee of the Irish Volunteers. Service in the Irish Volunteers gave Kettle his first glimpse of the war.

³² J.B. Lyons, *The Enigma of Tom Kettle, Irish Patriot, Essayist, Poet, British Soldier 1880-1916* (Dublin: The Glendale Press, 1983), 236.

While in Belgium buying arms for the Irish Volunteers, Kettle witnessed the invasion by the German army. Thereafter, Kettle stayed in Belgium as a war correspondent for the *Daily News*. It was from his experience in Belgium that Kettle's opinions toward the war took shape. Watching the desecration of a peaceful society shook him to the core. Kettle was a fierce idealist which prevented him from being a neutral observer of events in Belgium. He was unable to write about the war objectively. However, his idealism and passion are what make his accounts of the war that much more important, because he gave the reader his unreserved opinion. Kettle was so moved by what he saw in Belgium that he enlisted in the British Army upon returning to Ireland. Due to poor health he was not considered fit for frontline duty. However, Kettle's excellent speaking skills and intense belief in the good of the war made him a perfect candidate for recruitment duties.

Kettle travelled Ireland for two years as a recruiter for the British Army and gave numerous speeches. Two events in 1916 encouraged him to press for frontline duty despite his poor health. First, to Kettle the Easter Rising was a slap in the face. As a dedicated nationalist he believed the Rising jeopardized everything for which he had worked. He was convinced that service in the British war cause was the only way to secure Home Rule after the war. To him, the Rising was an act of violent immaturity that threatened Ireland's future. The second factor was the murder of his brother-in-law, Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, by a British officer. Kettle was very close to his brother-in-law and was devastated by his death. Some scholars argue that this event, coupled with the execution of the Easter Rising leaders (many of whom were Kettle's

friends) instilled nagging doubts in his mind about the purity of the war effort.³³ Kettle believed he had to serve on the frontline in order to purify the war effort and, subsequently, the nationalist cause he supported. Why Kettle was finally approved for active frontline service is unknown. Perhaps high casualties required recruits whether they were healthy or not. Kettle left Ireland for the last time on July 14, 1916. Three months later he died at the Battle of the Somme, as did many of his fellow Dublin Fusiliers.

As we have already seen, serving in the British Army was a controversial choice. This was as true for the laborer as it was for the middle-class journalist. As a lawyer and professor, Kettle was a respected member of middle-class society. By 1914 he was prominent member of the National Volunteers. Kettle's decision to join the British Army was constantly ridiculed by his opponents. As a recruiter, Kettle was criticized for "merely dancing to the tune of Imperialism, that [his] ideas came to [him] from London, that [he] hated Prussia and Prussianism not honestly but simply to order."³⁴ Yet Kettle's reasons had little to do with Britain and everything to do with Ireland.

Written in the trenches during 1916, *The Ways of War* was written as a way to refute the claims of his detractors. Kettle's wife, Mary, published the book in 1917 and introduced it with a tribute to her late husband. Throughout the introduction, Mary Kettle repeatedly pointed to her husband's intense patriotism and love of Ireland. She fervently believed he was misunderstood because few people looked deeply at his world outlook.³⁵ Kettle was a European. He was well-travelled and considered himself part of the wider European legacy. He

³³ Lyons, 287.

³⁴ Kettle, 72.

³⁵ Ibid, 4.

held European law and justice in the highest esteem. For Kettle, his countrymen would never truly be Irish until they understood what it meant to be European. Thus he believed fighting for the small nations that Germany had ravaged was the duty of Ireland and all of Europe. For Kettle, service in the war was a matter of honor to Ireland and Europe, not England. Mary stated, "England and English thought had nothing to do with his attitude to the war. England happened to be on the side of Justice."³⁶ To support these points Mary quoted passages from letters he wrote her while at the front. In her eyes, affirmations of his ideals verified his honor, because "he deemed it right to make the final sacrifice, and in a European struggle sign his ideal with the seal of his blood."³⁷ She urged the reader to reconsider the motivation behind her husband's military service, and constantly commended his heroism because he died for his beliefs.

Unlike the heroically bloody tale of Ernest Jünger or the tragic losses of Siegfried Sassoon, Kettle's *The Ways of War* did not seek to impress the Irish people with ideas of heroism or the evils of warfare. Instead, Kettle sought to justify his military service and that of all Irish servicemen. His book centered on the hope that readers would realize the deep patriotism inherent in himself and other nationalist soldiers. Kettle wrote, "I have written no word and spoken none that was not the word of an Irish Nationalist, who had been at the trouble of thinking for himself. Ireland was my centre of reference."³⁸ His hope of setting the record straight hinged on two assumptions. First, that Ireland had a duty not only to itself but

³⁶ Ibid, 5.

³⁷ Ibid, 5.

³⁸ Ibid, 73.

to the world and, second, whatever befell Ireland, the choice to assist Britain in war was one of honour and justice.³⁹

To illustrate why the Irish soldier was doing his patriotic duty, Kettle elucidated the characteristics of the German and Austrian-Hungarian foe. He saw Austria-Hungary as an imperial bully exploiting post-assassination fear to gain control of Serbia. Witnessing Germany's brutal invasion of Belgium incensed Kettle. He decried the wanton disregard for law and the disruption of peace. He blamed Prussian militarism, Bismarck and Nietzsche for poisoning the minds of the German people. To Kettle, Bismarck and Nietzsche embodied "the devil's gospel" of violence, intellect and domination.⁴⁰ The deep militaristic traditions of Prussia had no way to purge themselves outside of war. Therefore, the only way to stop the senselessness of war was to fight back.

The subjugation of two small European nations drew far too many comparisons to Ireland. The terrorization of Belgium and Serbia by imperial powers reminded Kettle of Ireland's sufferings under imperial Britain. More than anything, Kettle feared Serbia and "Belgium would be what he had mourned in Ireland . . . nation[s] in chains."⁴¹ This dreadful illustration of the enemy's characteristics implied a clear line between good and evil. Kettle understood that he had to drill into Irishmen just how despicable the enemy was and why that enemy was worth fighting. A firm believer in the strict differences between good and evil, Kettle also explained the good worth fighting for.

³⁹ Ibid, 73.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 212.

⁴¹ Ibid, 4.

Kettle spent significant time describing the glorious characteristics of Belgium and the Belgian people. Having spent a great deal of time in Belgium, Kettle considered himself something of an expert on their response to the German invasion. He watched as the German army stomped through Brussels, turning it from a cultural treasure to a desolate heap. He noted the resilience of the Belgian people, stating that after the Germans marched through, the Belgians would begin rebuilding even if they knew it would be torn down again. Kettle unabashedly admired Belgian fortitude: “Belgium is one of the allied countries which had to sacrifice, and did sacrifice without a murmur, her richly beautiful capital . . . With a noble faith and restraint she has put herself last, and the law of Europe first.”⁴² Kettle’s description of Belgium’s noble qualities stood in stark contrast to the dark qualities of Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Once Kettle defined good and evil on the world stage, he moved on to explicating the experience of the Irish at the front. Kettle once again deviated from the traditional approach to war narratives. Rather than detail the gore, Kettle focused on the long endurance of the Irish soldier. He believed that too much writing on the war focused on the big pushes, the exciting news bits that captured the imaginations of people back home. According to Kettle, most of the time war was an endurance test; enduring trench life, enemy barrages that lasted for days, rats, disease, and weather. He maintained these features were as important as any big maneuver. The consistency of death and moving the line only a couple feet wore on men. Kettle himself echoed the desensitization men felt in response to the constant death and destruction: “A few casualties every turn, another grating of the saw-teeth of death and

⁴² Ibid, 135.

disease, and before very long a strong unit is weak.”⁴³ Keeping one’s sanity amid the constant killing was crucial to survival. Kettle acknowledged the difficulty of holding the line despite the constant barrages and inclement weather.

Strange things issue from No Man’s Land and the eyes of the army never close or flinch. And so, strained, tense and immovable he leans and looks forward into the night of menace. But the trench has not fallen. As for him, he carried his pack for Ireland and Europe, and now pack-carrying is over. He has held the line.⁴⁴

Holding the line meant standing between the enemy and Ireland. For Kettle, Ireland was ultimately what the soldiers were protecting and honoring with their courage.

Kettle’s account of the war is unlike other Irish writers of the Great War, because rather than commenting on the war itself, Kettle was actually justifying his service. The ridicule and criticism he faced must have been excruciating, especially to a man accustomed to having no shortage of supportive friends and colleagues. He was a man torn by choice. Unable to live for ideals he did not believe in, Kettle died for those he did. Kettle wrote *The Ways of War* in an effort to exonerate himself and the many Irish nationalists who chose to serve in the British Army. The British Army was never mentioned by name in *The Ways of War*, indicating yet again that Kettle truly saw himself fighting for Ireland and Europe. The British Army was only the means to an end. Kettle served in the British Army because he believed it was on the side of justice. Had Germany been on the side of justice Kettle would have fought in the German army. Soldiers from other countries did not have to justify their service in the war to their fellow countrymen. They were not ridiculed by members of the community for being unpatriotic. Their nations welcomed them with open arms which bestowed a mantle of heroism on the

⁴³ Ibid, 177.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 179.

soldier. The difficulty for Irish nationalists serving in the British Army was truly more difficult than that of other combatant's soldiers. Kettle's deep devotion and contribution to Ireland and Europe were swept under the proverbial rug in favor of the more easily defined heroes of the Easter Rising.

Tom Kettle's war experience was unique because he chose to write about the war in a different way than other Irishmen. Kettle openly addressed the critics of nationalist soldiers in a way that few others did. His account shows us how morally guided men ended up in the meat grinder of war. Kettle believed wholeheartedly that fighting in World War I was the only way to ensure home rule for Ireland. By serving at the front Kettle hoped to purify nationalism by showing that the true bearers of Irish freedom fought hard for it.

Each of these war narratives, poems and stories shows just how splintered nationalism was in Ireland, both before and during the war. WWI caused the largest schism within the nationalist party, forcing nationalists to choose how best to attain independence. MacGill, Ledwidge and Kettle wrote about what affected them most. For Kettle it was the need to justify his service. For MacGill it was the fact that everyday events were more important than politics. Ledwidge sought to reconcile his place in the conflict through preservation of everything the war threatened to destroy.

While Kettle and Ledwidge were both known nationalists, they had strikingly different opinions of the Easter Rising. MacGill made no mention of the Rising in his books. One senses that, for MacGill, concentration on the daily life of soldiering proved more rewarding than worrying about the politics at home. Thus while each of these men fell under the umbrella of

nationalism, their writings demonstrate a remarkably stratified nationalism. It is evident from their writings that each man fought for Ireland, rather than Britain, and that they believed, at least initially, in the cause for which they fought. Yet while they had these aspects in common, each of these writers believed the goal of Irish independence must be reached in different ways. Their differences are demonstrative of the nationalist party as a whole. No cohesive Irish nationalist point of view for the war could exist because there was no unified nationalist point of view to begin with. The fragmentation of Irish nationalism prior to and during the war meant no two nationalist soldiers could or would have the same opinion on the war or their service. The fragmentation of opinions on the war from Irish soldiers is evidence of how fragmented Ireland itself was prior to the war. The nationalist party, so irreparably splintered, had no way of providing a coherent approach to the war; a fact which made the nationalist soldiers unwitting victims. If the soldiers themselves could not provide a coherent view of the war, how could they provide one to those at home? The fact that Irish servicemen failed to form a collective memory of the war prevented them from communicating such a memory to their fellow Irish. As we shall see in chapters two and three, this is just one part of why the southern Irish failed to form a collective memory of the war.

Chapter 2: The Monopolization of Memory

World War I histories are rife with important battles. Names like Verdun, Passchendale and Ypres are easily recognizable. Such battles are important markers in the history of World War I, not only because they track the progression of war tactics but because they elicit a depth of connection with the war itself. Certain battles draw out emotions running so deep that they mold the memory of the war. The Battle of the Somme, the first day of which was the bloodiest day in British military history, is one such battle. Though the experience of British and German troops on the Somme has prompted numerous studies, the role of Irish troops has received significantly less academic attention. In comparison to the sheer number of British troops, the Irish had only one division, the 36th Ulster Division, on the Somme the first day. While the 16th Irish Division fought on the Somme two months after the 36th, the battle is remembered more intensely in favor of the Ulstermen by the Northern Irish. The role of Irish troops on the Somme is important, not merely for their military contributions, but for the lasting impression their participation had on the Irish people. The southern Irish, who would become part of the Irish Free State in 1922, failed to integrate the memory of the Somme because they regarded the battle as an example of Ulster heroism which was completely divided from the southern Irish war experience. The Northern Irish immediately integrated the Somme, through the actions of the 36th on the first day, by connecting it to their emotionally charged memory of the Battle of the Boyne. This connection allowed Northern Ireland to reaffirm their allegiance to the Empire.

This chapter will explore the experience of both the 36th Ulster and 16th Irish Division on the Somme, how this event was immediately interpreted through Irish newspapers, and how this interpretation cemented itself into an untouchable memory of Ulster's part in the war. This untouchable formation of memory in Northern Ireland prevented southern Ireland from forming a memory of this significant battle and, subsequently, of the war itself.

In recent years scholarship regarding the Irish role in World War I has dramatically increased. Prior to the 1990s, most Irish works concerning the first quarter of the twentieth century dealt with the 1916 Easter Rising, Michael Collins, the IRA or the 1922-1923 Civil War. Yet even though scholars like Keith Jeffreys and Miles Dungan have written profusely on the experiences of Irish divisions in the Great War, relatively few works deal with the ways the Irish collectively remembered the war. Rather, most studies of memory in World War I to date have focused on the British and German experiences. Scholars like George Mosse, Paul Fussell and Jay Winter have created a useful framework for the study of war memory regarding World War I. Given the high importance attributed to British World War I memory it is surprising that so few studies have considered the Irish experience. This is especially remarkable, since the Irish contributed three specifically Irish divisions to the war effort, as well as men to other British divisions.

Thus far only two major works on Irish World War I memory have emerged. Nuala Christina Johnson's *Ireland, the Great War and the Geography of Remembrance*,⁴⁵ details the formation of Irish war memory through a discussion of propaganda posters, peace day

⁴⁵ Nuala Christina Johnson, *Ireland, the Great War, and the Geography of Remembrance*, Cambridge studies in historical geography, 35, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

celebrations, memorials, and war literature which she contrasts with remembrances of the 1916 Easter Rising. While her book is essential to understanding the formation of war memory in the Irish Free State, Johnson spends little time discussing Northern Ireland. She gives Ulster war memories only a passing glance, noting that it was easier for the Northern Irish Protestants to integrate their war experience. As a result, she completely misses how Northern Irish memory influenced war memories in the Free State.

Catherine Switzer's *Unionists and the Great War: Commemoration in the North of Ireland 1914-1918*⁴⁶ is a seminal work on Northern Irish memory of the war. Switzer concentrates on two forms of commemoration: the construction of memorials and commemoration ceremonies. Her focus revolves around Ulster participation at the Somme as crucial to war memory formation in Northern Ireland. Switzer establishes that commemoration of the war started during the war, which set later commemoration patterns. She argues that contemporary newspapers propagated certain themes which provided a framework for public interpretation of the battle and its impact.⁴⁷ While her discussion is valuable, it fails to consider the impact of unionist war remembrance on the rest of Ireland. Though Switzer asserts the importance of newspapers in the formation of memory, she fails to elucidate how the newspapers affected the memory of the Somme.

A deep examination of the Irish role in the Battle of the Somme will elucidate some key gaps in the present historiography of Ireland's role in the Great War. An examination of contemporary newspapers will show how the Northern Irish immediately claimed the Somme

⁴⁶ Catherine Switzer, *Unionists and the Great War: Commemoration in the North of Ireland 1914-1918*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

as their badge of honor, which then prevented the rest of Ireland from integrating the battle into their war memory. This chapter will also show that the connection of Ulster's service on the Somme to the Battle of the Boyne and, subsequently, the British crown is evidence of the Northern Irish desire to remain connected to the crown. These newspaper accounts will also demonstrate that the southern Irish viewed the battle as a Northern Irish engagement entirely unrelated to themselves. By the time the 16th Division fought in September, the epic tales of the Somme were dominated by the 36th Ulster Division. By examining newspapers of both unionist and nationalist affiliation, contesting viewpoints of the battle will become evident.

The moderate nationalist newspaper, the *Irish Independent*, provides important insight into how the nationalist media approached reporting the battle and how, only days after the battle, it was already seen as an Ulster event, even by the nationalists. The *Irish Independent* was founded in Dublin in 1905 and replaced the *Daily Irish Independent*. For most of its history the paper has been regarded as a nationalist publication. The unionist newspaper used in this chapter, *The Irish Times*, illuminates how Unionists viewed both the service of the 36th and the 16th. *The Irish Times*, also published in Dublin, was founded in 1859 and quickly thereafter became a unionist voice in the media.

Before delving into the newspaper coverage, we must first gain an understanding of the experiences of both the 36th and 16th Divisions. The rush to enlist, so prevalent in other European nations, was also evident in Ireland. While recruits were necessary to the war effort they required extensive training before setting foot on the battlefield. The British military needed trained units, ready to fight. To augment British divisions, the army turned to the Irish

militias. Both the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteers played integral roles in the war. Founded in 1912, the Ulster Volunteer Force began as an effort to prevent passage of the third Home Rule Bill presented to Parliament that year. The Irish Volunteer Force was created in 1913 in direct response to the Ulster Volunteer Force. By 1914 each militia had over 100,000 trained volunteers which made both groups excellent candidates for inclusion in the British army.

Due to their pronounced attachment to the British Empire and Unionist leader Sir Edward Carson's connection with Parliament, it was arranged that the Ulster Volunteer Force would have its own division. Carson also arranged that this division would be named the 36th Ulster Division. While John Redmond urged the Irish Volunteers to serve in the British Army as a sign of good faith in the ratification of the Home Rule Bill, his Volunteers were not given a division of their own. Two additional Irish divisions were created in which these volunteers served. The 10th and 16th Irish Divisions were predominantly Catholic nationalist units, although neither division achieved a level of "religious homogeneity" similar to the 36th.⁴⁸ The 16th Division was formed by many recruits from the Irish Volunteers and was heavily supported by John Redmond. The 10th Division was the first to see action in 1915, whereas the 36th and 16th Divisions would not engage in the war until the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

Part of the impetus behind the Northern Irish monopolization of the Somme memory was due to political allegiance. Irish political tensions were at a peak by 1916. The Easter Rising in April 1916, launched by Irish Volunteers who disagreed with Redmond's policy of serving in

⁴⁸ Terence Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War 1914-1918*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), 85.

the British Army, caused further problems for nationalists. The Rising leaders' attempt to forcibly institute independence and the subsequent quelling of the uprising by the British Army inevitably called the loyalty of the Catholic Irish into question. Three months later, in July, the Ulster Division charged over No Man's Land in the Battle of the Somme. The ensuing desire to classify the Ulster experience on the Somme in terms of bravery and sacrifice was an effort to cast the memory of the battle as one fought in allegiance and loyalty to Ulster and the British crown; to demonstrate the remarkable difference between themselves and the Catholic traitors at home. The Northern Irish immediately claimed the Somme memory as a purely Ulster demonstration of allegiance to prove they were different from the Irish who staged the Rising. It is in this context that the men of the 36th Division were cast, even before they set foot on No Man's Land, as martyrs for the crown. According to Philip Orr, the 36th was "to be an expression of Protestant Ulster power, pride, and independence . . . committed as much to the collective survival of Protestant Ulster as to the survival of the Britain they fought for and were part of."⁴⁹ Thus although the 16th Irish Division fought on the Somme in the following months, the actions of the 36th on the first day became the all encompassing moment of remembrance for the Northern Irish which disenfranchised the rest of Ireland of having a memory of the battle: "many nationalist Irishmen died in the trenches, but the Somme became the unionist blood sacrifice."⁵⁰

For the people of Ulster, the first day on the Somme enshrined the 36th Division in memory and myth. The Somme was the Ulster Division's first battle experience and would

⁴⁹ Philip Orr, *The Road to the Somme: Men of the Ulster Division Tell Their Story*, (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1987), 41, 45.

⁵⁰ Robert Shepherd, *Ireland's Fate: The Boyne and After*, (London: Aurum Press, 1990), 215.

prove a difficult one. The 36th division contributed 15,000 men to the initial battle.⁵¹ Of these, 6000 were killed or wounded by nightfall of the first day in battle, July 1.⁵² The loss of over one third of the division was a costly toll, both physically and mentally, for the Ulstermen. As Private A.V. Pearson of the Leeds Pals recalled, “We were two years in the making and ten minutes in the destroying.”⁵³ Yet out of such destruction arose a memory of Ulster’s bravery on the Somme that became a badge of honor for the Northern Irish. The first day on the Somme, which coincidentally corresponded with the revered anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, would set the tone for northern Irish remembrance of the war and the Somme in particular.

The objective of the 36th division on July 1, 1916 was to take the Schwaben Redoubt,

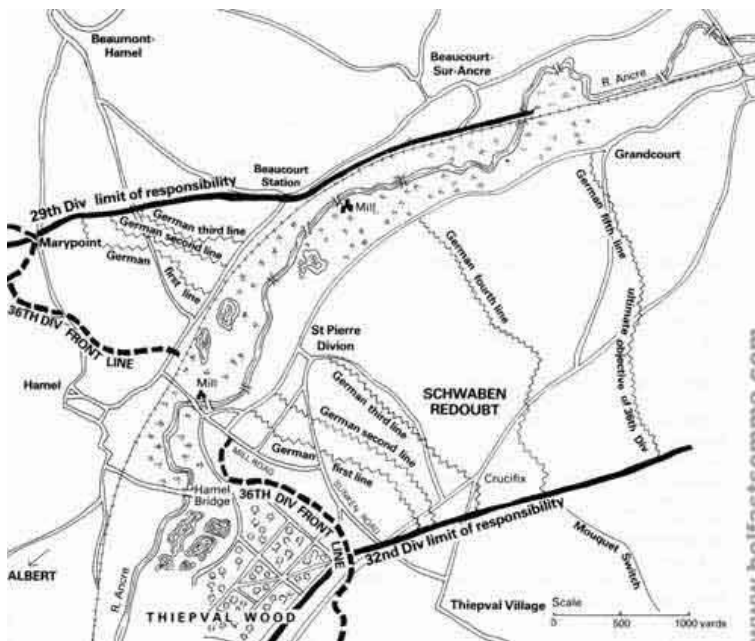


Figure 1: Map of the Schwaben Redoubt and the position of the 36th Division <http://www.belfastsomme.com/objectives/position.jpg>

known by the soldiers as “the Devil’s Dwelling Place”.⁵⁴ It was known as such due to the conglomeration of trenches, dugouts and fortified machine-gun posts which were guarded by four German lines, sixteen rows of barbed wire with dugouts reaching thirty five feet deep which provided a great deal of protection for

⁵¹ Martin Middlebrook, *First Day on the Somme, July 1, 1916*, (New York: Norton and Company Inc., 1972), 274.

⁵² *Ibid*, 274.

⁵³ As quoted in Middlebrook, 275.

⁵⁴ Orr, 170.

German soldiers.⁵⁵ After capturing the Redoubt, the 36th was to take the fifth (and last) German line wherein they would be able to “dominate the land between Beaucourt, to the north of their sector, and Thiepval village to the south”⁵⁶. The Redoubt’s strategic importance lay in the fact that it was the nucleus of the German front. Taking the Redoubt would allow the Allies to take the rest of the German front line.

As the Allied units prepared to storm across No Man’s Land on the morning of July 1, 1916 many of the Ulstermen, recognizing the coinciding date to the Battle of the Boyne, draped themselves or their equipment with orange sashes. The attachment of the Ulstermen to such Orange traditions was deep and extended back to training camp with Orange songs and Orange-specific regimental marches like “King William’s March”.⁵⁷ This connection to the Boyne, cemented to the Somme by the soldiers of the 36th, was not unique addition to Ulster’s tradition:

The imagery of the Boyne, King Billy and the siege are embedded in Ulster Protestant folklore. These images had been refashioned in the upheaval of the 1790’s, revived in the struggle against Home Rule, and sanctified in the blood-sacrifice at the Somme.⁵⁸

Thus, the long held tradition of the Boyne as a banner of Protestant triumph assisted the Northern Irish to integrate the Somme into their national memory. It is clear then, that regular soldiers in the 36th were quite aware of the coincidence of dates.

At 7:30am the 36th went over the top toward the German front lines. With little wire to contend with, the first wave of the 36th reached the German front line. When the 32nd

⁵⁵ Middlebrook, 170.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 170.

⁵⁷ Shepherd, 214.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 219.

division's advance failed to support the advance of the 36th, German crossfire turned on the Ulstermen. Successive waves of Ulstermen had to contend with this fierce crossfire which flew straight down No Man's Land, now between themselves and the Ulstermen of the first wave.⁵⁹

Pressing on, the Ulstermen met stiff resistance at the Schwaben garrison which prevented them from gaining further ground. Eight battalions fought to take the Schwaben Redoubt. By midmorning the redoubt was in possession of the 36th along with 500 German POW's.⁶⁰ As the Ulstermen attempted to push on to the next German line, they were bombarded by British and German artillery which pinned them down. This heavy bombardment prevented any divisions from aiding the 36th. By mid-afternoon the Ulstermen were exhausted and besieged. With dwindling numbers and lack of support, the 36th was driven back by a German counterattack to the Schwaben Redoubt. By nightfall the Ulstermen were pushed back to the German front line and were finally relieved by a Yorkshire unit. It took three months for the British to retake the redoubt.

Though this is a bare-bones narrative of the first day on the Somme for the 36th Division, the manner in which it was told at the time would come to form the foundation of Somme memory for the Northern Irish. The fact that the 36th was the sole British division to capture a portion of the German front line, let alone press further back into German territory, meant that the 36th came to hold a special place in Ulster memory. Almost instantly reports of the battle described the bravery and tenacity of the 36th. On July 6 the *Irish Times*, a predominant unionist paper, ran their first article on Ulster's experience on the Somme. With the battle only

⁵⁹ Middlebrook, 175.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 177.

five days old, the *Times* had little precise information on the battle. Though the article lacks details, it sought to provide encouragement and solace for the news to come:

When the full story of the British advance from Albert is known it will add a new and glorious chapter to Irish history. At this moment Ulster is torn between anxiety and pride. Her 36th Division has fought splendidly and it is to be feared, with heavy loss.⁶¹

From the first news piece, even without much detailed information, the Somme was strongly tied to the glory of the 36th Division.

The July 8 edition continued to heap praise upon the Ulster soldiers. In an article entitled “Ulster Division’s Heroism” the newspaper proclaimed:

The General Officer commanding the Ulster Division desires that the division should know that, in his opinion, nothing finer has been done in the war than the attack by the Ulster Division on the 1st July.⁶²

Using the phrase “nothing finer” indicates to the reader that the Ulster Division’s service on the Somme was beyond comparison and was without a doubt the most important of the war. This article also sought to solidify the reason for Ulster’s gallantry. Lt. Col of the 36th Division L.J. Comyn, in reference to the service of the Ulstermen, stated, “They are the stock from which our heroes come and to whom our Empire owes so much-unconquered and unconquerable.”⁶³ Stating that the Ulstermen’s deeds were for “our Empire” is indicative of the connection between the unionists and Britain. This statement also shows how, from almost the beginning of the battle, unionists sought to propagate the idea that, not only was Ulster service on the Somme particularly noble but that it was also uniquely Ulster. These sorts of statements are the central ideas that would come to enshrine the Somme as a solely Ulster experience.

⁶¹ *Irish Times*, July 6, 1916, page 4.

⁶² *Ibid*, July 8, 1916, page 7.

⁶³ *Ibid*, page 8.

The *Irish Times* articles on the Battle of the Somme concentrated on the overall details of the battle, with few specifically discussing the 36th. These articles referred to the army's movements and accomplishments as done by "our army" indicating that the newspaper's focus was that the 36th was part of the British army and, therefore, talking about the army was discussing the 36th. When the 36th was mentioned it was done with great reverence. To further drive home the nobility of Ulster service and solidify the soldier's place in the canon of Northern Irish heroes, one article states:

The price will be grievous, but Ulster will pay it with a steadfast heart. Her young soldiers have now earned their place beside the veteran Dublins and Munsters and Inniskillings who went through the hottest furnace of war at Helles.⁶⁴

The *Irish Times* was, of course, not the only Irish paper reporting on the battle. On July 7, 1916 the predominant nationalist *Irish Independent* ran an article from a war correspondent of *The Times* (of London), a conservative paper, entitled "Ulstermen in Big Battle, Tale of Amazing Attack". This article details the events of the Somme through the experiences of the 36th. An anonymous eyewitness notes that "as he followed their amazing 1st of July attack, he would rather be an Ulsterman than anything else in the world."⁶⁵ This eyewitness goes on to describe the bravery he witnessed that so inspired his devotion to the Ulstermen:

When I saw the men emerge through the smoke and form up as if on parade I could hardly believe my eyes. Then I saw them attack, beginning at a slow walk over No Man's land, and then suddenly let loose as they charged over the two front lines of enemy trenches, shouting 'No surrender, boys'. The enemy's gun fire raked them from the left, and machine guns in a village enfiladed them on the right, but battalion after battalion came out of the awful woods . . . steadily.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid, July 6, 1916, page 4.

⁶⁵ *Irish Independent*, July 7, 1916, page 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 3.

This was the first article published in the *Irish Independent*, a nationalist newspaper, concerning the Battle of the Somme. It represents the initial glimpse of the Ulster Division's role in the Somme. Although the article does not hide the fact of heavy casualties from the reader, these facts are glossed over in light of the admirable martial feats of the Ulstermen. So even though many of these men died during the advance, the article encourages the belief that they had sacrificed themselves nobly. The article concludes by offering a statement that would come to encapsulate the Northern Irish memory of their part in the Somme: "the Ulster Division lost very heavily, but won a name which equals any in history."⁶⁷

Two days later the *Irish Independent* published another article on the exploits of the Ulstermen. "Ulster Division's Heroism, Great Charge Described" details Edward Carson's message to the Ulster people. This article, originally from *The Daily Mail* (a British broadsheet newspaper), notes Carson's expression of pride and admiration of the 36th. Carson stated that, "they had made the supreme sacrifice with a courage, coolness, and determination in the face of the most trying difficulties, which upheld the greatest traditions of the Army and the spirit of their race".⁶⁸ He hoped that the maintenance of such traditions would "sustain those who mourned their loss and set an example to others."⁶⁹

Such articles bearing the bravery of Ulstermen to the Irish people would have been instrumental in forming an immediate understanding of the battle. As Switzer argues, "a web of meaning was quickly woven around the Ulster Division's advance, incorporating it into pre-existing historical discourses within days of news of the battle having reached the north of

⁶⁷ Ibid, page 3.

⁶⁸ *Irish Independent*, July 9, 1916 page 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid, page 2.

Ireland.”⁷⁰ The martial prowess of the 36th dominates articles from both newspapers. The theme of sacrifice is also dominant. As with other combatant nations, the Irish were attempting to make sense of the tremendous loss, particularly in Northern Ireland where cities like Belfast lost 1800 men in one day.⁷¹ One important factor that caused this battle to become firmly entrenched in Northern Irish memory was its historical connection to the Battle of the Boyne. The connection to an already entrenched set of memories led the Battle of the Somme, and the bravery displayed there, to become entwined with the Boyne memory. This connection was more prominent among the soldiers themselves than on the home front during the battle which is apparent by the lack of newspaper articles during the battle discussing the coinciding dates of the two battles.

Though the coverage by the *Irish Independent* noted Ulster bravery it also contained significant information on how the events of the 36th on the Somme were handled in a nationalist newspaper which illustrates how Ulster bravery was perceived by non-Ulster Irishmen. Though the *Irish Independent* did run their story on the Somme with a title recognizing Ulster bravery, it was not written by a writer from the *Independent*. Rather it was taken from a war correspondent in France from *The Times*. An article on July 5 on the progress of the Allies mentioned the advance on the Somme as a means to caution the readers for the heavy losses soon to come. Nowhere in this article were the 36th mentioned. While this could be seen as nationalist exclusion of unionist achievement, it is more likely due to lack of precise and up to date information on the battle.

⁷⁰ Switzer, 37.

⁷¹ Middlebrook, 274.

Yet even after the July 7 article noting Ulster bravery, the July 8 paper returns to the discussion of partitioning Ireland and the difficulties thereof. A small article on July 9 notes the sentiments of Edward Carson in regards to the performance of the 36th. As noted above, this article was excerpted from *The Daily Mail* and not written by the staff of the *Irish Independent*. The articles about the Ulstermen progressively diminish in favor of articles on partition, Home Rule and local news. An advertisement on the cover page of the July 5 paper exemplifies the preoccupation of the southern Irish. The advertisement for *Record of the Irish Rebellion* boasted being the “finest and only complete historical record of the recent rising”.⁷² This ad was substantially larger than other ads on the page and claimed the book was an impartial look at the rising which held a full review of the events, unpublished details concerning its repression, eye-witness accounts, illustrated pictures of the leaders and reproductions of proclamations and flags of the insurgents.⁷³

The fact that such an ad would be placed prominently on the front page of a nationalist newspaper indicates the perceived importance of such an event to Irish people. Though news of the Somme may not have reached Ireland by the publication of this paper, the advertisement demonstrates discussion topics of the most interest to the newspaper’s readership. Additionally, the volume of articles written on partition indicated that the concept of Home Rule was of high interest when the Battle of the Somme occurred. For many non-Ulstermen, an article on the 36th Division’s bravery was obligatory. The fact that the main news topics returned to partition, the results of the Rising and Home Rule after the obligatory article

⁷² *Irish Independent*, July 5, 1916, pg.1.

⁷³ *Ibid*, pg.1.

indicates the issues of importance to the southern Irish. This approach differs vastly from the words and expressions of Ulstermen and their supporters. The *Irish Independent* paid due respect to the service and losses of the 36th, yet indicated by the lack of subsequent articles that this event lacked merit for further inclusion.

Although the *Independent* contained a seemingly sparse amount of articles on the 36th's Somme experience, it is interesting to note that the nationalist paper contained more articles detailing the sacrifice and honor of the division than the unionist paper. This indicates that Ulster and the Somme were inextricably linked from the beginning of the battle. The nationalist paper reported the exploits of the 36th, almost as if it were that of a French or Australian division. This illustrates just how different the nationalist audience viewed the service of the 36th. With such coverage noting the sacrifice of the Ulstermen it is understandable that the southern Irish would fail to see any other version of the battle, even after the 16th charged over No Man's Land.

Because the 36th Division was the only Irish division to fight on the first day of the Somme, memory of the battle was monopolized by Ulster. As newspapers streamed in news about the heroics of the Ulstermen, the northern Irish immediately began to integrate their part in the Somme into their collective memory. As Catherine Switzer argues, newspapers propagated three themes which enabled a form for public understanding of the battle and its impact.⁷⁴ The first theme is emotional. Newspapers, particularly those with unionist leanings, circulated the concept of balancing intense sorrow with pride. For example, the *Irish Times*

⁷⁴ Switzer, 28.

noted: “The price will be grievous, but Ulster will pay it with a steadfast heart.”⁷⁵ The second theme focused on the concept that personal grief should be acknowledged but not dwelt upon due to the honor incurred by dying for the British Empire. The final theme emphasized was the strong historical and Orange ties of the Somme to Ulster folklore. The coinciding dates of the Battle of the Boyne and the Somme made the connection easy. These themes, set forth by the media, gave the Northern Irish a framework for understanding the battle and their place in it via the 36th. The emphasis on bravery, dying for the Empire and fulfillment of the ancestral tradition of the Williamite wars two hundred years prior allowed the Somme immediate accessibility to Northern Irish memory. Ultimately, “an image was created of an irresistible charge which had swept all before it.”⁷⁶

With a framework in place, the Northern Irish set about honoring their dead and the battle which claimed their lives. The coinciding dates of the Battle of the Boyne and Somme enabled a perfect date for commemoration. Though the anniversary of the Boyne was traditionally celebrated on July 12, the battle began July 1. In July 1916, with the knowledge of the Somme, the northern Irish opted to honor their recent dead rather than the long dead. The ongoing war and DORA (Defense of the Realm Act) restrictions prevented large scale celebrations or parades. Thus Sir Crawford McCullagh, Lord Mayor of Belfast proposed a five minute silence at noon on July 12 to honor the Somme dead and sympathize with the bereaved. Though the five minute silence applied only to Belfast, it was erratically honored

⁷⁵ *Irish Times*, July 6, 1916, p. 4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 28.

elsewhere in Northern Ireland. Thus the first commemoration of the Somme was one of reverence and silence.

Written declarations and moments of silence were not the only methods at Northern



Figure 2: *The Charge of the Ulster Division*

Ireland's disposal for immediately remembering the Somme. In July 1918 military artist J.P. Beadle unveiled his painting *The Charge of the Ulster Division* in Belfast. This painting visually honored the heroics described in the newspapers and eye witness accounts. From the battle until

the unveiling, no visual representation existed for the public. The painting portrays the Ulster Division charging over the top amid artillery explosions. The leading soldier stands upright, walking forward, gesturing to his men with a fist held high. This painting reinforces the claims made by newspapers and eye witness accounts: that the Ulstermen faced the battle bravely. Beadle was not present at the Somme, thus the painting was mostly a work of imagination. Still, Catherine Switzer argues that "The level of detail with which the uniforms and weapons of the officer and his men are depicted also subtly implies that the entire picture is as accurate as the painted equipment."⁷⁷ The accuracy of the equipment legitimizes Beadle's portrayal of the Ulster Division. The painting came to be the singular visual representation of the Ulster Division's role on the Somme. Switzer also notes that no other British troops are pictured. This indicates that Beadle, like many others, felt that Ulster's role was significantly exceptional.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 100.

Although commercial sales of the painting were not high, almost immediately Orange Lodges requested reproductions to incorporate into their halls. Many of these reproductions were printed on banners, the first displayed in July 1919.⁷⁸ As Switzer argues, “it is clear that the image quickly entered the realm of popular visual display, appearing with increasing frequency in Orange parades across north Ireland.”⁷⁹

The experience of the 16th Division on the Somme three months later was equally bloody yet has not attained a similar legendary status. The 47th Brigade of the 16th was attached to the 20th (Light) Division as the reserve for the September 3 offensive. Due to a weakened fighting force, the 20th (Light) Division was replaced by the 47th Brigade. With less than twenty-four hours to prepare, the 47th's objective was to take Guillemont, a town north of

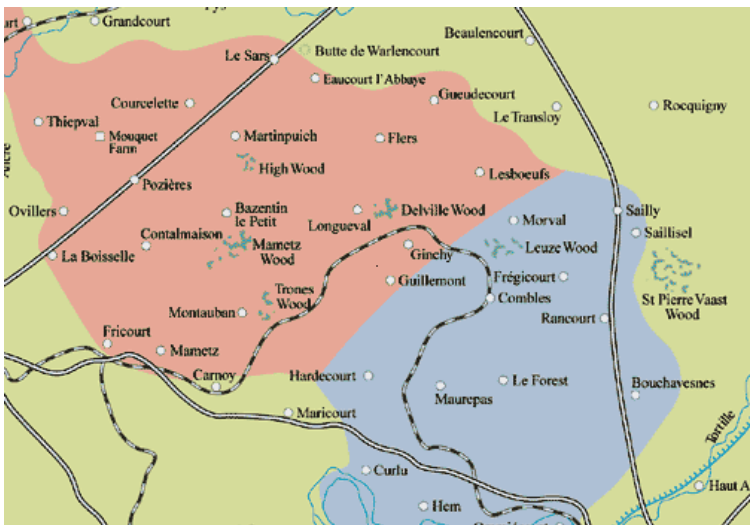


Figure 3 Map Guillemont and Guinchy objectives

http://www.essentialsonme.com/images/somme_map_01.gif

the Somme.⁸⁰ After three months of battle, little was left of the village when the 47th sought its capture. Prior to the end of the British bombardment at zero hour, the Connaught Rangers charged early which caught the Germans by surprise. This

allowed the Rangers to capture Guillemont. Significantly, it was the 47th Brigade, a self-identified Redmondite brigade, which captured Guillemont. The seizure of Guillemont proved

⁷⁸ Ibid, 101.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 101.

⁸⁰ Denman, 79.

distinct since many previous attempts had failed. The brigade suffered devastating casualties on September 3: 1147 men out of 2400.⁸¹

By September 9 the 47th and 48th brigades of the 16th Division were to push on to Guinchy. The attack was to be postponed by 2 minutes, but unfortunately the 48th brigade was unaware of the change and charged on time. This triggered a German counter barrage which fell on the 47th Brigade as they went over the top. Consequently members of the 47th Brigade, the 8th Munsters and 6th Royal Fusiliers, were practically decimated. Similar to the 36th's experience, the German artillery was untouched by the British barrage. The men of the 16th were undeterred. The 8th and 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers completed the capture, losing about half their men.⁸² Similar to the experience of the 36th on July 1, these regiments had pushed farther than those on their flanks. The lack of support on either flank created a bloody salient. The Irishmen held their position and were relieved September 10 by the 3rd Guards Brigade. The division would never see action on the Somme again.

Between September 1 and 10 the 16th Division lost 240 officers out of 435 and 4090 men from a pool of 10,410.⁸³ Because the participation of the 16th on the Somme is less researched and remembered than the 36th, one would imagine that there was little contemporary coverage or remark on their feats. However, there was a great deal of praise from the division's commanding general in addition to media coverage. General Hickie remarked that "The 16th Division came away from the Somme with a very high reputation" and that "after the Somme the discipline and fighting spirit of the 16th was a force to be reckoned

⁸¹ Ibid, 82.

⁸² Ibid, 99.

⁸³ Ibid, 101.

with.”⁸⁴ Such comments indicate that in the immediate aftermath of the battle, there was respect for the division at the official military level. The division was awarded 2 Victoria Crosses and three hundred other military decorations.⁸⁵ This can be compared with the praise showered on the 36th Division. Both divisions were described as having the “fighting spirit” and serving well. Therefore, there was little difference in the perceived honor of their service. An excerpt from an officer in the 7th Leinsters is indicative of the similarity of experience on the Somme between the 16th and 36th Divisions. John Hamilton Maxwell Staniforth wrote to his parents:

[War correspondents] will tell you that it was the most important capture since the push started, and that the fierceness of the fighting, which had seemed to reach the limit humanity could stand, was worse than ever before, and what it looks like to see flesh and blood walking into the thunderbolts hurled at them-but I was there, and I know.⁸⁶

The horrifying experience was touted, for both divisions, as fierce, bloody and honorable.

The 16th Division was not without champions who attempted to install the division in Irish memory similar to the entrenchment of Ulster memory. In 1917 Michael MacDonagh published *The Irish on the Somme: Being the Second Series of 'The Irish at the Front'*. Though his first installation of the series dealt with the overall creation of the Irish Regiments, this book dealt only with Irish engagements on the Somme. An introduction by John Redmond grants the book political approval. It is immediately obvious that Redmond’s introduction is intended to propagate his desire for the war to unite all of Ireland. While he placed nationalist aims at the forefront, it is clear that the introduction is meant to reaffirm nationalist goals of service.

⁸⁴ As quoted in Denman, 101.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 101.

⁸⁶ As quoted in Denman, 82.

While MacDonagh's book garnered official party approval, it is more important for the light it sheds on popular viewpoints of the Battle of the Somme. With such a political introduction it is surprising that MacDonagh did not limit his discussion to only the 16th Division. Rather he allowed both the 16th and 36th equal chapter coverage. In congruence with Redmond's desire for unity, MacDonagh chose to focus on both divisions in an attempt to show that their exploits were for Ireland as a whole. His attempt at unbiased coverage is evident in his continual descriptions of the 36th as gallant.⁸⁷ MacDonagh even dedicated an entire chapter to the discussion of the military honors given to men of the 36th. This is evidence of his attempt to unite both divisions' service in honor of Ireland. This is especially clear in the title of his third chapter on the 36th: "Victoria Crosses to the Ulster Division: Brilliant Additions to the Record of Irish Valour and Romance".⁸⁸

Although MacDonagh endeavored to give equal glory and honor to both divisions, his descriptions of the 16th Division were noticeably different. In the first chapter dedicated to the division MacDonagh described seeing the 16th before they left for France:

Then I perceived that something like a radiance shimmered about the marching ranks. It came . . . both from their muscular strength and their martial ardour, for the flush of battle already mantled their cheeks . . . they . . . rejoiced that they were going out to fight in liberty's defence, and saw only their bayonets triumphantly agleam in the fury of the engagement.⁸⁹

Here MacDonagh clearly expressed the perceived martial prowess of the 16th Division. Though he allowed that the 36th are gallant in their battlefield exploits, he did not describe them as

⁸⁷ Michael MacDonagh, *The Irish on the Somme: Being the Second Series of 'The Irish at the Front'*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), 41.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 47.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 119.

martial or fighting for liberty. MacDonagh therefore, tied the service of the 16th to inherent abilities and noble ideals.

Throughout MacDonagh's three chapters of the 16th on the Somme, he discussed several examples of their impressive and unique experience. Like the 36th, the 16th carried emblems which held important significance among the men. MacDonagh reported that many men of the division tied small green flags with yellow harps to their rifles before charging on September 3. After capturing Guillemont, MacDonagh stated that the men raised a green flag with a yellow harp in the center of their conquest.⁹⁰ Like the orange sashes of the Ulster Division, this flag was a symbol of what the men were fighting for. Additionally, the division carried a banner of the Sacred Heart, a gift from the citizens of Limerick.⁹¹ MacDonagh noted that this banner was only the third such banner to be carried into battle since the Crusades. The accuracy of this comment is less important than its intent. MacDonagh intended, by describing such deeply connected symbols of Nationalist Catholic Ireland, to cement the service of the 16th in the memories of his readers. Such descriptions were intended to elicit a strong attachment towards the soldiers and their service on the Somme. These examples were to explain why the 16th fought. They fought, by MacDonagh's description, for the true Ireland (as evidenced by the harp) and for Catholicism (as seen by the Crusades connection).

MacDonagh further attempted to build the reputation of the 16th Division. He noted that General Haig mentioned the pivotal role of the 16th in the capture of Guillemont. According to MacDonagh, the notation of a specific division in the official record was rare. Thus

⁹⁰ Ibid, 139.

⁹¹ Ibid, 139.

MacDonagh attempted to point out the unique honor bestowed on the division by the General. Also such a mention indicates that the service displayed by the 16th was of such a measure that the General felt it worthy of inclusion.

MacDonagh's detailed descriptions of the captures of Guillemont and Guinchy were no less full of praise for the division and similarly seek to solidify their glory in the infamous battle. He noted that Guinchy was an important German stronghold, especially for artillery.⁹² After describing how fortified and impenetrable Guinchy was, MacDonagh went on to illustrate the martial prowess which allowed the Irish to capture this stronghold. He states: "It stands solely to the credit of the Irish Brigade. They did it all themselves. It was an amazing martial feat, that charge of the Irish Brigade at Guinchy."⁹³ He even quoted an anonymous German officer as stating, ". . . you attacked us with devils not men."⁹⁴ MacDonagh pushed his theme of glorious Irish service so far as to argue that only three cases of desertion occurred in the 16th at the Somme. He stated that these three men were cooks stationed at Guillemont who desired to take part in the storming of Guinchy. Through all these accounts, MacDonagh set down a clear picture of the 16th Division. According to him, the 16th distinguished itself with honor and excelled due to inherent martial skills. Each man willingly served and only deserted to be a part of the action.

Despite MacDonagh's efforts to set a foundation for the heroic memory of the 16th, the Ulster Division harnessed the memory of the Somme. By the time MacDonagh's book was published in 1917, the Somme was already revered as an Ulster victory. Equal treatment of

⁹² Ibid, 146.

⁹³ Ibid, 146.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 146.

both divisions prevented the 16th Division from being the focus of the book. Therefore, readers would not necessarily have changed their interpretation of the Somme as an Ulster event. MacDonagh's book did little to alter the memory formation of the battle. The cementing of the Somme as an Ulster, and, therefore, British event prevented efforts like MacDonagh's from taking hold.

The 16th's experience on the Somme, like that of the 36th, was discussed in both the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times*. While the *Irish Times* discussion of the specifics of the Ulstermen's service was more limited than the *Independent*, their coverage of the 16th's experience was even more sparse. Throughout the battle coverage for the month of September (when the 16th was on the Somme), the *Irish Times* never mentioned the division by name. In fact, the articles rarely noted that any Irishmen were on the Somme at that time. The battle itself was discussed frequently and articles often made mention of French exploits. The Greek crisis occupied more space within the war section than the Somme. This may be due to the fact that by September the Somme battle had been raging for two full months whereas the Greek crisis was more immediately scintillating. As with the articles concerning the 36th, the *Irish Times* preferred to refer to the military efforts as "our army" regardless of whether any Irish divisions were in that particular conflict.

September 11, 1916 is the first mention within the *Times* of any specifically Irish soldiers. This article is remarkably sparse and has little information on the soldiers. It notes that the Connaughts, Leinsters and Munsters were in the thick of battle and that little other

information had come forward.⁹⁵ Again, there is no mention of which division these regiments were in or what they did. On the following page is an article entitled “The Irish at Guillemont”. Though this would have been members of the 16th Division, the article omitted the division title, preferring to simply call them Irishmen. This same format was used when discussing the attempt at Guinchy.⁹⁶

The only article within the time period of the 16th on the Somme that remotely discusses Irish service in any depth was “Irish Chivalry at Guinchy”. The article notes the great heroism of the Irish soldiers in taking numerous prisoners of war during the attack on Guinchy. As with previous articles the division is not mentioned and the soldiers are referred to only vaguely as “Irish”. While the article omitted specifics on the soldiers themselves, it managed to credit the Irishmen with a chivalrous character, “To the everlasting good name of the Irish soldiery, not one of these Huns, some of whom had been engaged in slaughtering our men up to the very last moment, was killed.”⁹⁷ This lack of identifying the precise Irish division is significant. The constant referral to these soldiers as merely Irish might have led readers of the *Irish Times* to think of these exploits as the same as those perpetrated by the 36th Division which was noted by name in previous Somme articles. Without a differentiation of experiences, the readership would have been unaware that the 16th fought on the Somme.

The coverage of the 16th's experience on the Somme by the *Irish Independent* was notably different than that of the *Irish Times*. Though the *Independent* did not note the division's number, it did contain several articles on the heroics of the soldiers. The majority of

⁹⁵ *The Irish Times*, September 11, 1916, page 4.

⁹⁶ *The Irish Times*, September 12, 1916, Page 5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, September 29, 1916, page 5.

these articles were contributed by British war correspondents in Paris who wrote their articles for the *Daily Mail*, a British newspaper. The tone of the British contributions is distinctly more praising of the Irish soldiers than those from the staff of the *Independent*. The British articles tend towards a more traditional exaggeration of Irish military prowess whereas the staff articles opt for more sober language. The differing treatment of the 16th's experience on the Somme indicates how the Somme had already been successfully monopolized by the service of the 36th to the point where the nationalist newspaper printed very little original coverage of the 16th on the Somme.

News of the division's service in the battle did not hit the newspaper until September 9 and consisted of a small paragraph entitled "Irish Gallantry at Guillemont" contributed by a British correspondent.⁹⁸ This paragraph contained a minimal description of the purported gallantry, stating, "[they] behaved with the greatest dash and gallantry, and took no small share in the success gained that day."⁹⁹ The gallantry described profusely by British journalists was yet again hailed by Mr. W. Beach Thomas in his article written originally for the *Daily Mail* wherein he stated:

It gives, I think, a satisfying sense of the variety and association of talent in the new army to picture these dashing Irish troops careering across the open while the ground was being methodically cleared and settled behind them by English Riflemen.¹⁰⁰

While the statement superficially notes the heroism of the Irish troops, it subtly implies that the British troops were the true power and force behind the successes on the Somme. The contrasting image of wild Irishmen against methodical, well-trained British soldiers leads the

⁹⁸ *Irish Independent*, September 9, 1916, page 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, September 12, 1916, page 3.

reader to see the British troops as superior soldiers. This is significant because it indicates not only how the British press portrayed Irish soldiers, but also how the Irish troops were portrayed in their own country. This article does little to break the myth of the Somme as a British endeavor. By using such British driven articles, the *Independent* did little to give the 16th a place in the legend of the Somme.

To further cement the perceived British-ness of the battle, next to the previous article was one entitled, "The New Irish V.C.'s, Ulstermen Proud of Bravery" which detailed each Ulsterman awarded the Victoria Cross for their service on the Somme in July.¹⁰¹ Such placement certainly would have connected the September service of the 16th on the Somme with that of the Ulstermen in July. The British ties were inescapable to the paper's readership.

Although these articles were written by British journalists, they did not shy away from heaping praise upon the performance of the 16th Division. One article noted,

The Germans in Ginchy would have had more terror in their hearts if they had known the character of the men who were about to storm their stronghold. They would have prayed to God to save them from the Irish.¹⁰²

Such praise was in abundance from British correspondents. Unfortunately such admiration sealed the experience of the 16th Division as heroism for a British cause. The excerpt above is telling in that, while it honors the Irish character, it leaves no doubt that the Irish heroism is in service to the British army.

In the September 11 issue a staff member of the *Independent* responded to the news of Irish gallantry on the Somme. The writer notes that even such a small acknowledgement of

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, September 13, 1916, page 3.

Irish heroism is unexpected: “It comes so much as a surprise when the gallantry of Irish troops is mentioned in official dispatches that we must hail as a phenomenal concession the appearance of two such allusions in the one weekend.”¹⁰³ Such a comment indicates the overall impression of the newspaper staff towards the official praise from the British army. It is apparent that these men did not expect the Irish troops to be recognized by the army. While the writer is obviously pleased with the recognition of the troops, he admonishes the army for so little detail: “We are glad that their work has been justly recognized, but it would have been more gratifying if the account of their performances had been told in greater detail.”¹⁰⁴

The following day the newspaper published another staff article entitled, “Irish Valour” which sought to incorporate information from other newspapers, stating, “Practically all the war correspondents at the front have sent to their papers stirring accounts of the dash and bravery of the Irish troops in their attack on Guillemont.”¹⁰⁵ This statement seems to infer that the article was written out of necessity rather than desire. The article goes on to quote several other journalists and their impressions of the 16th's service. One such excerpt is from a Mr. Philip Gibbs who is quoted as stating, “It was one of the most astonishing feats in the war, almost too fast in its impetuosity. They went forward with their pipes playing them on, in a wild and irresistible assault.”¹⁰⁶ The article’s author utilized the stimulating rhetoric of other journalists yet created none of his own to encapsulate the Somme experience for the Irish.

¹⁰³ Ibid, September 11, 1916, page 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, September 12, 1916, page 2.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

From the first publication of a Somme related article, the battle was associated with the 36th and, consequently, Ulster and the Unionists. What is fascinating about the memory of the Somme is that it was not an Irish memory at all. The Somme, from the moment the Ulster Division went over the top, was a Northern Irish example of skill and sacrifice to Ulster and the British crown. Because the 36th Division was the only Irish division to fight on the first day, they were able to monopolize the memory. The successes of the Ulstermen were seen, not as triumphs of the Irish, but as carrying on the traditions of the Battle of the Boyne wherein they supported the Protestant (and rightful) heir to the British throne. The performance of the 36th on the Somme was demonstrative, to the Northern Irish, as a supreme moment of dedication to the crown. “Ultimately, the advance would become the defining moment in unionist memory of the Great War, a blood sacrifice which exemplified loyalty to crown and empire.”¹⁰⁷ Thus their performance was directly related to their cause: defense of Ulster and the crown. Nowhere do the Northern Irish claim that the heroics of the Ulstermen were for the defense and honor of Ireland. Ireland was part of the empire, surely. But their true dedication was the Ulster and the crown.

The memory of the Somme in Ireland is entirely dictated by which Irish division fought the first day and by the loyalty unionists sought to demonstrate. Deep political and religious divisions in Ireland prevented the Catholic and southern Irish from seeing the Somme heroics as part of their national memory. Even the nationalist newspaper, the *Irish Independent*, saw the service of the 16th Division as a British endeavor and did not seek to disabuse their readership of the same assumption. Although people like Michael McDonagh attempted to immortalize

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 23.

the feats of the 16th Division, by the time they fought in September, the Somme was already touted as an Ulster event with little room for other heroes. So while the Somme was a banner moment for the Northern Irish, to the rest of Ireland it was as though they were talking about something the French experienced. The fact that the majority of Irishmen saw little of themselves in the noble acts of the Somme meant that Northern Ireland was given free reign over the Somme memory. They were free to associate it with the Battle of the Boyne and were unchecked in how they chose to commemorate it. Though Richard S. Grayson argues that there is some debate whether unionists intentionally appropriated the memory of the war, it is apparent that regardless of the intention, that is exactly what occurred.¹⁰⁸ The close connection between these battles in the memory of the Northern Irish harkened back to a battle which pitted a Catholic king against a Protestant one. This battle, for the Northern Irish at least, came to represent their devotion to the empire and prowess in battle. By connecting it with the Somme they left no room for other Irishmen to identify on such a deep level with the sacrifices of the battle. The Northern Irish government left the direction of Great War memory and commemoration to London. Not only does this indicate how Northern Ireland officially viewed the war and its memory, but it also shows that,

. . . regardless of whether unionists intended to make commemorations unionist in tone, any nationalist attending would be surrounded by flags and symbols of a country to which they felt no allegiance, in a crowd singing songs that had nothing to do with the nationalists national identity.¹⁰⁹

The connection between Northern Ireland and England precluded any overarching Irish memory of the Somme because, from the outset, it belonged to Ulster alone. Had the 10th or

¹⁰⁸ Richard S. Grayson, *Belfast Boys: How Unionists and Nationalists Fought and Died Together in the First World War*, (London: Continuum, 2009), 171.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 171.

16th Irish Divisions fought on the Somme that day the memory of the battle might have been different for each portion of Ireland.

The political tensions within Ireland over Home Rule left Northern Irish unionists fighting to remain part of the British Empire. By associating the experience of their division with loyally serving the crown, Northern Ireland was able to further connect themselves to the Britain. This connection was vital to their cause of remaining within the empire. The unionists saw themselves as British subjects, not distinctly Irish. The Ulster Division's service on the Somme was an extension of unionist sentiment toward Britain. They gladly fought to show their allegiance to the crown rather than an independent Ireland. The unionists and Northern Ireland needed the memory of the Somme to solidify their place in the empire and as an insurance that their portion of Ireland would not be made independent. This monopolization signifies not only the fierce political divisions within Ireland, but also how the memory of events is often molded by those who desperately desire their meaning. The rest of Ireland was never given a chance to incorporate the memory of the Somme because Northern Ireland immediately made it an Ulster experience which, due to its connection with the empire, precluded the inclusion of anything other than Northern Ireland.

Chapter 3: The Politics of Memory: The Difficulties of Honoring World War I Dead in Ireland

War memorials and monuments present an unprecedented opportunity for people of a nation to reflect and grieve.¹¹⁰ These physical representations of remembrance “are not mere relics, but extraordinarily rich communications from the past, living history books that illuminate societal, political and cultural values at specific moments in time.”¹¹¹ After World War I, many combatant nations eagerly erected monuments and memorials to the fallen. Their reasons were many: paying respect to the dead, empathizing with the bereaved and attempting to reconcile a war that tore Europe apart. A careful examination of such monuments provides the opportunity “. . . to see more clearly how communities mourned together during and after the Great War.”¹¹² Yet while the Cenotaph in London, (built to memorialize the Unknown Soldier), was constructed within a year of Armistice Day, and the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval on the Somme was erected in France within a decade of the war’s end, not every nation found it easy to erect monuments to the war.

As seen in Chapter One, Ireland was a deeply divided nation prior to 1914, and the war only intensified the divisions. The controversy over Home Rule left unionists and nationalists bitterly opposed. While unionists desired to remain within the British Empire, nationalists argued for an independent Ireland. These divisions influenced the way the Irish remembered World War I and how they chose to memorialize it. Indeed, the stratifications within Irish

¹¹⁰ Catherine Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 2.

¹¹¹ Judith Dupre, *Monuments: America’s History in Art and Memory*, (New York: Random House, 2007), 2.

¹¹² Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 79.

society become apparent through their attempts to erect monuments and memorials to the fallen of the war. In the Irish Free State, people struggled to find a means of integrating the war experience into their emerging national narratives. This struggle continued after 1937 when the Irish Free State gained total independence from the Commonwealth and became the Republic of Ireland. As a result, the majority of monuments and memorials to the war fallen were not erected till the late 1990s-more than seven decades after the war's conclusion. This problem of memory serves as an illustration of the importance of politics to the formation of Irish public and collective memory. This chapter will explore, through several case studies of particular memorials, how and why the Irish Free State failed to commemorate the war. It will also explore how and why, by the late twentieth century, later generations in the Irish Republic began to remember WWI in an attempt to reclaim a portion of history long overshadowed by memories of political violence.

An examination of these case studies and their importance necessitates a discussion of the guiding theories behind this chapter. The field of memory is a complex and vital area of the historical discipline. Several theorists have sought to define a comprehensive methodology for writing about memory and history. These works are highly instructive to this work and the concepts therein. A brief examination of the historiography of memory works will elucidate the claims made within this chapter and shed light on the importance of monuments in the construction of memory.

Catherine Reinhardt's *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean* illustrates some instructive concepts undergirding the study of memory. She

states that the problem with commemorations is that they presuppose the existence of a shared community of memory.¹¹³ This same problem exists with memorials. Reinhardt maintains that when communities fail to share the same memory of an event, commemorations, and in this case memorials, hold different possibilities for various people.¹¹⁴ She points, for example, to the different ways the French and French Caribbean peoples remembered abolition. Though both groups experienced the movement, they were divided by the gap in their experience. This led to remembering the event in different ways. The French saw themselves as commemorating abolition as the benevolent, enlightened nation which ended the evils of slavery. In contrast, the people of the French Caribbean viewed the commemoration as a failure to recognize slavery itself and the French role in slavery. This concept is important to understanding the difficulties in erecting memorials.

Reinhardt argues that collective memory of the past is important because it forms a bridge between the store of recollections that provide a framework for the past and for conditions of society in the present.¹¹⁵ Therefore, when a people fail to create a collective memory they fail to create the necessary framework for understanding their past, which in turn bars understanding of the present. Memorials are necessary methods of building a collective memory between the past and present. The failure and delay to build these in the Free State illustrates how the Free State Irish prevented the creation of a collective memory of the war.

Siobhan Kattago in her article "War Memorials and the Politics of Memory: the Soviet War Memorial in Tallinn", illustrates another important concept concerning war memorials and

¹¹³ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 9.

monuments. In her discussion of the Bronze Soldier monument in Tallinn, Estonia, Kattago fleshes out the complexities of the meaning behind monuments. She explains that although monuments are built with a specific meaning in mind, that meaning is not permanent. She argues,

As places of memory, [monuments] are supposed to symbolize events from the past for future generations. As works of art, they are supposed to make time stand still. However, since time marches on and societies change, the attempt to freeze time visually into space is fraught with difficulty.¹¹⁶

The ephemeral meaning attached to monuments and memorials is important to understanding the difficulty for the Free State in building a WWI monument. After the war, any attempt to build a WWI memorial became an intensely politicized event. By the late 1990s memorials were built to honor the dead and rectify the perceived wrongs of previous generations. Like the builders of the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn, the Irish of the Free State struggled to situate a WWI memorial within the political situation of the 1920s. The people of the Free State sought to establish a cohesive meaning of their WWI experience. This suggests that the emphasis behind memorial building changes not only with generations but also with the political tide.

The meaning of monuments is also discussed by Judith Dupre in *Monuments: America's History in Art and Memory*. Dupre examines the deeper symbolism inherent in monuments. She argues that memorials and monuments are not entirely about remembering. She asserts that these physical representations of loss are a method of forgetting: “. . . erecting a monument can reinforce the slim illusion that the memories associated with it can be retrieved

¹¹⁶ Siobhan Kattago, 2009, "War Memorials and the Politics of Memory: the Soviet War Memorial in Tallinn", *Constellations*. 16, no. 1: 150-166.

when desired at some later date.”¹¹⁷ Dupre maintains that the process for constructing a memorial “allows reconciliation with the event itself and in doing so frees history to move forward. Ultimately, monuments are about resolution, the outward sign that finally all has been said and done.”¹¹⁸ Thus we might hypothesize that without the process of building memorials, the Irish Free State was unable or unwilling to move its collective history forward until the 1990s.

While such works provide a framework for the role of memorials in memory, few works discuss Free State efforts to build memorials alongside those of the Irish Republic in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. To be sure, several works have addressed monuments and memorials in the Free State. Nuala Christina Johnson’s *Ireland, the Great War and the Geography of Remembrance*, for example, discusses the difficulties for the Free State in attempting to remember WWI through 1937. Yet no one has attempted to reconcile these early struggles with the fact that during the 1990’s, several WWI monuments and memorials were finally built across the Republic of Ireland. The sheer number of such memorials decades after the event itself demands analysis. What is the relationship between the earlier monuments and those erected by later generations?

Before we can answer this, it might be helpful to understand how easy it was for other, nearby nations to form collective memories of the war through memorials. Such a discussion will highlight the differences between the Free State and other combatant nations. Indeed,

¹¹⁷ Dupre, xii.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, xii.

while nations commemorated the dead of WWI differently, nearly all of the belligerent nations did in fact commemorate them. Ireland's neighbor Britain was no exception.

Perhaps the most famous British Great War monument, and most suitable to the discussion here, is the Cenotaph in London. Erected in 1919, the Cenotaph stands amid the most important buildings in London: the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and the Horse Guards Parade. Designed by renowned architect Sir Edward Lutyens, the Cenotaph "is literally, an empty tomb, and by announcing its presence as the tomb of no one, this one became the tomb of all who had died in the war."¹¹⁹ The Cenotaph is engraved with the words "The Glorious Dead" which were chosen by Rudyard Kipling. Such an inscription, although short, illustrates the light in which the WWI dead were seen in Britain. To call the fallen "glorious" indicates that these men died for a purpose which was noble and worthy. Such an inscription gives their death meaning and also shows the public how to view the dead of the Great War. This guidance along with the quickness with which the Cenotaph was built indicates that the war was not only important for the British people and government to remember, but also gave the British a collective memory of the war in which their boys died gloriously. The fact that Ireland could not bring about a similar national war memorial indicates how truly unique and difficult it was for the Irish to create a collective memory around World War One.

To understand the difficulty of creating a collective memory of the war in the Free State, we must examine the construction of both Free State and late twentieth century memorials. By comparing the process of building these, the time frame and politics involved, we will have a

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 104.

better understanding of how and why the southern Irish would return to the memory of WWI in the 1990's.

As established in chapter one, the Irish WWI experience was markedly different than other European combatant nations. Though the rush to enlist and eagerness for war were similar, Irish soldiers had to contend not only with fighting at the front, but also with intense political fighting at home. By 1914 Ireland was deeply divided over the issue of Home Rule. Unionists, who were predominant Protestant and Northern Irish, desired to remain part of the British Empire whereas the nationalist party, comprised mostly of Catholics, argued for independence from Britain. Though the third Home Rule bill passed Parliament in 1914, it was forestalled due to the onslaught of WWI. Both parties urged their paramilitary groups to enlist as a display of support. The unionists believed enlisting would demonstrate their true allegiance to the crown while nationalists hoped enlistment would show their good faith in the passage of the bill. Thus, during the war, Irish soldiers were fighting the Germans in front of them while keeping an eye on political developments back home.

Political tensions present in Ireland after the war caused further complications. The Easter Rising in 1916 was fomented by nationalists, who viewed the war as an opportunity to gain independence. The Rising was forcibly put down by the British Army which included Irishmen, nationalists and unionists alike, among its ranks. The leaders were executed and Ireland's political fate hung in the balance until the war's end. After the war, nationalists and unionists were even more divided than they were in 1914. Nationalists believed the British administration should honor their claims to independence. When the British failed to

acquiesce, the War for Independence broke out in 1919 and lasted till 1921, ending with the independence of twenty-six of Ireland's thirty-two counties.

Independence, however, failed to solve Ireland's troubles. The Anglo-Irish Treaty granted the independent counties the right to an army and police force. It did not, however, bestow complete independence. Under the treaty the Irish Free State, comprised of the twenty-six counties, remained a dominion of the British Empire, much like Canada or Australia. Nationalists disagreed over the treaty, which ultimately led to the Irish Civil War of 1922-1923. The Civil War was fought between nationalists to determine whether the twenty-six counties would push for complete independence or abide by the treaty. By the war's end in 1923, pro-treaty forces had won and the Irish Free State remained a dominion of Britain until 1937. Although the fighting had ended, the Free State had a long way to travel in order to stabilize the country.

One method of stabilizing and uniting a state is to erect memorials and monuments which honor ancestors and heroes that assist the state in defining itself. This is especially important to newly created states. Given the tense fighting and political tensions experienced in Ireland from 1914 to 1923, it is no wonder that the construction of WWI memorials was difficult to accomplish for the newly formed nation. Incorporating the memory of men who died fighting in the British Army for a British cause made WWI a difficult event to integrate into the public memory of the Free State. The Free State administration, under President Cosgrave, sought to distance itself from its British past in an attempt to cultivate the new independent nation. According to Guy Beiner, because they were "emerging out of cataclysmic conflicts and

riveted by deep divisions, the independent Irish state founded in the early twentieth century suffered from ‘commemoration paralysis’ and was practically incapable in its formative years of utilizing commemorations to promote solidarity.”¹²⁰

The Irish National War Memorial in Dublin went through several inceptions before it was built. While this in itself is not unusual for war memorials, the extent of the protracted debates and delays in its creation were remarkable. From the initial proposition in 1919, it took twenty years and several redesigns before the ultimate memorial was built. The political difficulties of approving the memorial plans and tensions over an opening ceremony reflect the larger problem for the Irish of how to include WWI into their national memory as the new Free State sought to distance itself from a British past.

In 1919 the Comrades of the Great War, a veteran’s aid group, submitted the first proposal for a WWI memorial. This group had raised £50,000 for a memorial home where veterans could live. This idea was quickly rejected by the Dáil Éireann, the dominant branch of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament), due to lack of long term funding for the home. The proposal did not specify who would continue to financially support a memorial home which would need staff, food, heat and other necessary items to maintain it.¹²¹

After the rejection of the memorial home plan, a new proposal for a Great War memorial emerged in 1924 and was presented to the Dáil the same year. The new memorial plan proposed the building of a war memorial in Merrion Square in Dublin. There was a great

¹²⁰ Guy Beiner, *Remembering the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 306.

¹²¹ Fergus D’Arcy, *Remembering the War Dead: British Commonwealth and International War Graves in Ireland since 1914*, (Dublin: Stationary Office, 2007), 172.

deal of debate as to whether or not this was the most effective way to assist veterans and memorialize the service of the dead. Among those who supported a memorial, some desired programs for veterans and their families while others wanted a physical representation of loss. There were still others who believed a memorial to WWI effectively honored the British, who they believed, had no place in the Free State. Senator ÓhÉigearthaigh stated,

There is considerable opposition from two different viewpoints- those interested in ex-soldiers' welfare want the money spent on welfare proposals such as housing, hospital or charitable assistance for ex-soldiers and their families, while a large section of nationalist opinion regards the scheme as part of a political movement of an imperialist nature.¹²²

Other senators supported the idea of a monument but believed that it should be located elsewhere since the large size of Armistice Day celebrations prevented Merrion Square from being an adequate space for such crowds. Still other senators argued against the Merrion Square location due to its close geographic location to the senate building. These men worried that placing a WWI memorial so close to a seat of government would give the wrong impression of how the Irish Free State secured its freedom. These men sought to create an Irish Free State devoid of British overtones. They saw WWI as a British war for British gains. To honor the war and those who fought in it, in their eyes, would not be recognition of an Irish experience. Rather, it would be immortalizing Irish service to Britain, something the administration of the Free State wished to steer away from. Vice President of the Executive Council Deputy O'Higgins, a pro-treaty leader during the Civil War, echoed this opinion when he stated:

¹²² As quoted in D'Arcy, 175.

. . . there will always be respectful admiration in the minds of Irishmen and Irishwomen for the men who went out to France and fought there and died there, believing that by so doing they were serving the best interests of their country . . . yet it is not on their sacrifice that this State is based and I have no desire to see it suggested that it is.¹²³

This sentiment was echoed by Irish people outside the Dáil. In a letter to the editor of *The Leader* John Sweetman, a resident of Merrion Square, argued against a memorial in the square, stating he saw no reason for a “perpetual memorial park in honour of some deceased Irish soldiers of the English Army.”¹²⁴ This comment is indicative of those Irish who did not view the WWI veterans and deceased as having fought for Ireland. In their eyes, the soldiers were in no need of a memorial because they had collaborated with the imperial domination of England.

The Dáil’s most adamant objection in regards to the memorial was the location. The thought of a WWI memorial to British military service in close proximity to the Free State senate, Dáil and other government offices bothered some senators. Though the sentiment was not universal, the senators were generally amenable to the concept of a war memorial. As Nuala Christina Johnson notes, this was the first public debate over Ireland’s role in WWI and would set the tone for how the Irish, particularly the government, chose to view the war. This debate also highlights the tension between serving the living, i.e. the needs of Irish citizens, and honoring the dead.¹²⁵

With no clear consensus emerging within the Dáil, the bill was withdrawn in April of 1927. At this point the Committee restructured the proposal in an attempt to better please the many voices of the Dáil. Because a majority of senators were worried about the proximity of

¹²³ As quoted in D’Arcy, 176.

¹²⁴ As quoted in D’Arcy, 175.

¹²⁵ Johnson, 93.

the memorial to the parliament building and the need for a large place to congregate, the committee redesigned the memorial as an entrance archway for Phoenix Park, which was roughly three kilometers from Dublin's city center and the Parliament building. This altered memorial plan was submitted to the Dáil in March of 1928, but by June it was again rejected.¹²⁶

By 1929 the Committee had received three versions of the memorial over the course of a decade without success. President Cosgrave sent a letter to senator and committee member Andrew Jameson regretting the delays, arguing that though a minority opposed a war memorial in any format the government should extend its support since many Irish viewed a memorial as important.¹²⁷ It was at this point that committee members inquired if there were any areas of Phoenix Park suitable for a memorial. By November 1929 committee members were invited to inspect the Islandbridge area near Phoenix Park as a potential memorial site. Finding this area amenable, the committee set about finding a suitable architect.

For Jameson, finding an architect was not a difficult task. Sir Edwin Lutyens, an Englishman, was the preeminent Great War memorial architect, having built several including the London Cenotaph and the Thiepval Memorial. He, along with three other British architects, was employed by the Imperial War Graves Committee to care for the graves of imperial soldiers. Securing such a famous architect was less difficult than the committee had anticipated. Surprisingly, Lutyens' English ancestry was of little consequence to the committee. Lutyens' wife was Irish, which gave him an added incentive to do the project. Lutyens visited the site in July 1930 and the model for the memorial was approved July 11, 1931. He

¹²⁶ D'Arcy, 177.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 178.

envisioned the memorial as a theater experience wherein the visitor would be completely surrounded and taken in by the beauty of the memorial. As Judith Hill notes, “[the memorial] is remarkable for its peace, and subtle invitation to wander and meditate.”¹²⁸ Work on the memorial began a short five months later. President Cosgrave required that the labor force building the memorial constitute fifty percent English ex-servicemen and fifty percent Irish ex-servicemen. This was done to provide job opportunities for veterans and also to ensure that the memorial was built for the veterans of WWI by veterans.

As the building of the memorial continued steadily, the elections of 1933 saw President Cosgrave replaced by Eamon de Valera. A prominent combatant in the Easter Rising, de Valera was the nominal head of the anti-treaty forces during the Irish Civil War. During his presidency he sought to craft an image of the Free State as completely independent of British ties. While Great War recognition had visibly struggled under Cosgrave’s presidency, under de Valera it practically withered. From the beginning of his term, de Valera withdrew from official appearances at Armistice Day celebrations. He restricted the sale of poppies to one day during the year and prohibited the wearing of military uniforms and the display of flags.¹²⁹ By discontinuing such obvious tributes to WWI, de Valera further entrenched the concept that WWI was a British endeavor that had no place in the Irish Free State.

Though de Valera enacted these restrictions, he did not hinder the building of the National War Memorial. In the mid 1930s, de Valera’s government approved the memorial’s inscription: “To the Memory of 49,400 Irishmen Who Gave Their Lives in the Great War, 1914-

¹²⁸ Judith Hill, *Irish Public Sculpture*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 161.

¹²⁹ D’Arcy, 181.

1918".¹³⁰ It is important to note several things about this seemingly trivial event. Because the national government contributed funds to the project, they were entitled to certain privileges, including approval of the inscription. The approval is additionally significant because it acknowledges the reason for the memorial. It may seem obvious that a Great War memorial would acknowledge the reason for its existence. However, other memorials were constructed with no inscription indicating their purpose, leaving their meaning obscure or open to interpretation. By approving this inscription, the government acknowledged the fact that Irishmen served and died in WWI. Yet this inscription is simple, avoiding controversy but leaving the viewer with no understanding of how they were supposed to interpret the memorial and the Irish soldier's role in the war. Although many war memorials in England, France and Germany had similar inscriptions, they included statements highlighting the honor and sacrifice of the fallen. The Islandbridge Memorial inscription lacks such a sentiment. The viewer is left understanding only that 49,400 Irishmen died during the Great War. There is no reflection within the inscription of the importance attached to the dead by the Free State.

By 1939 the memorial was near completion, and another world war loomed. The impending official opening of the memorial elicited a new occasion for conflict. Some members of the finance committee worried that a large public opening would make the memorial a target for groups like the IRA. The IRA was banned in Ireland in 1935 due to increasing demonstrations of violence. In January 1939 the IRA declared war on Britain and implemented the Sabotage Campaign. This campaign of destruction was aimed against the economic and military institutions of Britain. Because the national memorial was in honor of Irishmen who

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 181.

served in the British army, vandalism or destruction by the IRA was a great worry. At the same time, because so much effort had gone into the construction of the memorial, the committee



Figure 4: National War Memorial in Dublin post restoration

believed it deserved a proper ceremony. They ultimately decided on a semi-private inauguration to be attended by the committee, de Valera and the Northern Ireland prime minister. The ceremony was set for July 30, 1939. Due to the

deteriorating international situation, however, de Valera postponed the ceremony. This seemingly temporary postponement lasted sixty-seven years, until 2006.

Although the National War Memorial was finally successfully completed after long delays and much controversy, the Free State's struggle and failure to hold a public ceremony left a vacuum in Irish collective memory. Because the Irish as a nation failed to integrate the war into their national memory, the country still yearned for this moment. Although from 1940 to 1970 the Association of Great War veterans was allowed to hold Armistice Day celebrations at the Islandbridge memorial (without government support), over the course of the twentieth century Ireland was unable to construct a collective moment of memory in regards to the war.¹³¹ The lack of any other attempts to build a WWI memorial and the intense difficulties associated with the Islandbridge Memorial indicate that the Free State, and later the Republic,

¹³¹ Desmond and Jean Bowen, *Heroic Option: the Irish in the British Army*, (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Military Publishing, 2005), xii.

struggled to cultivate a collective memory. The political tensions and controversies present in 1914 grew and incited increasing problems for the Ireland. The onslaught of the Troubles in the 1960's and IRA violence over the century precluded many Irish from thinking about issues other than current political ones because the "remembrance of problematic episodes in the collective past challenges national meta-narratives and poses a threat to the dominant power structures."¹³²

The easing of political tensions between Great Britain and Ireland after the 1998 Easter Agreement finally provided the opportunity for reexamining the role of the Irish in World War I. This is evidenced by a boom in the creation of war memorials after the 1990's in the Republic of Ireland. Perhaps most importantly, the fallen of WWI were finally honored in an official opening of the National War Memorial. Though the memorial had fallen into disrepair by the 1970's, the late 1980's brought a renewed interest in the memorial. The bombing of a civilian Remembrance Day ceremony in Enniskillen in 1987 prompted many Irish to reevaluate the government's attitude towards Remembrance ceremonies.¹³³ The Office of Public Works began restoring the memorial and in 1988 it was unofficially reopened to the public. The official state opening of the memorial came on July 1, 2006 in conjunction with the 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme and was attended by President Mary McAleese.¹³⁴

The attendance of the President of Ireland indicates a significant shift in Irish attitudes toward the Great War over the century. Though elected in 1997 under the Fianna Fáil party,

¹³² Beiner, 304.

¹³³ Richard S. Grayson, *Belfast Boys: How Unionists and Nationalists Fought and Died Together in the First World War*, (London: Continuum, 2009), 171.

¹³⁴ D'Arcy, 191.

the main republican party, McAleese is currently serving her second term as an independent. She is the first president of the Republic born in Northern Ireland and has sought to build bridges between the Republic and Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is not surprising that a president representing the need to rectify the difficulties suffered by the two Irelands would attend a ceremony honoring men whose memory had been swept under the political rug.

During the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, World War I memorials appeared in growing numbers across the Republic of Ireland. Some were funded by community organizations, others by local city or county governments. One of the forerunners of this movement was a group of local citizens in Bandon, Co. Cork (a predominantly Catholic county) who realized the lack of memorials to the fallen of both world wars. The committee was formed in 1995 to erect a monument in honor of the county men who fought and the two hundred who were buried abroad.¹³⁵ Although no mention is made on the memorial website of possible deeper motivations, such as fallen ancestors, the committee repeatedly emphasizes the need for recognition of those who served and to heal past omissions:

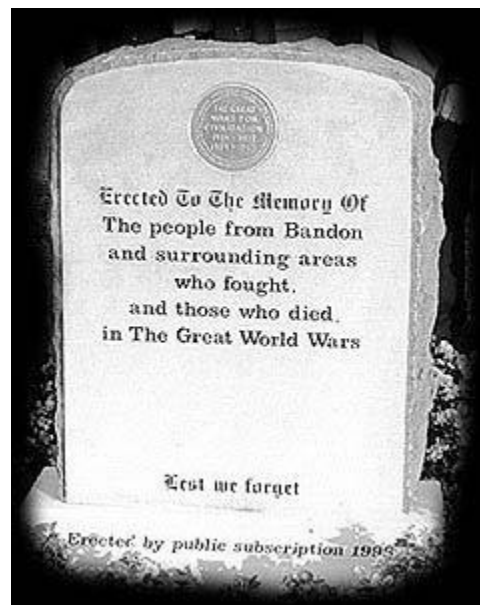


Figure 5: Bandon Memorial Stone
www.bandonmemorial.com

It is to promote a wider awareness of the forgotten Irish men and women who served, fought and died in the Great War 1914-1918. We believe that a better understanding of

¹³⁵ <http://www.bandonmemorial.com> November 10, 2009.

the shared heritage of sacrifice now will help to reconcile the two major traditions on the whole of this island.¹³⁶

This was not planned as a memorial on the national level but to the men who fought from Bandon.¹³⁷ The committee chose to place the memorial stone on the site of the old railway station from which many of the fallen left Bandon for war. The request to build there was granted in January 1996 and the stone was placed in February. The following spring the surrounding area was cultivated for a park.

The Bandon War Memorial Committee continued its efforts to integrate the long dead of WWI into their local memory. While the memorial stone honors the fallen of both world wars, the central efforts of the committee focused on the Great War. On November 3, 1996 they hosted a tree planting ceremony on the memorial site. Clergy from surrounding churches, Protestant and Catholic, were invited to attend and lead the gathering in prayer for the honored dead. This tree was planted by the committee as a living element to symbolize the eternal nature of their remembrance. In subsequent years the committee hosted the tree planting ceremony on Remembrance Sunday, the second Sunday in November. On their website, the committee notes that their annual Remembrance Day celebration has grown to include a parade, prayers by local clergy, wreath laying, reading of the roll of honor and reveille.¹³⁸ The privilege given to the Great War is apparent in the fact that the concept for the memorial began due to a desire to honor the forgotten of this war. World War II and later conflicts were added as a way to prevent excluding other area veterans the way World War I veterans were previously omitted.

¹³⁶ <http://www.bandonmemorial.com> November 10, 2009

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Another example of a recent county memorial rests in the predominantly Catholic Co. Mayo. The creation and building of the Mayo Peace Park Memorial spanned almost a decade, culminating in an official opening ceremony October 7, 2008 by President Mary McAleese. The project began in 1999 when the current chairman of the Mayo Peace Park committee, Michael Feeney, wrote to the *Connaught Telegraph* newspaper hoping to find others interested in creating a Co. Mayo memorial to commemorate those who had served and fallen in the world wars. To further his goal of building a memorial, Feeney organized the initial Mayo World War Remembrance Mass in November 1999. During this mass, a torch was lit and has burned constantly ever since. By 2002 Feeney was able to organize a committee to develop the memorial plans.

In an article posted to the Mayo Memorial Peace Park website, Feeney wrote, “The brave Mayo men and women who served and helped in World War One were ignored and



Figure 6: Mayo Memorial Peace Park

forgotten, airbrushed out of local and national history.”¹³⁹ After learning that two of his own family members died in the Great War, Feeney began extensive research on their role in the war, which in turn,

generated an increased interest in the Great War overall. Inheriting war memorabilia from his

¹³⁹ “Council gives fulsome support to World War Peace Park proposal,” <http://www.mayomemorialpeacepark.org/about.html>, December 6 2009

mother also pushed Feeney to learn more about his own family's war experience. Feeney realized that no memorial existed in his home county to honor the 1,020 Mayo men who died during WWI.¹⁴⁰ Feeney argued,

It will go some small way to expressing our gratitude and thanks to all those who served and died in the cause of world peace. It will give families a place to pray for the people they lost. It is also an opportunity to right history.¹⁴¹

Like the Bandon Co. Memorial stone, this memorial honors the fallen of both world wars, although it is important to note that the driving force for the memorial was the commemoration of WWI dead. While the Republic of Ireland did not officially engage in WWII, Irishmen did participate. Feeney and his committee realized the necessity of honoring men of both wars.

Construction of the memorial took five years. Feeney and his committee were granted a building site adjacent to the Old Cemetery by a local businessman and the Mayo County Council. Once the site was secured, building applications were submitted to the County Council. Councillor Cribbin promised Feeney the full support of the council.¹⁴² The response of the council was overwhelmingly supportive and the committee was granted their request.

The motivations for support by the County Council, as stated in the article, are particularly telling of the need to remember World War I. Councillor Munnelly stated that "Ireland would not be a democratic country today if it had not been for those who stood up against tyranny and paid the ultimate sacrifice for doing so."¹⁴³ This council member viewed

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Irish service in WWI as a necessity to produce a democratic and independent Ireland (an interesting point of view, given that De Valera fought to prevent such a concept). After almost eighty years of constantly dealing with the bloody aftermath of the division of the island, in the 1990's the Irish strove to find other historical memories which could provide a different insight into their past. For most of the twentieth century Irish history revolved around the War for Independence and the Civil War and their contemporary consequences. The members of this committee sought to identify other pieces of their collective past. Another council member, Johnny Mee, cites the improved relations between Great Britain and Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century as allowing the Irish to honor those who fought with the British during the war.¹⁴⁴ Councillor Munnelly also commented,

It is well overdue, however, that two things are done in this country. Firstly, to recognize all those people who made the ultimate sacrifice at war and, secondly, to hold ceremonies in their honour that are non-political.¹⁴⁵

These comments are indicative, not only of the altered mindset ninety years removed from the controversy of the National War Memorial, but also of the pressing importance felt to construct a memorial to these men and women. Echoed in these comments is the desire to rightfully place those who served in their proper place in Irish history, regardless of politics. This is a prime example of an attempt to have the necessary reflection that allows a moment to be integrated into memory. With the lessening of Irish-British tensions after the Easter agreement in 1998, the Irish could focus on other aspects of their history rather than those moments that directly contributed to the violence of the twentieth century. With such disagreements settled

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

by the mid 1990's, the Irish could recapture other historical moments which had been forgotten.

A September 14, 2005 article from the *Mayo News* not only describes the process of the Mayo Memorial Peace Park's construction but also illustrates the desire to remember the men of WWI. The article's first paragraph is a scathing condemnation of the lack of remembrance for Irish soldiers. Though the county lost over one thousand men, there were no public memorials.¹⁴⁶ The paragraph describes in graphic detail the horrifying experiences these men died in, citing the inexcusability of neglecting such sacrifice:

For them, few words of sorrow were ever publicly expressed. No memorial to their bravery was erected. They were the forgotten heroes of an horrific war, unsung, unloved, anonymous.¹⁴⁷

The language of this article is demonstrative of the overarching need to find a way to properly remember these soldiers. The article also echoes the sentiment of sadness for the soldiers forgotten due to the conflict between nationalists and the British:

The feats of Michael Collins and the IRA obscured the events of the Great War. Young men dying in foreign fields were spared no thought. No address of welcome greeted those fortunate to survive when they returned home. They lived out their lives as if nothing had happened.¹⁴⁸

In a 2009 essay entitled, "The Historical Background of the Mayo Peace Park", Captain Donal Buckley of the Irish Army elucidates the history of Ireland's involvement in WWI and how the soldiers were forgotten. He argues that it is time for the Irish to change the way they think

¹⁴⁶ "Honouring the Mayo men who died on the battlefields of Europe and beyond has become a labour of love for Michael Feeney". <http://www.mayomemorialpeacepark.org/about.html>, December 6, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

about WWI. He argues that they were force-fed a one-sided history where the Rising and Civil War were more important than any other events of that period. Since the Great War, the unionists claimed WWI as their own which Buckley believes is an erroneous monopolization of history. He urges the Republic of Ireland to reclaim their part in WWI. Buckley asserts,

History is written by the victors, but rarely if ever have victors betrayed their own in such a manner. We ought to hang our head in shame and beg forgiveness from these soldiers and their families and their descendants.¹⁴⁹

For Buckley, this memorial seeks to right, even if in a small way, the wrongs done by previous administrations and the greater Irish people to the soldiers of WWI. He wants the Irish “to stand back and see how our history was manipulated [by politics] and how we were manipulated with it.”¹⁵⁰ Ultimately, Buckley believes the memorial and the subsequent book which details the stories of hundreds of Mayo soldiers of the Great War, would redeem the previous wrongs done to the soldiers’ memory:

The scores of thousands of veterans in heaven will look down on this country and on the authors and say ‘Thank you, at last we are remembered, justice has been done, we can rest.’¹⁵¹

This essay illustrates the changed mindset of many Irish by the end of the twentieth century. Due to the alterations in the relationship with Great Britain, Ireland no longer had to maintain a one-sided view of the Great War period. Evident from Buckley and the case study of Mayo County, descendants of the Catholic nationalists discovered a need to remember the soldiers of WWI. Michael Feeney’s inheritance of Great War memorabilia pushed him to

¹⁴⁹ Captain Donal Buckley, “Historical Background of the Mayo Peace Park”, <http://www.mayomemorialpeacepark.org/about.html>, December 6, 2009.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ P.J. Clarke and Michael Feeney, *Mayo Comrades of the Great War 1914-1919*, (Ballina Co. Mayo: Padraig Corcoran Publishing, 2006), 1.

investigate his own family past and, consequently, that of his home county. His professed need to connect to his family's past is evidence of a need felt by many Irish people. According to Seamus Heaney, "To an imaginative person, an inherited possession . . . is not just an object, an antique, an item on an inventory; rather it becomes a point of entry into a common emotional ground of memory and belonging."¹⁵² As Buckley illustrated, there was a need to resurrect the full history of Ireland, not just the version manipulated by the early Free State. This speaks to Catherine Reinhardt's point that a nation cannot lose awareness of its past or it will fail to walk into the future. By the twenty-first century, Ireland was ready to confront the truth of its past and incorporate that memory. The Irish were able to incorporate historical events and memories rather than just those that had served the needs of politicians.

The failure of the Irish Free State to erect an effective memorial to the memory of WWI and the subsequent quelling of Great War memory meant that Irish people living in the Republic lacked a complete understanding of their history or a way to deal with the loss of those that died. According to Jay Winter, "Touching war memorials, and in particular, touching the names of those who died, is an important part of the rituals of separation which surrounded [memorials]."¹⁵³ The lack of memorials to WWI precluded this essential grieving process for people in the Free State. The deep political divisions within Ireland prevented the inclusion of memory about an event that was seen as a British endeavor. As argued by Desmond and Jean Bowen, "during the years of Fianna Fail hegemony the resentment of everything British tended to be bitter and unforgiving."¹⁵⁴ It was not until the late 1990's that

¹⁵² Seamus Heaney as quoted in Guy Beiner, 231.

¹⁵³ Winter, 113.

¹⁵⁴ Bowen, xii.

the Irish, through the thawing of tensions with Northern Ireland and Britain, could reexamine their history. This enabled them to see WWI as an event, not simply in service to the British Army, but as one where Irishmen spilled their blood ostensibly for Ireland. The slackening of political tensions at the turn of the century allowed Irish service in WWI to be about more than service to Britain. Although the Irish struggled to incorporate the memory of the Great War, by the century's end the dead of WWI were honored.

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