



# Distant Thunder

The Journal of the Irish Branches of  
The Western Front Association



Issue No. 2

Autumn 2019



The cover of the periodical *Irish Life* dated 26 September 1916 which marked the death in battle of Lieutenant Thomas Kettle, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

## From the Editor

Welcome to Issue No. 2 of *Distant Thunder*. First of all, let me sincerely thank all those who sent their good wishes on the arrival of this journal and those who provided material for this issue and who offered to provide material for future issues. While the main aim of this journal is to keep Irish members of the WFA informed of association events in Ireland, to publicise branch activities and to provide them with a means to publish their own material, I would hope all those who received it will pass it on to anyone they know who has an interest in the Great War. Once again, this issue contains news from the branches, photographs and articles. I hope you will find content interesting, enjoyable and informative.

The next issue is planned for January 2020, so let me take this opportunity to again invite all those who read this to contribute material for future issues or to offer suggestions or comments regarding its content.

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# **Ireland, Cork and the Gallipoli Campaign**

By

**Gerry White**

**Island of Ireland Trustee**



**Landing troops from the River Clyde at V Beach, Gallipoli Peninsula  
by  
Charles Dixon RA**

The ill-fated Gallipoli campaign that took place during the Great War had its origins in the stalemate that had developed on the Western Front at the end of 1914. In November of that year Winston Churchill, Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty, conceived a plan to send a number of battleships up the Dardanelles Straits to suppress the Turkish defences on the Gallipoli peninsula and bombard Constantinople, the capital of Turkey. He hoped this operation would force the Ottoman Empire out of the war and open the Dardanelles to Allied shipping.

Churchill's plan was approved by the British War Cabinet on 13 January 1915. Between 19 February and 18 March 1915, the Royal Navy and French Navy made three unsuccessful attempts to force the straits with the loss of a number of battleships. Following the failure of the naval operation, the Allied High Command decided that a ground offensive would be required to suppress the Turkish defences on the Gallipoli peninsula. The formation tasked with this operation was the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force under command of the General Sir Ian Hamilton. This force consisted of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division, commanded by Major General Aylmer Hunter Weston; the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (the ANZACs) commanded by Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood, and the French *Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient*, led by General Albert D'Amande.

The Allied plan called for the invasion force to concentrate on number of Greek islands in the Aegean Sea from where it would be ferried to the coast of Gallipoli. The French Corps would launch a diversionary attack on the Asiatic shore near Kum Kale while the British and ANZACs landed on the peninsula. The ANZACs would land on beach north of Gaba Tepe known as 'ANZAC Cove' and the 29<sup>th</sup> Division would land on five beaches (designated S, V, W, X and Y beaches) on Cape Helles at the southern tip of the peninsula.



Following a preliminary naval bombardment, the majority of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division would be taken ashore in rowboats manned by naval personnel. The only variation to this plan concerned the landing at 'V' Beach. Some members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, would be taken ashore in rowboats, but the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers, two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the Hampshire Regiment and one company of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers would travel on board a converted collier the SS 'River Clyde'. This ship would be run aground. The troops would then exit through a number of sally ports that had been cut into its hull and onto a flat-bottomed steam hopper that would provide a 'bridge' to the beach. Once ashore, the 29<sup>th</sup> Division would capture the heights around Achi Baba and the ANZACs would occupy the Sari Bair ridge and cut off the Turkish forces in the south. The Allies would then advance and capture the Turkish positions defending the straits. However, because of the their failed naval operation, the Allies had lost the element of surprise and the Turkish Army, now under the command of the German General Otto Liman Von Sanders, had ample time to strengthen their defences.

The operation commenced at dawn on 25 April 1915. The British troops coming ashore at S, X and Y beaches met little opposition. However, the French troops landing at Kum Kale and the 1,000 men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, who landed at W Beach (later known as 'Lancashire Landing') met with determined opposition. As they came ashore, many Lancashires were mown down by small arms fire. Fighting raged for the entire day but by nightfall they had established a beachhead and secured some of their objectives.

Among the 169 Lancashires who died that day was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant John Stanley Williamson of St. Luke's, Cork. Two soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force with Cork connections also died at Anzac Cove. Major John William Hamilton of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion was the son of former RIC constable William Hamilton, of 6 St. Joseph's Terrace, St. Luke's, Cork and Private Patrick Kieley of the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion was the son of Elizabeth Kieley of 29 Thomas Davis Street, Cork. Unfortunately, these men were not the only Cork soldiers to die at Gallipoli that fateful day. The majority were members of the Royal Munster Fusiliers and they lost their lives at the horror that was V Beach.

V Beach was 270 metres long and 9.1 meters wide with a 1.5 metre sand bank. It was overlooked by Fort Etrugel on the left and Sedd el Bahr castle on the right. At around 6.30am the Dublin Fusiliers made their way to the shore. It appeared that the naval bombardment had destroyed the enemy defences but this wasn't the case. Just as they reached the shore Turkish infantry situated in the fort and castle opened fire with rifle and machine-gun fire causing many casualties.

While the 'Dubs' were scrambling to find some cover on the beach the *River Clyde* approached the shore. It was then that things started to go wrong. The steam hopper that was supposed to form a 'bridge' to the beach failed to do so. When he noticed this, the captain of the River Clyde, Commander Edward Unwin and Able Seaman William Charles Williams jumped into the sea and formed a makeshift bridge with three transport ships that they managed to manhandle alongside the 'River Clyde'.

The Munsters now started to emerge from the sally ports but as soon as they were on the gangplank Turkish infantry opened fire and within seconds many were killed or wounded. Two of the Cork born members of the Munsters on board the River Clyde were Private Timothy Buckley from Macroom and

Private James Fitzgerald from Blarney. Buckley survived the carnage and, in a letter he later wrote home, he described the landing and the death of James Fitzgerald:

*About 7 o'clock we ran the ship ashore about 50 yards from the Turkish fort Sedd-el-Bahr. It was a good job we had the protection of the steel sides of the ship, otherwise not a man would have been left. Then the landing operations started. The gangway was put out, and a few pontoons bridges stretched to the beach. All the time the Turks were sending a hail of lead at anything that appeared. The captain of my company asked for 200 volunteers, and as I was in his company I volunteered. We got ready inside on the deck, and opened the buckles of our equipment, so that every man might have a chance of saving himself if he fell into the water. He gave the order to fix bayonets when we should get ashore. He then led the way, but fell immediately at the foot of the gangway. The next man jumped over him, and kept going until he fell on the pontoon bridge.*

*Altogether 149 men were killed outright and 30 wounded. I was about the twenty-seventh man out. I stood counting them as they were going through. It was then I thought of peaceful Macroom, and wondered if I should ever see it again. When my turn came I was wiser than some of my comrades. The moment I stood on the gangway I jumped over the rope on to the pontoon. Two more men did the same, and I was already flat on the ground. Those two chaps were at each side of me, but not for long, as the shrapnel was bursting all around us. I was talking to the chap on the left, and saw a lump of lead enter his temple. I turned to the chap on my right. His name was Fitzgerald. He was from Cork, but soon he was over the border. The one piece of shrapnel had done the job for the two. In the meantime the water was full of dead. Some got slightly wounded and fell off the barge. The water did the remainder.*

By nightfall those who made it ashore were huddled beneath the sandbank. During the night, efforts were made to reorganise those still capable of fighting into something resembling a military formation. The surviving members of the Dublin and Munster Fusiliers were amalgamated into an ad hoc force -which quickly became known as the 'Dubsters'.

By noon the following day and by noon the British had secured the beach and captured Fort Etrugel. The next objective was the village of Sedd el Bahr. Rows of barbed wire attached to metal stanchions blocked the way to the village and these would have to be cleared if the assault had any chance of success. A party of fifty men under the command of a sergeant major was tasked with cutting the wire. One of the Munsters detailed for this task was twenty-seven year old Corporal William Cosgrove from the village of Ballinookera, near Aghada, Co. Cork. The operation commenced at 1.30pm and Cosgrove later described his experience in an article that appeared in the *Cork Examiner*:

*Our job was to dash ahead, face the trenches bristling with rifles and machine guns, and destroy the wire entanglements – that is, to cut them here and there with our pliers.*

*Our Sergeant Major was killed – a bullet through the brain. I then took charge; shouted to the boys to come on. From the village near at hand there came a terrible fire to swell the murderous hail of bullets from the trenches. In the village they fired from doors and windows, and from that advantage they could comfortably take aim.*

*The dash was quite 100 yards, and I don't know whether I ran or prayed the faster – I wanted to try and succeed in my work, and I also wanted to have the benefit of dying with a prayer on*

*my mind ... Some of us got close to the wire, and we started to cut it with pliers. You might as well try and snip Cloyne Round Tower with a lady's scissors, and you would not hurt yourself either. The wire was of great strength, strained as tight as a fiddle string, and so full of spikes or thorns that you could not get a cutters between.*

*'Heavens' said, I, 'we're done'; a moment later I threw the pliers from me. 'Pull them up' I roared, 'put your arms round them and pull them out of the ground.' I dashed at the first one; heaved and strained, and then it came into my arms and same as you'd lift a child. I believe there was some wild cheering when they saw what I was at, but I only heard the screech of the bullets and saw dust rising all round from where they hit.*

While he was pulling the stanchions from the ground Cosgrove was hit by two Turkish bullets. Despite his wounds he continued to remove the barbed wire obstacle. When a path had been cleared, Cosgrove and some of his comrades charged forward and managed to capture a number of Turkish trenches. However, once these positions had been secured, he collapsed and was taken to the regimental aid post for medical assistance. William Cosgrove was subsequently promoted to sergeant and on 23 August 1915 he was awarded the Victoria Cross – Britain's highest military award for gallantry in the face of the enemy.



A contemporary print showing Corporal William Cosgrove, 1RMF, removing the barbed wire barricades on the heights above V Beach on 26 April 1915

Though the British managed to secure a foothold on Cape Helles, a stalemate soon developed. In an effort to break this impasse a plan was conceived to land a force at Suvla Bay on the Aegean coast. This would open a new front on the peninsula and support a breakout from ANZAC Cove five miles to the south. This operation commenced on the night of 6 August 1915. Unfortunately, it was mismanaged from the start and within weeks another stalemate had developed.

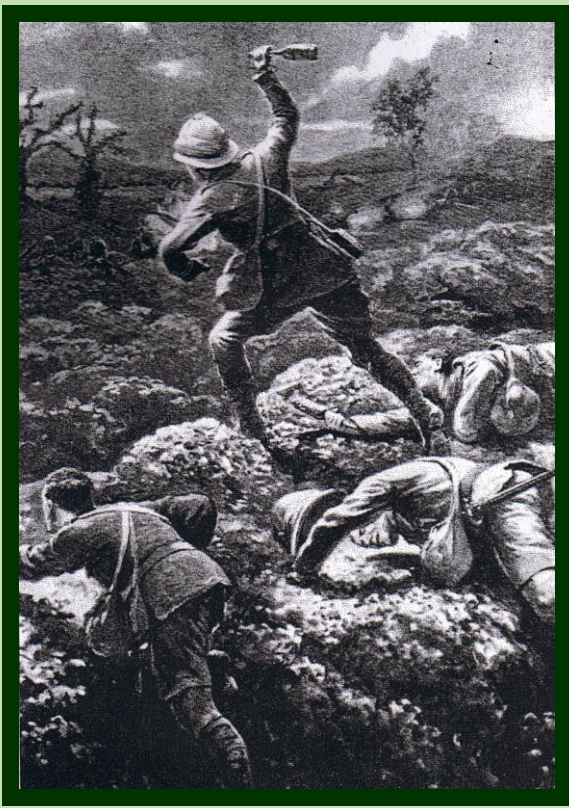


Among the Cork born soldiers to fight at Suvla was Captain Gerald Robert O'Sullivan of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Inniskilling Fusiliers. Born at Frankfield, Co. Cork, O'Sullivan originally came ashore with his unit at X Beach on 25 April and over the next few weeks he took part in many of the battles that took place in that part of the peninsula. On the night of 1 July 1915, he was instrumental in repulsing a Turkish attack. Notwithstanding the danger to himself, O'Sullivan climbed over the parapet of his trench and threw a number of grenades at the advancing Turks. Though wounded in the legs, his example served as inspiration to his men who successfully defended their position.

On 11 August, after he recovered from his wounds, O'Sullivan rejoined the Inniskillings at Suvla Bay. Ten days later he was killed while leading his men in an operation to capture a Turkish position known as Hill 70. He was twenty-six years old and his remains were never recovered. Like Cosgrove before him, O'Sullivan was also awarded the Victoria Cross for the gallantry and courage he displayed on the night of 1 July and previously on the night of 18 June 1915.



**Captain Gerald O'Sullivan VC**



**A contemporary print showing Captain Gerald O'Sullivan in action at Gallipoli**

Despite the heroism displayed by Cosgrove, O'Sullivan and countless others, poor leadership, inadequate logistics, and the determined opposition of their Turkish opponents meant that the Allied campaign at Gallipoli was doomed to fail. In December 1915 the British government took a decision to call off the campaign and evacuate its forces from the peninsula. This operation commenced on 10 December 1915 and finished on 15 January 1916.

Britain suffered 205,000 casualties during the Gallipoli campaign. Of those approximately 4,000 were from Ireland. On 24 March 2010 President Mary McAleese visited Gallipoli to pay tribute to the Irishmen who at Gallipoli. Speaking at a ceremony at Green Hill Cemetery she said, 'We come today to honour our Irish dead, those who fought in British uniforms, those who fought in Anzac uniforms and

to honour those whom they fought, the young Turkish men who defended their homeland. She also said, 'The distance of time and historical perspective can allow us to question the folly of that war and the appalling waste of countless wonderful, courageous young men on both sides.'

Seventy-six years earlier, in 1934, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the president of Turkey who fought with the Turkish Army at Gallipoli, wrote the following tribute to the mothers of the ANZAC soldiers who died during the campaign.

*Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives, you are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore, rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehments to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours. You, the mothers, who sent their sons from far away countries wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well.*

Today, over 100 years after the start of the Gallipoli campaign the words spoken by Mary McAleese and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk can serve as a reminder of the reconciliation and friendship that can follow when the guns of war fall silent.



**The Hellenic Memorial is a Commonwealth War Graves Commission memorial located at the tip of the Gallipoli peninsula. It commemorates 20,956 servicemen from the Commonwealth who died during the campaign and who have with no known grave. Among those commemorated on the memorial are servicemen from all parts of Ireland**



# **The Notice Board**

## **Irish Branch Details**

### **Antrim and Down Branch**

**Chairman:** Ian Montgomery

#### **Contact**

**Secretary:** Dr Tom Thorpe [antrimdownwfa@gmail.com](mailto:antrimdownwfa@gmail.com)

**Website:** <https://www.antrimanddownwfa.org/>

**Twitter:** [@WFA\\_AntrimDown](https://twitter.com/WFA_AntrimDown)

Meets at 6.30pm at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) on the second Thursday of each month. We do not meet however in January, July, August (this year) or December. A modest donation of £5.00 is requested at the door to help fund branch activities.

#### **Forthcoming Events**

**12 September:** 'It was an awful Sunday': the 2nd Inniskillings at the Battle of Festubert, May 1915 by Michael Nugent.

**10 October:** 'Willie Redmond and the Great War' by John Green.

**14 November:** Winter Conference – details to follow.

### **Cork Branch**

**Chairman:** Gerry White

#### **Contact**

**Secretary:** Gerry O'Meara [gerryo@gerryomeara.com](mailto:gerryo@gerryomeara.com)

**Website:** <https://www.westernfrontassociationcork.com>

**Facebook:** Cork Branch Western Front Association

Usually meets the last Wednesday of each month from September to June at 7:30pm in the College of Commerce, Cork. If the college is not available an alternative venue will be notified. A modest donation of €5.00 is requested to help fund branch activities.

#### **Forthcoming Events**

**2 October:** 'From Gunner to Guerrilla: Tom Barry's Road to Rebellion' by Gerry White.

**30 October:** 'Otto Dix and the Visual Memory of the Western Front of the Great War' by Dr Ann Murray.

**27 November:** 'The Battle of Verdun' by Emilie Duchateau

**11 December:** 'The Capture of Carrigtwohill RIC Barracks, January 1920' by Marie McCarthy.

### **Dublin Branch**

**Chairman:** Ian Chambers

#### **Contact**

Ian Chambers: [ian1914@eircom.net](mailto:ian1914@eircom.net)

**Website:** <https://wfadublin.webs.com/>

Meetings held at 2pm on the third Saturday of each month (except for March and August) – location to be confirmed. A modest donation of €3.00 is requested to help fund branch activities.

#### **Forthcoming Events**

**21 September:** 'The Men of Wicklow Parish in the Great War' by John Goodman.

**19 October:** Josephine Heffernan, A First World War Nurse' by Brian White.

## Podcasts Available!

A large (and growing) number of excellent podcasts on different aspects of the Great War have been recorded by Dr Tom Thorpe, the WFA Public Relations Officer and Secretary of the Antrim and Down Branch. The latest podcasts are free and can be heard via your smart phone's podcast app such as Acast, iTunes or Stitcher. Just search for the name 'Mentioned in Dispatches' to listen to the latest episodes. The back catalogue can be heard at: <https://www.kensingtons.org.uk/>

## Looking for a New Video to Watch?

If you are looking for a new video on the Great War then why not visit the Western Front Association's YouTube channel? This contains recordings of a range of interesting and informative talks given by a number of historian and academics.

You can access the video library at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/WesternFrontAssoc>

## Visit the Western Front Association Website

You can see the above and plenty of other interesting items by visiting the association website which can be accessed at this link: <https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/>

## New Material Wanted!

If you would like to contribute an item to this newsletter (an article, notice, photograph, poem or letter) then please send same to the editor at: [gerrywhitecork@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:gerrywhitecork@yahoo.co.uk)

New material is welcome and all contributions will be considered for inclusion. Material from Northern Ireland or of Irish interest from branches in the United Kingdom or the USA would be particularly welcome!

## 2020 WFA Calendar

The WFA's 2020 calendar is now available. Once again it features images of the battlefield taken by a team of volunteer photographers. The scenes depict points of interest in France and Belgium and Italy, some of which are well known but others 'off the beaten track'. As well as providing superb images of a dozen views of the battlefields of the Great War, the calendar provides detailed commentary to each image helping to set the scene in context. This is a high-quality product which, every year, receives superb feedback. Sales of the calendar also assist the WFA to continue its work. The 2020 calendar is available via the WFA e-shop or from any of the Irish branches.

### Two Calendar Images



May 2020 - Prowse Point Military Cemetery  
(Photo: John White)



April 2020 - Vancouver Corner  
(Photo: Steve Kerr)



## All Ireland WFA Conference



The Irish Branches  
of the Western Front Association  
present a

### One Day Conference

## To End All Wars?

### The Aftermath and Legacy of The First World War



**Date:** 5 October 2019

**Time:** 10:00am to 5:00pm

Registration at 09:30am

**Venue:** Dublin Port Company,  
Port Centre, Alexandra Road, Dublin 1.

### SPEAKERS

Professor Gary Sheffield, (University of Wolverhampton, President of the WFA):

'Hinge of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Aftermath of the First World War'

Gerry White, (Island of Ireland Trustee, WFA):

'From Gunner to Guerrilla - Tom Barry's Road to Rebellion'

Lar Joye, (Heritage Director at Dublin Port):

'A Divided Company - Dublin Port and the Impact of the First World War'

Dr. Darragh Gannon, (Queens University, Belfast):

'Beyond Versailles: Ireland's Global Revolutionary Moment'

Dr. Jennifer Wellington, (University College Dublin):

'Exhibiting War: The Great War, Museums, and Memory'

Chair: Dr Brendan O'Shea, (European Trustee, WFA)

Tickets (including tea/coffee) can be purchased at [www.eventbrite.ie](http://www.eventbrite.ie)  
or at the door.

Price: **€15.00**

For more information contact **Gerry White** on **0852171240**

### Please support!

Come along to the Dublin Port offices on 3 October to hear fascinating and informative talks  
and meet like-minded people from all over Ireland.



# **Tom Kettle** **Soldier, Statesman, Patriot**

by  
**Dr Brendan O'Shea**  
**European Trustee**



**Lieutenant Tom Kettle 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers**

Lieutenant Tom Kettle, Officer Commanding B Company, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was killed in action at about 5pm on 9 September 1916, near the village of Ginchy in northern France. It was of the 71st day of the Battle of the Somme. Initially buried on the battlefield by members of the Welch Guards, the location of his grave was subsequently lost and his remains were never found thereafter. Today his name is inscribed on the Thiepval Memorial near the town of Albert together with those of 72,000 others who lost their lives on the Somme - and equally have no known grave.

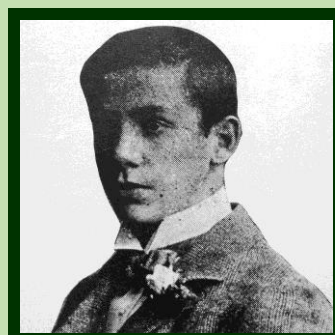
One hundred and three years later a constant stream of people from all over the world still visit Thiepval to pay their respects to the fallen - I was there myself just last week. Few remember Tom Kettle - many never heard of him at all. His only public memorial in Ireland is to be found in Dublin's St. Stephen's Green. Never unveiled properly, and following several objections by the Commissioner of Public Works to the inscription, in 1927 a bust of Kettle was eventually placed where it stands today without any reference to the facts that he was an Irish Volunteer, an officer in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and that he died during the Battle of the Somme. It is therefore hardly any wonder that almost nobody gives this memorial a second glance as the people of Dublin and visiting tourists go about their business.



**The memorial to Tom Kettle in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin**

It is, however, a national disgrace, that on the 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of his death nobody stops, nobody looks, and nobody cares. There should be an annual official commemoration at this site just as there should be one at Guillemont and Ginchy in France – but there isn't for exactly the same reasons. Nobody in official Ireland actually cares anymore and that is simply shameful. Tom Kettle deserves so much more but the Ireland he fought and died for has effectively disowned him. The manner in which history has been taught in our schools to successive generations - prioritising one historical narrative over another - has effectively reduced his contribution and sacrifice to the status of an historical footnote. This is deplorable and ignores the fact that Tom Kettle was a truly great Irishman of whom we should all be immensely proud.

Thomas Michael Kettle was born in Artane, Dublin on 9 February 1880. The seventh of twelve children, in his formative years he was influenced significantly by the Home Rule politics of his father Andrew who was a leading Catholic nationalist politician, and together with Michael Davitt a founding member of the Irish Land League. Educated initially by the Christian Brothers' at O'Connell School, Richmond Street, Dublin, he proved to be an excellent student. In 1894 he moved on to Clongowes Wood College in Co. Kildare where it was immediately obvious that the young Kettle possessed more than just an average intellect.



**Young Tom Kettle**

Three years later, Kettle enrolled at University College Dublin, where in 1898, he was elected auditor of the Literary and Historical Society and became vocal on the legitimacy of the Boer War in South Africa, before obtaining a Bachelor in Arts Degree in 1902. Thereafter he was admitted to the Irish Bar and qualified as a barrister in 1905.

Throughout this period, he also indulged in political journalism and was a determined supporter of John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party. He became president of the Young Ireland Branch of the United Irish League in 1904. Not surprisingly then when a vacancy arose in the constituency of East Tyrone after the death in 1906 of the sitting MP, Patrick Doogan, Tom Kettle was offered and accepted the chance to stand for election to Parliament. In the by-election which followed he won the seat by eighteen votes, thus becoming the youngest member of the party, and was immediately viewed by many colleagues as a future leader.

In this regard his vision of where Ireland should stand in the world was critical and a fundamental component of his entire political philosophy. Together with Willie Redmond he passionately believed that an emerging independent Ireland must exist within a wider political context. For Redmond that context was colonial in a shared political jurisdiction with Canada, Australia and New Zealand. For Kettle it was Europe. In his article 'Ireland' he wrote: *'My only programme for Ireland consists in equal parts of Home Rule and the Ten Commandments. My only counsel to Ireland is, that to become deeply Irish, she must become European'*. Tom Kettle could see the big picture and that is precisely what set him apart from the majority of his peers.

By 1908, and still only twenty-eight years of age, he had become the new professor of national economics at University College Dublin, while simultaneously continuing his work as an MP. However, the burden became too great given the fragile nature of his health, which included at times a struggle with both depression and alcoholism, and prior to the general election of December 1910 he stood down and did not contest the seat. , he retained his political connections and remained an active supporter of John Redmond, welcoming the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912, and believing that Unionist fears could be overcome in due course.

However, other social and political factors were now also at play in Ireland and in 1913 Dublin became embroiled in a workers' strike and subsequent lockout by management. Unlike many in the political establishment Kettle supported the locked-out workers and wrote numerous articles describing the appalling poverty in which thousands of working-class people were forced to live before intervening directly himself through the establishment of a peace committee in order to find a resolution.

The year of 1913 also saw the formation of the Irish Volunteers in Dublin's Rotunda Rink on 25 November. Together with his brother Laurence, Kettle immediately enrolled and



subscribed to the Volunteer Manifesto. Thereafter, he was tasked by the Volunteer leadership with obtaining arms on the continent and in August 1914 he found himself in Belgium where he personally witnessed both the ferocity of the German invasion and the corresponding inability of the Belgian military to resist.

Writing for the Daily News at this time he was unequivocal in his thoughts, *'It is impossible not to be with Belgium in this 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 dishonour. And through it, over its flaming coals, Justice must walk, were it on bare feet.'*

For Kettle the die was now cast and his continuing experiences in France and Belgium during September, particularly in relation to the plight of the civilian population, served only to confirm his view that this was a war of civilization against barbarians.

He was also clear that Ireland had obligations to support Belgium in her hour of need. *'In such a conflict to counsel Ireland to stand neutral in judgment, is as if one were to counsel a Christian to stand neutral in judgment between Nero and St Peter. To counsel her to stand neutral in action would be to abandon all her old valour and decision, and to establish in their places the new cardinal virtues of comfort and cowardice. In such matters you cannot compromise. Neutrality is already a decision, a decision of adherence to the evil side.'*

Not surprisingly then, when Kettle returned to Ireland, he had little difficulty subscribing to John Redmond's belief that Ireland should play its part in the war effort notwithstanding that Home Rule had been suspended until hostilities ceased. True to his convictions he quickly applied for a commission but was turned down repeatedly because of his fragile health. However, he persisted, and eventually obtained the rank of lieutenant, albeit that he was confined exclusively to a recruiting role. Undeterred, he continued to apply for active service and with his health improving marginally, and a chronic need for replacement officers on the Western Front, in 1916 he received an appointment in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers and deployed to France.

However, within a short time his health deteriorated again and at Easter 1916 he found himself at home in Dublin on sick leave. As his former colleagues in the Irish Volunteers launched their ill-conceived insurrection, Kettle watched in fury believing that his dream of a free Ireland in a free Europe had been terminally damaged. That said, he was also distraught at the manner in which the leaders were subsequently dealt with and he could not be consoled when his colleague at UCD, Thomas MacDonagh, was executed and his pacifist brother-in-law Francis Sheehy-Skeffington was unlawfully killed.

Nevertheless, when his time came to return to the front Kettle understood what his duty required of him, and with the courage of his deeply held convictions on 14 July he set sail

once again for France. He was thirty-six years old and had a mere fifty-eight days left to live. Readjusting to life in the trenches, Kettle did not find life easy. *'Physically I am having a heavy time.'* he wrote. *'am doing my best but I see better men than me dropping out day by day and wonder if I shall ever come home... the heat is bad as are the insects and rats, but the moral strain is positively terrible.'*

Despite such conditions, Kettle carried on bravely and in early September his leadership was effective in the series of actions close to the destroyed village of Guillemont. However, the equally damaged village of Ginchy still remained to be taken and writing to his brother the night before the attack he gave a very clear insight into his frame of mind. *'I am calm and happy but desperately anxious to live ... the big guns are coughing and smacking their shells, which sound for all the world like overhead express trains at anything from 10 to 100 per minute on this sector; the men are grubbing and an odd one writing home. Somewhere the Choosers of the Slain are touching, as in our Norse story they used to touch, with invisible wands those who are to die.'*

Tom Kettle did not want to die. He simply wanted to do his duty, survive the war, and go home. His numerous writings which survived make this abundantly clear and any suggestions to the contrary are completely without foundation. However, the following afternoon, at about 5pm, having made his way through the stench of the dead in the forward trenches and progressed to within touching distance of his objective, the *Choosers of the Slain* touched Tom Kettle notwithstanding that he had tried to outwit them by wearing a somewhat primitive bulletproof vest. Kettle was gone and Ireland had lost one of her most loyal and faithful servants.

In the intervening years Tom Kettle has often been criticised for supporting the war and serving in the British Army. Some commentators have even dared to suggest that if he wished to make a personal sacrifice in 1916 he should more properly have done so in the General Post Office with his former Irish Volunteer colleagues now turned insurrectionists. In fact, Kettle was acutely aware that this criticism would be made but firmly believed that: *'the faults of a period or a man should not prevail against the cause of liberty'*.

Writing a poem to his daughter Betty (his gift from God) on 4 September, just before the attack on Guillemont, Tom Kettle railed at the madness of his predicament and spelt out in detail why he had put country before family:

*So here, while the mad guns curse overhead,  
And tired men sigh, with mud for couch and floor,  
Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,  
Died not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor,  
But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed,  
And for the secret Scripture of the poor.*

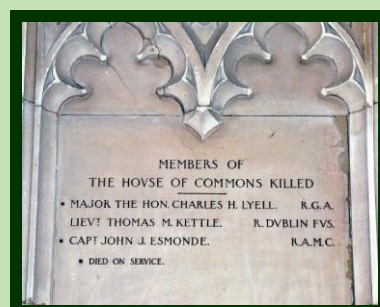
In recent times, lesser poets and lesser people have seen fit to criticise this incredible poem without having made the slightest effort to understand the physical and psychological contexts within which it was written. This is Kettle's epitaph crafted in a world of unimaginable horror with nothing save the stench of death for company and the cold sweat of fear soaking into every fibre of his body. Kettle's dream was of a free, united, and independent Ireland in a free Europe - of that there is no doubt whatsoever - and the secret scripture of the poor is what is always is - liberty, equality, and justice - or in modern parlance, Human Rights.

Three years ago, on 1 July 2016, I went to Thiepval to remember all Irishmen who died during the Battle of the Somme 100 years previously. I took with me the first edition (1917) of 'The Ways of War' by Lieutenant Tom Kettle, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, which once was owned and treasured by Private Maurice Donovan, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Durham Light Infantry. The very last words on the very last page have turned out to be prophetic: *'History will write of us that we began nobly, but that our purpose corrupted. The Great War for freedom will not, indeed, have been waged in vain; that is already decided: but it will have but half kept its promises. Blood and iron will have been once more established as the veritable masters of men, and nothing will open before the world save a vista of new wars.'*

The records show that Lieutenant Tom Kettle, Irish Volunteer and Dublin Fusilier, died courageously leading his men on 9 September 1916. His last company commander's orders written at 1050hrs that morning display clarity of thought and a comprehensive understanding of the task which faced him. His preparations were as complete as they could possibly have been in the circumstances and he led his men with courage and conviction.

But Tom Kettle was so much more than just another soldier who simply did his duty. He was desperately anxious to live in order to record for future generations the horrors of his own wartime experiences. He wanted Ireland to find her place amongst the nations of the world and he wanted that to be within a European context. Most of all he wanted to lead that progression and contribute to the intellectual and political debate which would of necessity be part of the journey. Alas, it was not to be - such are the Ways of War - and our Nation has been the poorer ever since.

Rest easy Tom Kettle - Ar dheis Dé go raibh do anam dilís.



Tom Kettle's name on the War Memorial in the House of Commons.



# **The Long and Windy Road from Stradbally to Vimy**

by  
**Denis Kirby**  
**Cork Branch**



**Lieutenant Michael Higgins**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)**

Michael Higgins grew up in Stradbally, Co. Laois (Queens County), the third eldest of sixteen children - eight boys and eight girls. His father, Thomas Higgins, who came from Co. Meath, was the local dispensary doctor and also a small farmer. His mother, Annie Sullivan, was a daughter of the MP, T. D. Sullivan and a member of the political Sullivan/Healy family. Originally from Bantry, Co. Cork, the family included five members of the Westminster Parliament.

Michael's eldest brother, Jack, was a doctor who joined the Royal Navy as a Surgeon in 1912, while the next brother, Tom, was also studying medicine. His younger brother, Kevin, was studying Law, but Michael chose an easier life and joined the Munster and Leinster Bank.

By early 1914, life was good to Michael. He was based in the bank in Skibbereen, Co. Cork and engaged to a local twenty-year old girl, Virginia O'Shea, the daughter of a local merchant and former mayor of the town. Things were looking good for his future.

That was all to come to an end that Autumn. The war broke out in Europe and on 4 August, Britain declared war on Germany. Michael didn't immediately join up, but perhaps influenced by his uncle, the nationalist MP Tim Healy and a Healy cousin who was recruiting across Munster, he joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Leinster Regiment in January 1915, which was then based in Victoria Barracks in Cork and received a commission as a lieutenant.

Whatever his real reason for giving up a comfortable job and joining the army was, he used to say, in jest, that members of his fiancée's family would object to his marriage unless he went to fight for catholic Belgium.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was, at that time, mainly a training battalion and he trained at locations around Cork, Fermoy and Kilworth until he was ready for action.

In the spring of 1915, Lieutenant Michael Higgins left to join the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Leinsters which were then deployed in the Ypres area. For the next year he was stationed in the general area of the Ypres ramparts, Birr Crossroads and Hooze.

Michael and his comrades spent their 'Rest & Recreation' in the area of Poperinge and in his book, *Stand To—A Diary of the Trenches 1915-1918*, his friend, Captain Francis Clere Hitchcock, later described some of the scrapes they got involved in – away from the front lines.

On 26 March 1916 Michael wrote to his fiancée, telling her that he was feeling a 'bit tired' but that he was looking forward to his leave which was coming up within a few weeks. Sadly, that was not to happen.

On 13 April he was admitted to Wimereux General Hospital suffering from 'fever'. Six days later, he was transferred to Wimereux 14 Stationery Hospital suffering from Enteric Fever (Typhoid). Within days his situation was so bad that a view was taken that he had only days to live. A telegram was then sent to his parents in Stradbally granting them permission to travel to France to be with him at his death.

But his parents never received the telegram. It was sent from the War Office on 25 April 1916 and would have been routed through the General Post Office in Dublin. However, that was Easter Tuesday, the second day of the 1916 Rising, and the GPO was in rebel hands. Because of this, they never got to France. But, even if they had, it would have been a wasted journey. Michael started to recover, possibly due to the treatment of Capt. (later Sir) Alexander Fleming, who was developing his research into cures for fevers. Surgeon John McCrae, who wrote the poem 'In Flanders Fields', was also based in Wimereux around that time.

In July 1916, after he was judged to be fit enough, Michael was moved to England and later in the Summer he returned to Stradbally, under the care of his medical doctor father. His recovery took a long time and he had to undergo monthly checks by the Army's medical personnel based in the Curragh Camp.

Only in January 1917 was he finally considered to be fit enough to return to duty and he was sent to Staffordshire for further training.

When he learned that he was being returned to duty, Michael's CO in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters, Colonel A.D. Murphy, put in a special request asking that he be returned to the battalion. He embarked for France on 6 March 1917 and joined his unit on 16 March.

At that stage, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters were based just west of Souchez and were preparing for the assault on Vimy Ridge which was due to take place in a few weeks. From Souchez, the battalion moved closer to the front line near Bois en Hache. Their positions there were quite exposed to the enemy who occupied higher ground. As a result, the troops had to be careful not to expose themselves to enemy fire.

The evening of 31 March 1917 was relatively quiet. It was just a week before the attack on Vimy was due to begin. The Germans started an artillery barrage at about 10.30pm that night. Michael was observing it and, possibly lit up by the light from the explosions, he was shot and killed by an enemy sniper.

Today Lieutenant Michael Higgins rests in Aix-Noulette Communal Cemetery Extension.

His eldest brother, Surgeon Commander Jack Higgins RN, survived the war. His older brother, Tom (now) O'Higgins, went on to become the head of the Irish Army's Medical Corps and later a Minister for Defence in the Irish Government. The younger brother, Kevin O'Higgins, who had been studying law, was elected to 'The First Dail' in 1919 and was later the Vice President of the Irish Free State Government and Minister for Justice until his assassination in 1927.



**The grave of Lieutenant Michal Higgins in Aix-Noulette Communal Cemetery Extension, France.**



## **Ireland Remembers – July 2019**

Since 1986 the Irish Government has held a National Day of Commemoration to commemorate all Irish people who died in past wars or United Nations peacekeeping missions. It occurs on the Sunday nearest 11 July, the anniversary of the date in 1921 that a truce was signed ending the Irish War of Independence. Each year ceremonies are held in Dublin and other locations in Ireland to mark the occasion. The day before, the Royal British Legion in Ireland holds its annual Service of Remembrance at the National War Memorial Gardens in Dublin to remember all those from Ireland who died in the Great War. This year, members of the WFA attended the ceremonies held in Dublin and Cork.



**The bands of the Irish Defence Forces and Royal Irish Regiment playing at the Royal British Legion's Service of Remembrance at the Irish National War Memorial Gardens in Dublin on Saturday, 13 July 2019.**



**Dr Brendan O'Shea, European Trustee; Gerry White, Island of Ireland Trustee; Sgt Adrian Foley, Cork Branch and Irish Defence Forces Band; Ian Chambers, Chairman, Dublin Branch and Thomas Murphy, Dublin Branch at the Royal British Legion Service of Remembrance in Dublin on 13 July 2019.**



**Members of the Cork Branch with the Lord Mayor of Cork and Mayor of Cork County at the ceremony held in Fitzgerald's Park, Cork, marking Ireland's National Day of Commemoration on Sunday, 14 July 2019.**

# 7 June 1917

## Let Ireland Remember!

By  
**Gerry White**  
**Island of Ireland Trustee**

On 7 June 1917, soldiers from the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division fought and died together at the Battle of Messines. It was also at this battle that Major Wille Redmond, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment, the nationalist MP for the Irish constituency of East Clare, was mortally wounded. After going 'over the top', Redmond was leading his men across 'No Man's Land' towards the village of Wytschaete when a German bullet hit him in the wrist. A short time later another one hit him in the leg and he fell to the ground. Though in great pain he continued to urge his men forward towards their objective.

While the battle raged, stretcher bearers from the 36th (Ulster) Division were active recovering the wounded from all units. One them, Private John Meeke, a twenty-three year old Ulster unionist from Benvarden, Co. Antrim and a member of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, saw Redmond fall and immediately rushed to his aid. While he was bandaging Redmond's wounds, Meek was himself wounded in the left side. On seeing this Redmond ordered Meeke to return to the British lines. Meeke, however, refused but within minutes he was hit by another German bullet. Once again Redmond ordered him to safety and once again Meek refused and continued his efforts to save Redmond's life. Eventually the men were rescued by a party from the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division who were escorting German prisoners to the British lines.

Major Wille Redmond was subsequently taken to a casualty clearing station at Locré where he died of his wounds and where he continues to rest in peace to this day. Though wounded, Private John Meeke insisted on returning to the battlefield to search for more casualties but he was eventually persuaded to have his own wounds treated. He was later awarded the Military Medal for his amazing act of courage. Though seriously wounded before the Armistice in 1918 he survived the war and returned home to Co. Antrim where he died of tuberculosis in December 1923.



**Private John Meeke and Major Willie Redmond**  
**Political opponents in Ireland – Comrades-in-arms on the Field of Battle.**





**A Colour Party consisting of members of the Irish Defence Forcers and Royal Irish Regiment at the Island of Ireland Peace Park on 7 June 2017.**

One hundred years after the Battle of Messines, on 7 June 2017, the Irish Taoiseach, Enda Kenny gathered at Willie Redmond's grave to remember his sacrifice. They were joined by relatives of Willie Redmond and members of the WFA. After a small wreath laying ceremony, the group travelled to the Island of Ireland Peace Park for a ceremony that was organised by the Irish and UK governments in partnership with the Mayor of Messines to honour all the Irishmen who died in the battle. The Taoiseach was joined by the Duke of Cambridge And Princess Astrid of Belgium. The event included a wreath laying ceremony, readings by members of the Irish Defence Forces and British Army and musical contributions by the Royal Band of the Belgian Navy. Wreaths were also laid on behalf of the Australian and German governments. Members of the Irish Defence Forces and British Army also provided a Colour Party. After this event the party travelled to Wytschaete where a monument depicting John Meek's rescue of Willie Redmond was unveiled.

The spirit, unity and comradeship that was present on the field of battle at Messines on 7 June 1917 was again evident at the ceremonies to mark the centenary of the battle. Rather than let that slowly fade away, I think it would be a good idea for the Irish branches and members of the WFA to 'adopt' 7 June as an association day to remember those from all parts of Ireland who lost their lives in the Great War. This can be done by organising a WFA event in Ypres and by the Irish branches and members finding a suitable way to mark the day in localities. I invite those who are willing to support this to contact me or the European Trustee by phone or e-mail.

**Let Ireland remember!**

Gerry White

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# **New Ross Soldier of the Great War Identified After 103 Years**

**By  
Ian Chambers  
Chairman, Dublin Branch**



**Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, France.**  
Photo: The New Zealand War Grave Project

In September 2016, Ian Chambers, Chairman of the Dublin Branch of The Western Front Association, was contacted by the Fromelles Association of Australia, seeking help to find male relatives of an Australian soldier, Private Peter Paul Shannon, 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion, Australian Imperial Force. Originally from New Ross, Co Wexford, Shannon had been killed in action on 19 July 1916, during the Battle of Fromelles, and whose body was believed to have been one of 250 located in a mass grave in 2008.

A plea for help was published in the New Ross Standard in October 2016, which led to Ian being contacted by Pat Shannon, whose parents, Mary and the late Jack, are well known in New Ross and whose family has lived in the town for several generations. Pat was born in New Ross and went to school in the CBS but has lived in Dublin for many years and recently retired as Professor of Geology at UCD. He was contacted by his cousin, Dolores Fleming (née Shannon), who had seen the article and sent it on to him.

Pat had done a considerable amount of research into his family tree but had not come across a link to the Peter Shannon in question, although he told Ian that he suspected that there could be a link several generations back as the Shannon name was not very common in the New Ross area. After a lengthy discussion, it was agreed that there was nothing to lose and Pat made contact with the Fromelles Association to see if they wanted to pursue the matter. They were very interested in following this up and Pat provided the details of his family tree, as well as the results of research that he had subsequently carried out on Peter Shannon's family tree. This was then passed onto the Unrecovered War Casualties team of the Australian Army.

Pat's work showed that Peter was born in Mary Street in 1880. Following the death of his father, the family emigrated to Australia in 1888. He worked as a sheep shearer and later joined the Australian

Army. He was posted to the western front and died, together with 2,500 other Australian soldiers in the Battle of Fromelles in France on 19 July 1916.

Towards the end of 2017, Pat was asked by the Australian Army if he was willing to provide a DNA sample, which he did. On 18 March this year, he was delighted to receive a telephone call from the Unrecovered War Casualties team at Army Headquarters and was told that the remains of Private Peter Shannon have now been identified as a result of the DNA comparisons. The DNA results show that Private Shannon was a second cousin of Pat's grandfather, the late Johnny Shannon of Charleton Hill.

Pat said, 'I found it sad to think that a man with the same surname and from the same town as myself lay in an unmarked mass grave for over a century.' Following the news of the identification he said, 'It was immensely rewarding to feel that I had contributed in a small way towards the identification of Peter's remains and to know that his place of birth, New Ross, will be now be inscribed on his headstone in the Fromelles Military Cemetery.'

Completed in July 2010, Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery is the first new war cemetery to be built by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 50 years. It was officially dedicated on 19 July 2010 and since that date Peter Shannon has lain in a grave marked only as 'Known Unto God'.

On 19 July, Peter was one of seven recently identified soldiers to have a new headstone with his full details on it officially dedicated. Pat, his sister Susan Synnott from New Ross, and Ian attended the rededication ceremony in Fromelles. This was also attended by Australian relatives of the other six soldiers, together with senior representatives of the Australian and French armies, the Australian ambassador and the Mayor of Fromelles. They also visited the battlefield site and were shown great hospitality by the people of Fromelles.

Peter's headstone carries the following short inscription, chosen by Pat:

*BORN NEW ROSS IRELAND  
ADOPTED BY AUSTRALIA  
BRAVE SOLDIER  
REMEMBERED BY FAMILY*



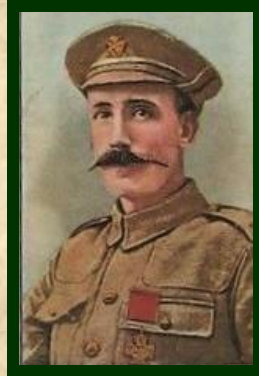
**The grave of  
3433 Private Peter Paul Shannon  
Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery,  
France.**



**Pat Shannon, his sister Susan Synnott and Ian  
Chambers at the grave of Peter Paul Shannon.**

# *Roll of Honour*

## **Rifleman Robert Quigg VC An Ulster Hero of the Somme**



Robert Quigg was born on 28 February 1885 in Ardihannon, Co. Antrim. His father, Robert Quigg senior, worked as a boatman and tour guide at the Giant's Causeway. Quigg attended the local National School between 1893 and 1898 and later got employment as a labourer on local farms including the estate of Sir Edward Harry Macnaghten. In January 1913 Quigg joined the Ulster Volunteer Force. In September 1914 he enlisted in the British Army and became a member of the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Irish Rifles (Mid-Antrim Volunteers). Macnaghten also joined the British Army and became Quigg's platoon commander

Quigg deployed to the Western Front with his unit and served there throughout the war. He earned his Victoria Cross for acts undertaken while trying, unsuccessfully, to rescue Macnaghten who had been wounded on 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Quigg survived the war but decided to remain in the army. He retired with the rank of sergeant in 1934 and died on 14 May 1955, aged seventy.

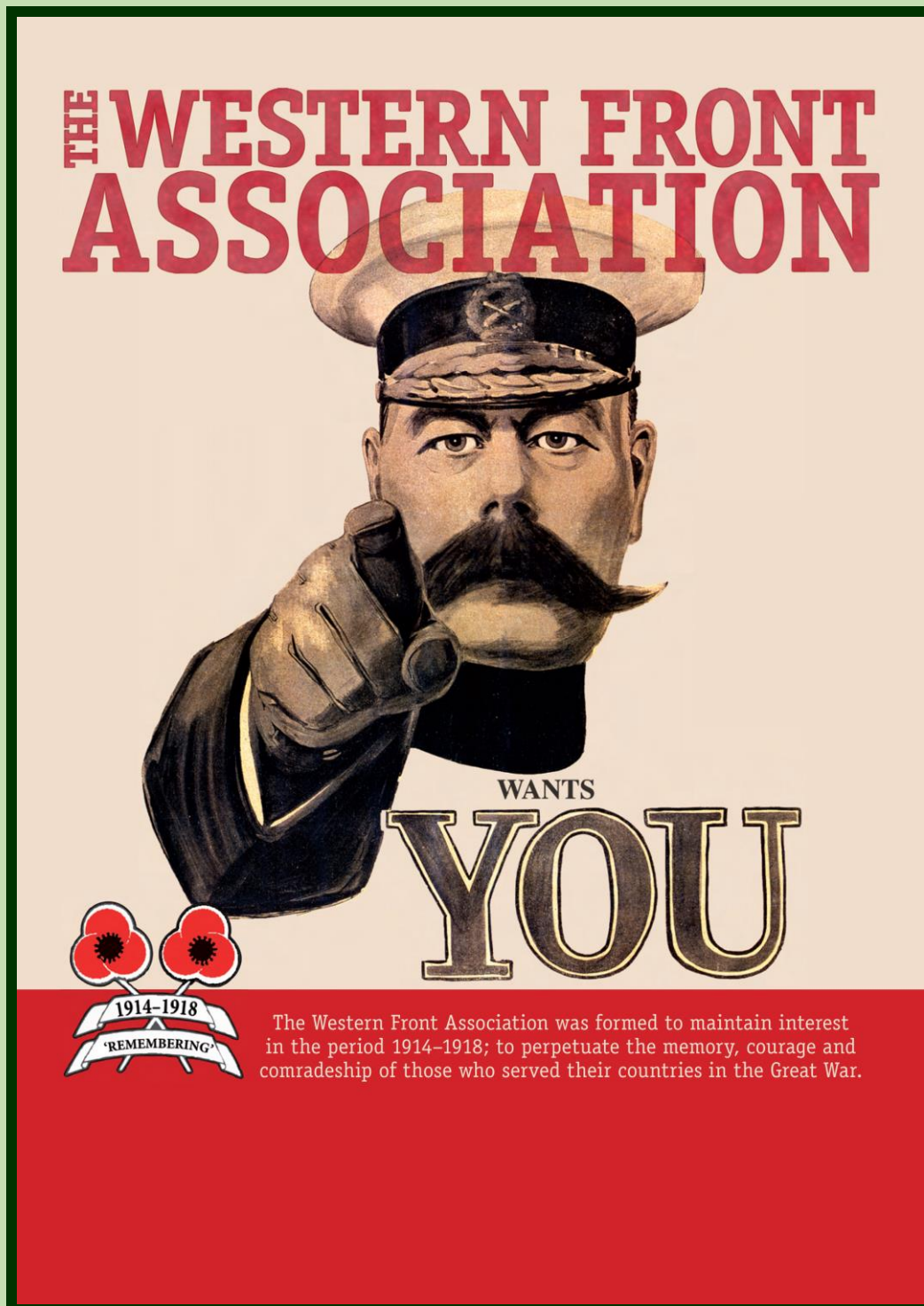
Rifleman Robert Quigg's Victoria Cross citation was published in the Supplement to the *London Gazette* on 9 September 1916 and read as follows:

### **No. 12/18645 Pte. Robert Quigg, R. Ir. Rif.**

*For most conspicuous bravery. He advanced to the assault with his platoon three times. Early next morning, hearing a rumour that his platoon officer was lying out wounded, he went out seven times to look for him under heavy shell and machine gun fire, each time bringing back a wounded man. The last man he dragged in on a waterproof sheet from within a few yards of the enemy's wire. He was seven hours engaged in this most gallant work, and finally was so exhausted that he had to give it up.*



# New Recruits Wanted!



If you are interested in joining, or forming a new branch, please contact any of the following:

**In the Republic of Ireland:**

Gerry White (Cork) 0035385 2171240 or [gerrywhitecork@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:gerrywhitecork@yahoo.co.uk)

Ian Chambers (Dublin) 003531 8958831 or [ian1914@eircom.net](mailto:ian1914@eircom.net)

Dr Brendan O'Shea (Kildare) 0035387 6886755 or [osheab@eircom.net](mailto:osheab@eircom.net)

**In Northern Ireland:** Dr Tom Thorpe: 004477 79269182 or [antrimdownwfa@gmail.com](mailto:antrimdownwfa@gmail.com)