



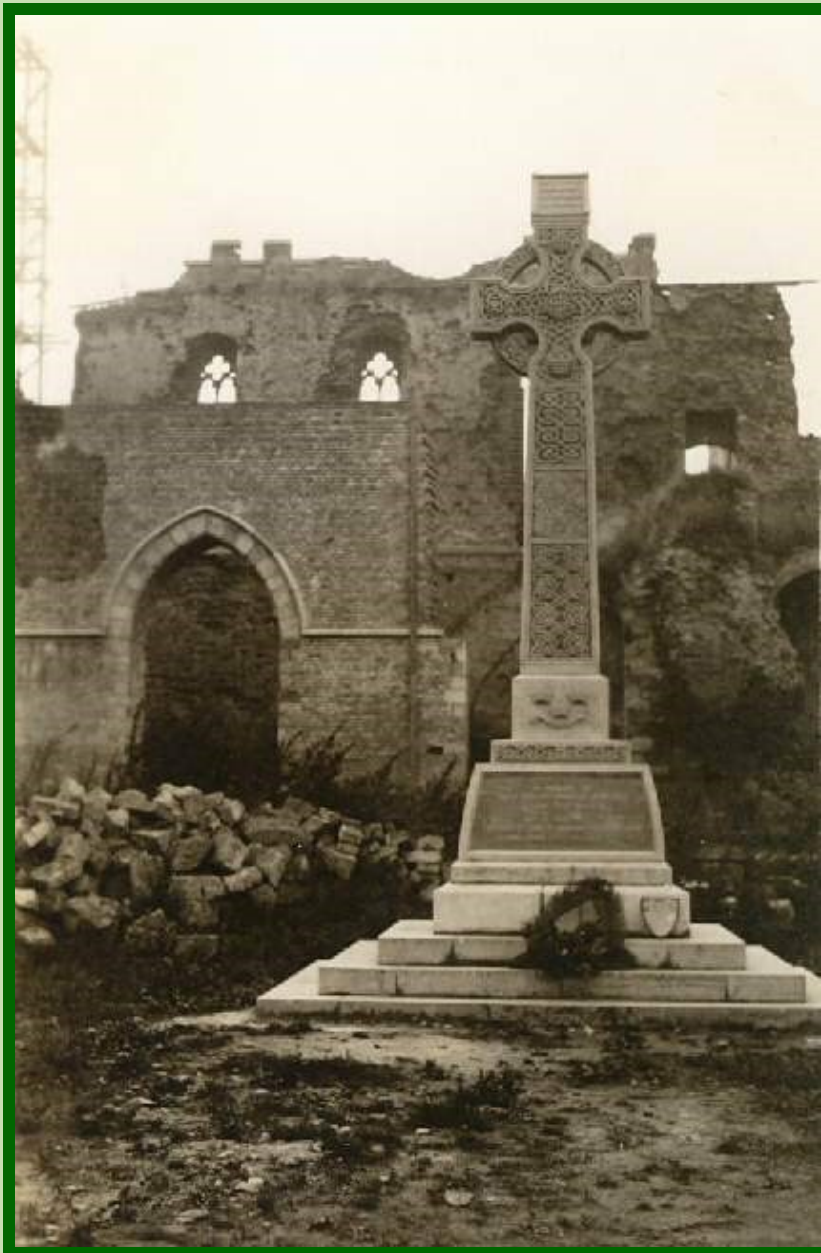
Distant Thunder

The Journal of the Irish Branches of
The Western Front Association

**Forty Years Exploring the Great War
1980-2020**

Issue No. 4

Summer 2020



**The Munster Cross
Ypres, Belgium
1925**

From the Editor

Welcome to Issue No. 4 of *Distant Thunder*. The summer of 2020 is upon us and it will be a summer unlike any other we have experienced! By now, many of you would have been on your annual pilgrimage to the Western Front or would be looking forward to doing so in the coming weeks. All that is changed now – at least for this year. Now, many of us are pursuing our interest in the Great War by watching documentaries and films on television, by catching up on our reading or by ‘tuning in’ to one of the online presentations (webinars) being organised by the association. Others have turned their hand to conducting research and writing. And some of you have taken the time to send me an article for this issue of our journal. For that, I am extremely grateful. Despite the current situation, the Western Front Association remains active and has responded to the challenge of providing information to its members. If by chance, you are not a member I would ask you to consider joining. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the articles in this issue and please feel free to pass it on to your friends or anyone you know who might have an interest in the Great War. Also, if you would like to contribute to the next issue then please feel free to contact me.

Stay safe!

Gerry White
Island of Ireland Trustee
gerrywhitecork@yahoo.co.uk

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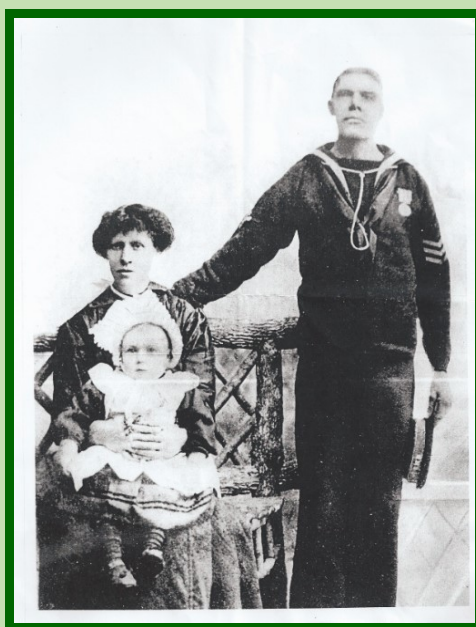
Private Martin Moffat VC

By Denis Kirby

Remembering Stoker Daniel Fitzgerald

HMS Tiger, Royal Navy

Marie McCarthy (née Fitzgerald)



**Stoker Daniel Fitzgerald Royal Navy
with his wife Mary and baby son Daniel**

I proudly spoke about my dear grandfather, Daniel Fitzgerald, on the centenary day of the Battle of Jutland on 31 May, 2016, at Alexandria Dock, Belfast. This was a formal event of remembrance which was attended by Irish, British and German Navy representatives, Prince Michael of Kent and a host of public dignitaries. I was one of five descendants who were invited to speak. I experienced many mixed emotions standing on the lectern, with HMS Caroline as my backdrop. These are the words I spoke on that historic occasion:

Daniel Fitzgerald was born on 17 December 1872, the second of three children. His parents, Daniel Fitzgerald and Mary Spillane, lived with their family at Ballyadam and in later years at Main Street, Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork, Ireland. Daniel was educated locally. Prior to World War One, he worked on the 999-acre estate of the Barry family as a gardener, as did his father. He married a local girl Mary Burke on 17 October 1910.

He joined the British Royal Navy at Queenstown, Co. Cork, on 31 March 1897. His decision to join was probably influenced by the lack of employment in his locality. His naval record shows that he was initially trained at Devonport. He was described as being of stocky build, 5ft 8in in height, dark hair and a ruddy complexion. The HMS Tiger, a 704 ft long battle cruiser, became his home for the duration of the Great War and he was on board as a stoker for the Battle of Jutland.

My grandfather experienced and witnessed the horror and suffering of the Battle of Jutland while shovelling tons of coal in the bowels of this ship. I suppose one could conclude that he possibly survived because he was buried deep in the ocean in a coal dust laden atmosphere within the confines of the stoker's area, tolerating temperatures of 150°F. HMS Tiger carried over 3,000 tons of coal at maximum loading. There was poor ventilation and it was exhausting, backbreaking work. I wonder what it was like for him to think of his wife and his very young family of two sons; Daniel, two years, and Thomas, an infant at home. Would he survive to see them again, as the ship was under attack and

being pitched around in the roaring seas? Tiger took several hits, some records suggest as many as eighteen, as the warships of the rival navies continued to converge on each other.

My father told me in later years that his father (Daniel) did not speak of his experiences very often but would frequently stand in his doorway at his home and stare into the distance. He recalled hearing horrific sounds when HMS Queen Mary received a direct hit that caused the ship to explode and sink, with the entire crew of over 1,200 lost to the deep. My father suspected that his tragic haunting memories led him to experience great emotional turmoil and sadness.

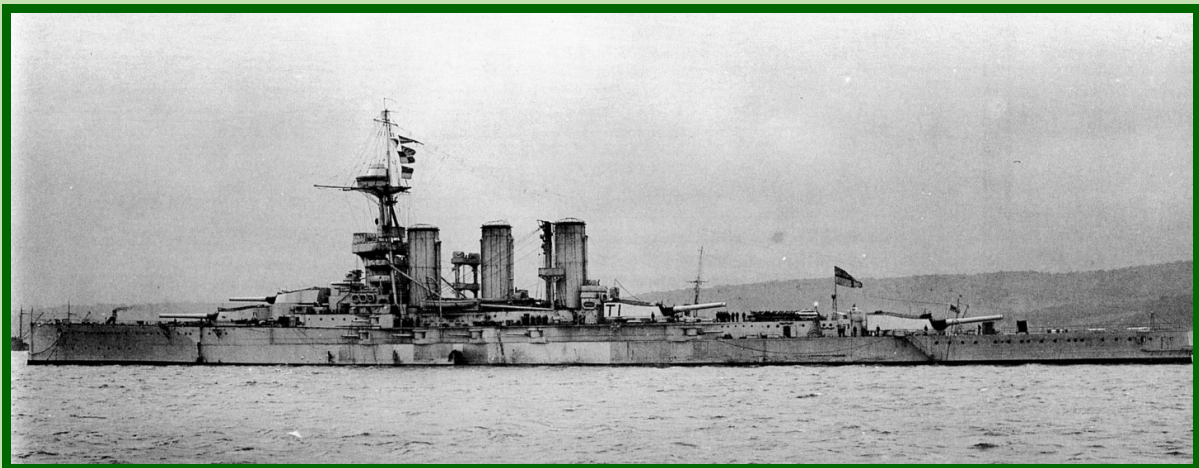
Recent research, conducted by Francis O Connor of the Cork Branch, WFA, shows that Cork city and county lost at least 123 sailors at the Battle of Jutland. My grandfather would have known many of those people and their families, some of whom had lived in Queenstown, Youghal and Cork city. On 1 June 1916 at 5.30 p.m., the Tiger came out of its zig - zag formation to facilitate the burials at sea of those twenty-eight unfortunate crew members who perished in the battle. Daniel witnessed this and relived it psychologically for the rest of his life. He never slept well again. Another matter of concern to Daniel was that while he was at sea, Mary his wife, struggled to rear their two young children on her own. She also managed a successful poultry business. A third son was born post-war called Patrick.

Daniel came home from the war to his native village and continued his quiet lifestyle, though a changed man. He is described today by those who remember him as a quiet, gentle man who liked to play with his children. He is also described as having excellent barbering skills and regularly was called upon by his neighbours to use his skills on their hair. He died a widower, on 15 October 1952 aged almost 82 years and is at rest at St Mary's cemetery in Carrigtwohill.

The thought that lingers with me is that my grandfather gave his all in that war. He returned home to be greeted by political turmoil in Ireland. His second son, Thomas, born in 1914, was nicknamed "Limey" by some local people. Thomas died at thirty-seven years old from alcohol poisoning exactly a year before his father.

I do not remember my grandfather as I was too young to recall him but I cherish the fact that he returned from the war alive and that he knew me for a brief time. I honour him here today, and give voice to his story as a war hero, as his only grandchild as does my son Cathal, his only great grandson who is present today, in presenting this tribute to him.

His grave has the following inscription, which translates as 'in God's corn store may we all meet again' and in Irish it reads as: 'In lothlainn Dé go gcastar sinn.'



HMS Tiger

Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum

Conclusion

It was an amazingly emotive experience and an honour to deliver this address and I was aware of my grandfather's spirit being very present to me as I stood there and spoke about him. It was important for me to remember him and to break the culture of silence, that has persisted in our country for the past 100 years. I admire his courage, integrity and strength of character to do what he considered correct for him to do, in the context of that time.

Incidentally, my other grandfather William Sylvester, originally from Manhattan, New York, was involved in the Irish War of Independence and was a member of the 4th Battalion, Cork No. 1 Brigade of Irish Volunteers.

Sin sceál eile!

(That's another story!)



The author (Marie McCarthy) speaking about Daniel Fitzgerald at the centenary commemoration of the Battle of Jutland at Alexandra Dock, Belfast, on 31 May 2016.

Courtesy of CPCNI.



Daniel Fitzgerald in later life, proudly wearing his medals. Pictured with his youngest son, Patrick.

Corporal William Valentine Cooper DCM

1st Battalion, Irish Guards

A VC Never Received

Kenneth Cromie



William Valentine Cooper was born at Glengariff, Co. Cork on St Valentine's Day in 1894 to George Nolan Cooper and Margaret Emma Cooper (née Smith). He inherited a long family tradition of service to the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). His father, George Nolan Cooper (1860-1919), and grandfather, George Cooper (1816-91), served with the force, as did three uncles, a brother and a brother-in-law. Another brother served in the Birmingham City Police. Some details of their careers are given below in addition to William's own story.

RIC Ancestors

William's paternal grandfather George Cooper, son of William Cooper and Margaret (Peggy) Cooper (née Butler), was a native of Co. Wicklow and joined the RIC (No. 2880) on 30 August 1837 on the recommendation of P.S. Dames JP. George Cooper was promoted to Constable in 1845 and is recorded in the Annual Constabulary List and Directory for 1853 as the Constable in Charge of the Barracks in Camolin in the Gorey sub district of Co. Wexford. On 28 March of that year, he married Maria Nolan, daughter of James and Mary Nowlan (sic), at the neighbouring Ballycanew Parish Church. In the Annual Constabulary List and Directory for 1860 he is listed as the Constable in Charge of the Barracks in Clonroche in the New Ross sub district of Co. Wexford. It was here, on 15 February 1860, that a son, George Nolan Cooper, was born.

In 1861, George Cooper (senior) was promoted to Head Constable and transferred to Co. Kilkenny. His name appears on the list as Head Constable in Charge of the Barracks in Gouran until January 1868, but he served until July 1868. After George retired, the family returned to

Camolin, where he is described as a shopkeeper and later, as a farmer. He was found dead as the result of heart disease on 14 December 1891 at home in Mileseshogue, Camolin. He and his wife were buried at St. Mogue's Church, Ballycanew, Co. Wexford, the memorial inscription reading as follows:

COOPER. Erected/in/loving memory of/Geo Cooper/who depd. this life 14th Dec 1891/aged 75 years/also his daughter Margaret E./who depd this life 12th Aug 1870/aged 16 years/also his loving wife Maria/Nee Nolan who died July 1904/aged 72 years.

As noted above, their son George Nolan Cooper was born in 1860, being baptised on 1 April 1860 at Killegney Church, Co. Wexford. He joined the RIC (No. 44770) on 8 September 1879 on the recommendation of Head Constable O'Donnell (Gorey) and was posted to Co. Cork. His younger brothers, Thomas (born 1865), Philip (born 1869) and Charles Francis (born 1872, died at Newry 1944) followed him into the RIC between 1888 and 1891.

On 19 November 1891, George Nolan Cooper married Margaret Emma Smith, of whom more shortly, at Christ Church on South Main Street, Cork. Three months later, he was posted to the West Riding of County Cork, where he served for the rest of his life. Promoted to Acting Sergeant in 1895 and Sergeant in 1897, he remained in charge of the barracks in Glengarriff until his death from heart disease at the age of fifty-eight on 24 January 1919, just at the start of the Anglo-Irish War.



A contemporary postcard showing the Church of Ireland church in Glengarriff, Co. Cork.

George Cooper Nolan's wife, Margaret Emma Smith, came from an army family, having been born on 2 March 1868 at the barracks in Gibraltar. Her paternal grandparents were Lieutenant John Smith and Matilda Margaretta Sophone Jolliffe. Her father, Colour Sergeant Robert Hilliard Smith (1834-1903), was born on the Isle of Man and enlisted in the 13th Light Infantry (Regimental No. 2713) in 1849. He served in that regiment until 1870, seeing action

at Sebastopol in the Crimean War and at Azimghur during the Indian Mutiny and receiving medals for those campaigns. In 1866, he was deployed to Ireland and on 2 April 1867, the day after his promotion to Sergeant, married a local girl, Catherine (Kate) Vickery (1841-1933), at Kilmacomogue Parish Church, Bantry, Co. Cork. Although posted to Gibraltar before the end of that year, the family returned to Ireland in the early 1870s and settled in Cork City where Robert found work as a master baker

George Nolan and Margaret Emma Cooper had thirteen children, all of whom lived to adulthood. We shall return in a moment to their eldest son, William Valentine Cooper. Their eldest daughters were Maria Catherine (May) (1892-1972) and Margaret Elizabeth (1895-1972), who married two brothers, Richard (Dick) and Thomas James Skuce. The fourth child, George Robert Cooper (1897-1922), served as one of the original members of the Royal Air Force on its formation and, after demobilization, as a police constable in the Birmingham City Police, dying from blood poisoning caused by an accident whilst on duty. The fifth child, Charles Richard Cooper (1898-1973) enlisted in the RIC in 1920. Then followed Ellen Maud (1899-1983); Matilda Mary (1900-1989), whose husband David Smith (1893-1985) enlisted in the RIC in 1913; Lillian Annie (born 1901); Thomas Hilliard (1903-72), born just after the death of his grandfather Robert Hilliard Smith; Henry Francis (1904-65); Olive Eveleen (1906-82); Edith Patricia (1910-2001) and Emma (born 19 May 1911).

Tragically, Margaret Emma Cooper died in childbirth aged only forty-three. Her funeral was held at Bantry on 21 May 1911. The Skibbereen Eagle of 27 May 1911 recorded her death:

The late Mrs Cooper, Glengarriff: On the 19th inst the wife of Sergeant Cooper died at the Barrack, leaving a large helpless family, after a very brief illness. Much regret has been expressed by the sergeant's superior officers, his comrades, all the magistrates and a sympathetic public who attended the funeral on Sunday, which was three miles in extent. Rev. W. O'Harvey, Rector of Glengarriff, Canon O'Grady and Rev E. Haddon, Bantry, officiated. The deceased, being a well-known member of the Vickery family, the greatest respect was shown by the general public, as well as the members of the force, who contributed many wreaths.

William Valentine Cooper

We now turn to the main focus of this article, William Valentine Cooper: who as noted above, was born on 14 February 1894. Having been brought up in the police house at Glengarriff, it was natural that he should follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather by enlisting with the RIC (No. 66525) in 1912. On completion of his training, he was posted to Castlewellan, Co. Down. An aunt, Mary Jane Thompson (née Cooper) lived in Newry and, following the death of their mother, his younger sister Olive went to live with a Mrs Thompson.

On 3 November 1915, aged twenty-one, William volunteered for military service, enlisting at Dublin with the Irish Guards (Regimental No. 10161) for the duration of the war. The next day, he embarked for Caterham Army Depot, the home of the Foot Guards. He was passed fit for service in the field at home and abroad. His height was recorded as 6 feet 1 inch and his weight was 196 pounds. The *Down Recorder* of 6 November 1915 recorded that:

Constables Cooper, Corcoran and Henaghan, who have enlisted in the Irish Guards, were entertained on Monday night by the townspeople at a farewell dance in the courthouse. Mr P. McAleenan, JP, and Mr T. Blackwood, in short, telling speeches, expressed the pride with which the community regarded the three constables, the certainty that they would worthily do their duty, and the hope that they might live to be welcomed back like O'Leary and Somers. Suitable gifts were then presented to the guests, and "They are jolly good fellows" was enthusiastically sung. Dancing was kept up to an advanced hour. Mr W.J. Agar attended to the catering in his usual good style, and the entire arrangements reflected the utmost credit upon the capable committee, Messrs N. Bennett, B. Cusack, P. McTeggart and J. Wilson. The music was supplied by Miss McAreavey, piano, and Mr J. Hamilton, violin, and MR B. Cusack was MC.

Promoted Lance Corporal on 5 January 1917 and with a qualification as an assistant instructor of signalling, William V. Cooper embarked at Southampton on 24 April for Harfleur. He reached the front on 13 May 1917.

A full account of the engagements of the 1st Battalion, Irish Guards is given in Rudyard Kipling's *The Irish Guards in the Great War: Volume 1*. By May 1917, it already seemed likely that the battalion would be called upon before long to take part in a major offensive in the vicinity of Ypres. On 1 July 1917, it relieved the 2nd Coldstream Guards on the Boesinghe sector of the front, where there was constant shelling all along the line. At 3.50 a.m. on 31 July 1917, the Allies commenced the attack that marked the start of the Battle of Passchendaele.

On 5 August 1917 William Cooper wrote to an uncle:

Just to say that I am still alive & well and very thankful to God for bringing me safely through this last big advance. I am glad to inform you that my coy. Commander considered that I distinguished myself in a place known as no man's land and he told me he recommended me for a decoration. The deed was not a great one, it was only to capture a blockhouse which was strongly held and take its garrison prisoners. I am looking forward to far greater deeds when the weather gets fine as at present the mud is waist high in places. I received your letter during the first days of last week on either Monday or Tuesday last. Hoping all are well.

*Your fond nephew.
W. Cooper Cpl.*

france 5/8/17

Dear Uncle,

Just to say that I am still
alive & well and very thankful to God for
bringing me safely through this last big
adventure. I am glad to inform you that
my Coy. Commander considered that I distinguished
myself in a place where no man's land
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your letter during the first days of last week on
either Monday or Tuesday last. Hoping all are
well.

Yours fondly
W Cooper. capt.

The letter from William Cooper to an uncle dated 5 August 1917

Kipling records that 'On the 27 August medal ribbons were presented by the General of the 1st Brigade to those who had won honour in the Boesinghe battle, either by their coolheadedness in dealing with "surprise situations" or sheer valour in the face of death, of self-devotion to a comrade; for there was every form of bravery to choose from. ... No. 10161 Lance-Corporal W. Cooper [received the] DCM.'

The Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) was instituted in 1854, during the Crimean War, to recognize gallantry of a high order within the 'other ranks', i.e. soldiers who were not commissioned officers.

On 1 September 1917, *The Belfast Telegraph* reported:

DCM For Constable

Cpl W. V. Cooper, Irish Guards, son of Sergeant G. W. Cooper, Glenariff, County Antrim (sic), has been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the ribbon of which was presented to him on parade on the 10th inst (sic). Prior to the outbreak of the war Cpl Cooper was a member of the RIC, and was stationed at Banbridge and Castlewellan. He gained the DCM under the following circumstances: In July Cpl Cooper, while in charge of a patrol, attacked a German blockhouse, strongly held with machine guns, at 8 am, and at noon rushed the position with the bayonet, capturing the entire defenders, who were four to one, and marched them back prisoners without a single casualty to his party.

The official citation in the *The London Gazette* of 17 September 1917 reads as follows:

L/CPL. WILLIAM VALENTINE COOPER DCM (10161 IRISH GUARDS)

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. On his own initiative he determined to capture a blockhouse which commanded our position and from which snipers were inflicting casualties upon our troops. Posting eight men to give him covering fire, he worked round the flank with four others, rushed the blockhouse and killed and captured the garrison, over twenty in number. His splendid leadership and skilful disposition materially strengthened our position by the capture of this most important point.

The Passchendaele campaign continued during the summer with some success, but the tide turned on 9 October 1917 at the Battle of Poelcappelle. An advance by over ten divisions of the French First Army and British 2nd and 5th Armies against German defences virtually undamaged by artillery and protected by a moat of quicksand-like mud was a dismal failure. William Cooper was one of 13,000 casualties.

The *Belfast Telegraph* of 8 December 1917 reported as follows:

RIC Roll of Honour - Killed: Irish Guards – Lance Corporal W. V. Cooper

L-Cpl Cooper, reported killed in action, was the son of Sergeant Cooper, RIC, Glengariff, and was awarded the DCM a few months ago for conspicuous gallantry on the battlefield. Prior to entering the army for active service he was a member of the County Down RIC, stationed at Castlewellan. He also served in Banbridge.

William Valentine Cooper DCM, killed in action on 9 October 1917 aged 23, is buried in Poelcappelle British Cemetery (Plot 3, Row A, Grave 18). He is commemorated on memorials at Castlewellan and in Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork.



**The Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone on the grave of Corporal William Valentine Cooper
1st Battalion, Irish Guards, Poelcapelle British Cemetery, Belgium**

The VC that never was

After William's death a number of references to the award of 'further honours' and the Victoria Cross appeared in the press.

The Sketch of 31 October 1917, carried the following notice:

Corporal W.V. Cooper - It was officially announced to Sergeant George N. Cooper, Glengarriff, on 26th inst, the death of his son, William V. Cooper, corporal 1st Battalion Irish Guards, ex R.I.C., in action in France on 17th inst (sic). Corporal Cooper was recently awarded the D.C.M. for meritorious service on the field of battle, and more recently recommended for further honours.

The front page of the *Southern Star* dated Saturday 13 October 1917 covered proceedings in the Skibbereen Quarter Sessions on Tuesday 9 October 1917, the date of William Cooper's death. Sergeant George Nolan Cooper, was appearing as a prosecution witness. The report includes the following intriguing exchange:

Sergeant Cooper, Glengarriffe, was sworn.

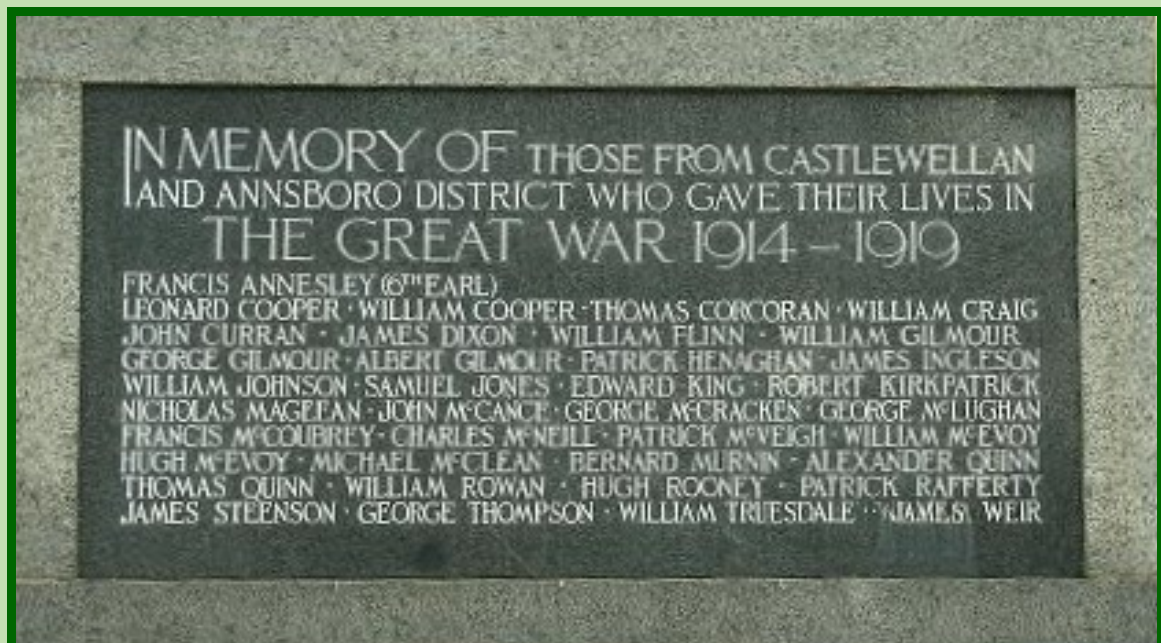
His Honor [County Court Judge Hynes KC]: I am very glad to see, Sergeant, that your son has been recommended for the V.C.

Sergeant Cooper: I thank your Honor.

Despite this exchange, no record of a recommendation for the award of the Victoria Cross appears to have survived.



**The Column of Heroes in St. Fin Barre's Church of Ireland Cathedral in Cork.
William Cooper's name is on the fifth row.**



**The Castlewellan and Annsboro District War Memorial.
Located on the south wall of what originally was the old courthouse but in more recent time is the local library.**

All three Castlewellan RIC men who received a hearty send off by the townspeople when they enlisted in November would be killed in the war. Lance Corporal Thomas Corcoran, 2nd Battalion Irish Guards died of wounds on 9 October 1917, the same day as William Cooper lost his life and Guardsman Patrick Henaghan, 2nd Battalion, Irish Guards, was killed in action on 3 August 1917.

The Notice Board

Note All branch activities have been cancelled due to the Covid 19 restrictions. Information as to when they will resume will be posted in this journal and on the WFA social media platforms

Irish Branch Details

Antrim and Down Branch

Chairman: Ian Montgomery

Contact

Secretary: Dr Tom Thorpe 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 or December. A modest donation of £5.00 is normally requested at the door to help fund branch activities.

Cork Branch

Chairman: Gerry White

Contact

Secretary: Gerry O'Meara gerryo@gerryomeara.com

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

Facebook: Cork Branch Western Front Association

Twitter: @Cork WFA Official

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.

Dublin Branch

Chairman: Ian Chambers

Contact

Chairman: Ian Chambers: ian1914@eircom.net

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

Meetings held at 2pm on the third Saturday of each month (except for March and August) at Pearse Street Library in Dublin. A modest donation of €3.00 is re

quested to help fund branch activities.

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

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!

Facebook and Twitter

There are many interesting articles and facts available on the association's Facebook and Twitter pages. Readers who use social media are encouraged to visit these sites, 'like' what they see and share or retweet. Doing so will spread the word about the association!

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://tunein.com/podcasts/History-Podcasts/Mentioned-in-Dispatches-p1184631/>

The podcasts that are currently available are as follows (starting from the most recent):

Available Podcasts

Episodes

Ep161 – Civilian Internment in WW1 – Prof Matthew Stibbe

5/18/2020

Ep160 – The 2nd Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment in FWW – Nigel Atter

5/11/2020

Ep159 – The 2nd Inniskillings at Festubert, 1915 – Michael Nugent

5/4/2020

Ep158- The German Zeppelin Offensive and Propaganda – David Marks

4/27/2020

Ep157 – Responses of Irish Jesuits to the end of WW1 – Damien Burke

4/20/2020

Ep156 – The Indian Army in the GW – Dr Adam Prime

4/13/2020

Ep155 – London during WW1 – Prof. Jerry White
4/6/2020

Ep154 – Rugbeians at War – Dan Mclean
3/30/2020

Ep153 – The 66th (East Lancs) Division During the German Spring Offensive – David Martin
3/23/2020

Ep152 – Defence of Trinity College during the Easter Rising – Dr Rory Sweetman
3/16/2020

Ep151 – Desertion in the UK during WW1 – Andrea Hetherington
3/9/2020

Ep150 – War without End – Prof. Sir Hew Strachan
3/2/2020

Ep149 – The Amritsar Massacre – Vanessa Holburn
2/24/2020

Ep148 – The First and the Last of the Sheffield City Bn – John Cornwell
2/17/2020

Ep147 – Officer Cadet Battalions – Charles Fair
2/10/2020

Ep146 – The YMCA during WW1 – Kathryn White
2/3/2020

Ep145 – Stories from the Bo'ness War Memorial – Alan Gow & Robert Jardine
1/27/2020

Ep144 – British West Indies Regiment and the Taranto 1918 Mutiny – Tony T
1/20/2020

Ep143 – Veterans, Families, Museums and Mementos of the FWW – Dr Ann-Marie Foster
1/13/2020

Ep142 – The Battle of the Somme Film – Dr Toby Haggith
1/6/2020

Ep141 – The Heugh Battery in the Great War – Diane Stephens
12/16/2019

Ep140 – Who Killed Kitchener? – David Laws
12/9/2019

Ep139 – Bilsdale in the Great War – Susan Laffey
12/2/2019

Ep138 – The Indian Labour Corps in WW1 – Pratap Chhetri
11/25/2019

Ep137 – The letters of Douglas Haig and Hugo De Pree – Prof. Gary Sheffield
11/18/2019

Ep136 – Food in the trenches – Dr Rachel Duffett
11/11/2019

Ep135 – North East Coastal Communities during the Great War – Dr Michael Reeve
11/4/2019

Ep134 – Bainsfather's 'Other 'ole' cartoon – Dr Helen Brooks & Dr Pip Gregory
10/28/2019

Ep133 – African American Servicemen during WW1 – Dr Amanda Nagel
10/21/2019

Ep132 – A Lord Lieutenant at War – Dr Richard Batten
10/14/2019

Ep131 – The 51st Highland Division – Colin Campbell
10/7/2019

Ep130 – Sex on the Western Front – Dr Bruce Cherry
9/30/2019

Ep129 – Sabaton's Great War Album – Pär Sundström
9/23/2019

Ep128 – Serbia in the Great War – Dr Samuel Foster
9/16/2019

Ep127 – The 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion – Emile Coetzee
9/9/2019

Ep126 – The First World War in Computer Games – Dr Chris Kempshall
9/2/2019

Ep125 – The 1914-5 Campaign in German SW Africa – Antonio Garcia
8/5/2019

Ep124 – Archibald Wavell – William Franklin
7/29/2019

Ep123 – British veterans' responses to Peace Day, 19 July 1919 – Mike Hally
7/21/2019

Ep122 – The Welsh Walter Mitty – Marietta Crichton Stuart
7/15/2019

Ep121 – Communications and British Operations on the Western Front – Dr Brian Hall
7/8/2019

Ep120 – Popular responses to the outbreak of WW1 – Prof Catriona Pennell
7/1/2019

Ep119 – The Chinese Labour Corps – Wenlan Peng
6/24/2019

Ep118 – British, French and American Relations on the Western Front, 1914-1918 – Dr Chris Kempshall
6/17/2019

Ep117 – Post War Mutinies in the British Army – Dr William Butler
6/10/2019

Ep116 – The Connaught Rangers Mutiny in 1920 – Dr Mario Draper
6/3/2019

Ep115 – English infantryman's morale and the perception of crisis on the Western Front – Dr Alex Mayhew
5/27/2019

Ep114 – Chaplains and religion on the Western Front – Dr Martin Purdy
5/20/2019

Ep113 – The Ulster Division during the German Spring Offensive – Michael Nugent
5/13/2019

Ep112 – Humour in British literature during the Great War – Dr Emily Anderson
5/6/2019

Ep111 – L/Cpl Wijnand "Vic" Hamman, 2nd South African Regt – Emile Coetzee
4/29/2019

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Ep5 – French tanks in 1917 – Dr Tim Gale
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Ep4 – The Honourable Artillery Company in 1917 – Michael Orr
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Ep3 – Stately Homes and Cartoons in WW1
3/1/2017

Ep2 – Mentioned in Dispatches Ep2
2/13/2017

Less
We hear from historians Steven Barker and Jack Sheldon on how combatants learnt lessons from the Battle of the Somme. We also discuss with psychologist Peter Hodgkinson his latest book Glum Heroes on psychological survival in the trenches and interview Rob Newman about his PhD on the importance of wood in trench warfare.

Ep1 – Mentioned in Dispatches Ep.1
2/13/2017

This episode comes from HMS Caroline, the last remaining warship that fought at the 1916 Battle of Jutland. We also interview historian Gavin Hughes on his new book Fighting Irish, talk to Beverly Jones about Peterborough's tea stall visitors book stories and speak to PhD student Michael Woods about tactical learning in 1915.

Remember – you can access all these podcasts here:

<https://tunein.com/podcasts/History-Podcasts/Mentioned-in-Dispatches-p1184631/>

WFA Webinars

Are you missing your monthly branch meetings? Would you like to enhance your knowledge of the Great War? If so, tune in to one of the online webinars (presentations) being organised by David Tattersfield, the WFA Development Trustee. These are proving to be quite popular with over 300 people 'attending' recent ones. Further details are available on 'Trenchlines' the online newsletter of the WFA and also on the association's website.

New Irish Education Officer

Mr Lar Joye was recently appointed the WFA Irish Education Officer. He takes over from Dr Brendan O'Shea who took up the appointment of European Trustee. Lar is Port Heritage Director at Dublin Port. Previously he curated the award-winning Soldiers & Chiefs the Irish soldier at home and abroad from 1550 exhibition at National Museum of Ireland, described as a museum with a museum. He played a key role in the Decade of Commemorations 2012-2017 involved in a variety of projects including the 1913 Lockout: Impact & Aftermath and Banners Unfurled exhibitions and the WWI exhibitions Recovered Voices 1914-1916 & War in the Mud, the Irish Soldier on the Western Front, 1917. He represented the National Museum on the Irish Battlefield commission and on the Moore Street and GPO projects. In 2016 he was historical adviser for An Post's 2016 commemorative stamp series. More recently he has partnered with the theatre company Anu productions on the plays Pals - the Irish at Gallipoli, Sunder and These Rooms.

He is a graduate of University College Dublin, Leicester University and the Getty Leadership Institute and is currently chairman of the Irish National Committee of the Blue Shield and a member of the Board of Directors of the Irish Museums Association and the Military Heritage of Ireland Trust.

The Limburg and Munster Memorials and the Cork Soldier Politician

Jean Prendergast



Corporal Jeremiah Redmond Connolly

In October 1917, Corporal Jeremiah Redmond Connolly, of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, was part of a Prisoner of War Committee that oversaw the erection of a memorial dedicated to fellow POWs who had died while in captivity in Limburg-on-der-Lahn in Germany. Seven years later, as Chairman of the Cork Branch of the Legion of Irish Ex-Servicemen, Connolly presided over the unveiling of the Munster Memorial in Ypres and would go on to serve as an Alderman in his native city. Yet despite this, Connolly remains unknown and the story of his journey from the Munsters to City Hall via Limburg and Ypres remains untold.

Jeremiah (Jerry) Connolly was born in Cork city in 1881 the son of Jeremiah Connolly Senior and Catherine Mahoney of Fair Lane (Wolfe Tone Street) on the north side of the city. His father worked on the docks where Connolly Junior also found employment before enlisting in the Royal Munster Fusiliers in April 1902. Connolly's service records have not survived but we can surmise that he spent some time with the 2nd Battalion of the Munsters, which was then stationed in Cork county. At this time, Boer War memorials, in the shape of ornately carved Celtic Crosses, were erected in Cork city and in Killarney the latter being exclusively dedicated to the memory of the Munster Fusiliers. The design and context must have resounded with Connolly marrying, as they did, Irish Nationalism and Irish soldiers in the British army.

Connolly's first wife died tragically of TB in Cork in 1906 after four years of marriage. By 1909, he had returned to Cork, where he remarried, and threw himself into the melee of Cork city politics where elections were fought on the streets between rival Nationalist factions by men who were ineligible to vote. Chief among these street fighters were the army reservists who played in the city's numerous workingmen's bands, and their non-playing followers, and amongst the most prominent bands was the Parnell Guards, or Fair Lane, Drum and Fife Band who had pledged their allegiance to the Irish Parliamentary Party of John Redmond and the cause of Home Rule. Connolly also was a loyal follower of the Parnell Guards and the Irish Parliamentary Party (United Irish League) and in the years leading up to the First World War became a well-known Party activist in the North-West Ward of the city while employed with Cork Corporations' Public Health Department. He adopted Redmond as his middle name and was listed amongst all of the prominent Party activists during the elections and political meetings of this time and we can surmise that he would have met both John and Willie

Redmond during their visits to Cork. He also followed the Redmonds into the Irish Volunteers and was no doubt present at the inaugural meeting in Cork, in December 1913, where Roger Casement spoke and the meeting ended in violence and chaos at the mention of the name of Edward Carson. Connolly would encounter Casement again under quite different circumstances.

On the outbreak of war in August 1914, Connolly, as a Reservist, was called up for service and arrived in France on 13 August with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers. On 27 August, at Étreux, in France, the 2nd Munsters were cut off and surrounded by the oncoming Germans, fighting a rearguard action until forced to surrender. On that occasion, Connolly managed to evade capture linking up with a French Regiment and making his way back to what remained of the 2nd Munsters. However, it was being reported in Cork by the end of 1914 that Connolly had been killed in action and it subsequently emerged by January 1915 that he was a prisoner of war in Germany. Connolly found himself in the camp at Limburg-an-der-Lahn where the Irish Catholic POWs had been segregated in the expectation that they would join Roger Casement's Irish Brigade¹. Casement himself visited the camp during Connolly's time there but he was not among the small few who joined the Brigade. Instead, he was busy writing letters to the *Cork Examiner* enquiring about local politics and assuring the newspaper of his continued loyalty to the Irish Parliamentary Party and the cause of Home Rule. He was among the distributors of food and tobacco parcels sent from home and frequently sent group photographs of himself and other POWs of all nationalities for publication in the *Examiner*. In July 1917, following the death of Willie Redmond, he wrote to the *Cork Examiner* and said:

'The Irish prisoners of war at Giessen Camp, Germany, having learnt through a German newspaper of the death of Major W. H. K. Redmond, hasten to convey to Mrs. Redmond, to Mr. J. E. Redmond, the Irish Leader, and the Irish Nation, an expression of their deepest sympathy. Ireland has lost one of her greatest and most fearless sons and soldiers through his death. We regret he did not live to see the accomplishment of that for which he gave his life – the freedom of his native land. We in exile join with those at home in mourning his loss. He shall go down in history as one of Ireland's martyred sons.'

In October 1917, Connolly again wrote to the *Cork Examiner* from the camp at Giessen to announce that he had, along with a committee of POWs, unveiled a Celtic Cross memorial to their deceased comrades at Limburg-an-der-Lahn. It had been planned for the cross to be carved in Dublin and shipped over but this was not possible at the time. However, with designs sent out from Dublin, the cross was carved locally and, in his letter, which also included a photograph below, Connolly describes how:

'The memorial cross stands 17 ½ feet high, weighing about [40?] tons, costing almost 7,000 marks - £350. This amount was generously subscribed by the Irish prisoners of war. The ceremony of unveiling and blessing took place on Trinity Sunday, the 3rd June, 1917. The Committee who were then at Giessen Camp, and nearly 200 Irish prisoners of war from the surrounding district of Limburg were permitted by the Commandant of the camp to attend the ceremony. During and after this most impressive ceremony,

1 See also *LAST ABSOLUTION: The 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers 1914 – 1915* by this author.

photographs were taken, copies of which I enclose. A few months ago we decided to arrange a garden around the memorial. Permission was granted, and five members of the committee were allowed to proceed to Limburg to complete same. A cement wall was built around the cross, which allows over three feet of a grass plot between it and the cross. There is an entrance with four small palm trees, and also a gravel walk around the cross. The outside limit of this walk is trimmed with evergreens, then a sloping grass plot of about six feet in dept all around, which is also trimmed with, and at each corner of this large grass plot is placed a large palm tree...'



The Limburg Memorial

Connolly was back in Cork in October 1918 having been released from Germany suffering from chronic bronchitis and rheumatism. He was soon active in politics again as he took part as an observer for the Irish Parliamentary Party in the General Election of December 1918. However, with the demise of that party, he gravitated towards the Cork Branch of the Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors' and Soldiers' Association (FDDSS) and campaigned for their candidates in the Municipal Elections of January 1920. The following April, he was elected chairman of the branch and he would steer the FDDSS through the difficult months ahead. During this time, local IRA members, which included many ex-servicemen, were initially friendly towards the FDDSS but in November 1920 a former chairman of the branch was 'disappeared' by the IRA following which the branch went to ground.



Membership Card Cork Branch of the Legion of Irish Ex-Servicemen.

The Branch re-emerged after the Truce with a new name – the Irish Legion of Ex-Servicemen – and a new club on the South Mall in the city. In January 1921, it publicly proclaimed itself Pro-Treaty and during the occupation of Cork by Anti-Treaty forces it again went to ground. Following the landing of Pro-Treaty forces in Cork, the opposition threatened to burn the Legion's club but the gunmen were driven off by unarmed Legion members. With the return of peace, the Legion again began to get involved in both local and national politics throwing their weight behind candidates from Cumann na nGaedheal in the elections of the time. Housing for Ex-Servicemen, and the lack of, became the Legion's main issue at this time, and it campaigned tirelessly for the fulfilment of the promises made before the war as well as for improvements in pension and welfare rights.

In February 1924, the Legion announced in the press that it would commission and unveil a 'suitable monument...to commemorate the deeds of those men of Munster who fell in the Great War' and that it would organise a 'Battlefield Pilgrimage' to accompany it. Thus was the Munster Memorial commissioned and made in Cork and by the following July, the Pilgrimage was ready to depart for the old Western Front accompanied only by the plinth of the memorial as the cross itself was still not ready and would not be so until the following August. The group left Cork accompanied by thousands of spectators who lined the streets and cheered them on. Their journey to Belgium was via London where Connolly laid a wreath at the Cenotaph and said that: -

'they had come all the way from Ireland and were going to France to pay a tribute to the memory of their comrades, who had given their lives in the Great War that others might live to be free. Whatever happened, they were not going to forget their comrades or allow their memory to fade.'

At Ypres, where the entire town turned out to greet the Pilgrims, Connolly presided as the plinth of the memorial was unveiled by Major-General Sir Bryan Mahon. Afterwards, Connolly led a smaller party to the grave of Major Willie Redmond, at Locre, where he laid a wreath on his grave

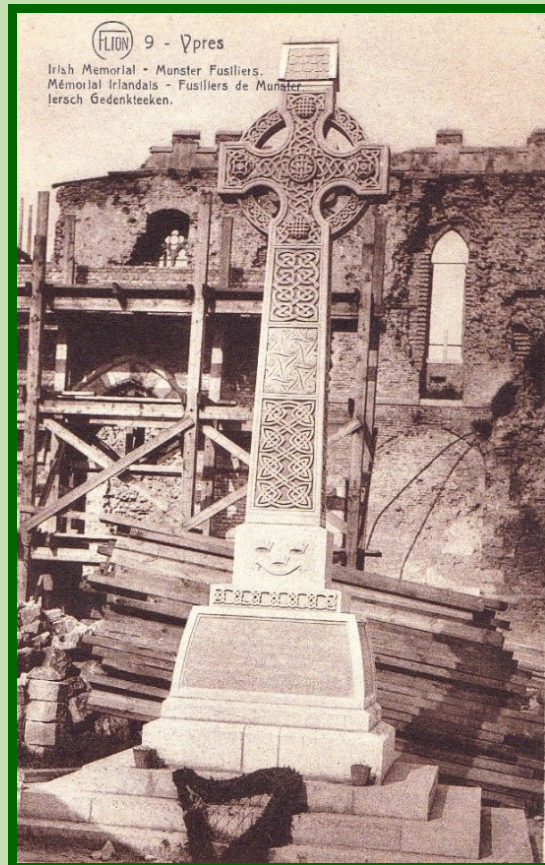


Jerry Redmond Connolly kneeling (centre) at the unveiling of the Munster Memorial.



Jerry Redmond Connolly laying a wreath on the grave of Major Willie Redmond.

After some days spent touring the old battlefields and time in Paris, the Pilgrimage returned to Cork via London. The following year Cork's First World War memorial was unveiled on the South Mall by a rival splinter group to the Legion but they generously allowed Connolly and other Legion Executive Committee members to fully attend. By this time, the organisation had again undergone a change of name to the British Legion and by 1927, Connolly and the Legion Committee which had conceived and organised the erection of the Munster Memorial, were no longer members of the Executive Committee. Instead, it had been taken over by a Committee of former officers after which the Legion withdrew from politics leaving Connolly out in the cold.



Contemporary postcard of the Munster Memorial with the remains of a wreath from Cork.

However, 1929 saw the beginning of a career in local politics for Connolly when he stood as an Independent candidate in the Cork Municipal Elections that year but failed to win a seat. After the long-promised houses for Cork Ex-Servicemen were finally built, yet another ex-servicemen's organisation emerged in 1933 with Connolly as Chairman of the short-lived Ex-Servicemen's Tenants' Rights Association. He was elected to Cork Corporation the following year and eventually joined Cumann na nGaedheal which merged into Fine Gael and provided a home for many old Redmondites like Connolly. Their adversaries were Fianna Fáil, elements of which had attempted to burn down the Legion Club in 1922 and to whom, at a meeting of Cork Corporation, Connolly would claim, as a British ex-serviceman, that he was as good an Irishman as anybody else. Connolly spent most of the following ten years as a Councillor on Cork Corporation. In 1944 he was elected as an Alderman for his ward and was nominated for the position of Lord Mayor. He unsuccessfully contested the 1944 General Election for Fine Gael and during the course of this campaign, Connolly said that:

'My record since I came into public life is well known. I have always stood by the working people, and I defy anybody to say that I have not done my duty by them.' He went on to say how a government minister had referred to him as *'an unknown soldier'*. This may have been the case, but Jerry Redmond Connolly had fought hard to ensure that his fallen comrades would not remain unknown. He died in Cork in 1949 and was buried in Douglas.



Alderman Jeremiah Redmond Connolly
Courtesy of Brian McCarthy.

Editor's note:

To date, Jean Prendergast has written five books on aspects of Cork, the Royal Munster Fusiliers and the Great War:

Cork Voices of WW1

Last Absolution – The 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers 1914 – 1915

Blood, Fire and Flood- The 1st Royal Munster Fusiliers at Gallipoli

Cork Medals of WW1: The Irish Regiments

Cork Medals of WW2: British Commonwealth, American and French Units

The above article is taken from her forthcoming book: **Cork's WWI Ex-Servicemen and their Memorials 1917-1925.**

All of Jean's books can be ordered online at Amazon.

The Commemoration for Company Sergeant Major Martin Doyle VC, MM

Denis Kirby



Company Sergeant Major Martin Doyle VC, MM

A number of members of the Cork Branch of The Western Front Association attended the unveiling of a commemorative stone in New Ross, Co. Wexford, on Sunday, 2 February 2020, commemorating local man Company Sergeant Major Martin Doyle VC, MM.

Martin Doyle was born on 25 October 1894 in New Ross. He commenced his military career on St. Stephen's Day 1909 when he joined the Royal Irish Regiment and left his home, family and friends to serve in India. At the time of enlisting, he was only fifteen years old, lying about his age in order to join.

He was an eager learner attending night classes to improve his military skills. He also excelled in sport and won the regimental Lightweight Boxing Championship in 1913.

In December 1914, he departed for France with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. He fought in the Battle of Mons and survived. He rose through the ranks to become sergeant and in March 1918, he transferred to the 1st Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers. That same month, the courage he displayed when leading a bayonet charge on a barn held by a German machine-gun crew earned him the award of the Military Medal. It was during this time that he was captured by German troops, but he was later freed in an Allied counter-attack.

Martin Doyle was awarded the Victoria Cross for an action on 2 September 1918, near Riencourt in France when, as Acting Company Sergeant-Major, found himself leading his company after all its officers had become casualties. His citation read:

For most conspicuous bravery on the 2nd September, 1918, near Riencourt, when as Acting Company Serjeant-Major, command of the company devolved upon him consequent on officer casualties.

Observing that some of our men were surrounded by the enemy, he led a party to their assistance, and by skill and leadership worked his way along the trenches, killed several of the enemy and extricated the party, carrying back, under heavy fire, a wounded officer to a place of safety. Later, seeing a Tank in difficulties, he rushed forward under intense fire, routed the enemy who were attempting to get into it, and prevented the advance of another enemy party collecting for a further attack on the Tank. An enemy machine gun now opened on the Tank at close range, rendering it impossible to get the wounded away, whereupon CSM Doyle, with great gallantry, rushed forward, and, single-handed, silenced the machine gun, capturing it with three prisoners. He then carried a wounded man to safety under very heavy fire.

Later in the day, when the enemy counterattacked his position, he showed great power of command, driving back the enemy and capturing many prisoners. Throughout the whole of these operations CSM Doyle set the very highest example to all ranks by his courage and total disregard of danger.

Martin Doyle left the British Army in 1920. In June of that year he attended a reception for VC holders at Buckingham Palace. Around the same time, he joined the East Clare Brigade of the IRA and fought in the Irish War of Independence. After the Treaty between Britain and Ireland came into effect in January 1922, he became one of the founder members of the Irish Free State Army, later known as the National Army. He fought in the Irish Civil War with the army and remained in service until 1937 when he finally hung up his uniform bringing to an end twenty-eight years of military service.

Throughout his life, Martin Doyle continued his connection with the unique group of servicemen who were awarded the Victoria Cross. In 1927 he attended a dinner for VC recipients in the House of Lords and in 1937 he was awarded the Coronation Medal.

Martin Doyle contracted polio and on 20 November 1940 he died St. Patrick's Hospital in Dublin at the early age of forty-six. He was buried in Grangegorman Military Cemetery and today, his grave is marked by a headstone erected by his old comrades in the Royal Munster Fusiliers Association.



Queen Mary greets Martin Doyle at a garden party for 300 Victoria Cross recipients held in June 1920.

The author would like to acknowledge the information provided by Wexford County Council that was used in the compilation of this article.

Private William Mulcahy

2nd Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers

Francis O'Connor



The British Army service record of service number 9965, Private William Mulcahy, 2nd Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers and 77 Evergreen Street, Cork, is one of the thousands that were destroyed by fire in the Records Officer in Arnside Street, London in September 1940 during the Blitz. This record would have provided his date of enlistment, period of service and terms of engagement. These records are known as the 'burned records', reference numbers: W0363, W0364, W0398 AND PIN26. However, from his surviving records; his Medal Index Card, Medal Roll Card, Soldier's Effects, and his Pension Record, we can recreate something resembling a record of service for him.

William Mulcahy would have enlisted in the regular battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers at the age of eighteen. He would have commenced his basic training in Ireland at the Regimental Depot at Tralee, Co. Kerry. It is also possible that he may have been posted to the military barracks in Kinsale, Co. Cork, for further training. As part of his training, William qualified for a second-class certificate of education.

On completion of his basic training William was posted to the 2nd Battalion. This was one of the two regular battalions in the regiment. From 1912 to 1914 it was based in England where it conducted training, carried out garrison duties and participated in various sporting activities.

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, all the arrangements for the mobilization of the 2nd Munsters worked without confusion or delay. The first batch of reservists, 485 in number, arrived at Aldershot on the 7, under Major G. J. Ryan. The battalion itself was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel J. K. Meagher and its strength was twenty-seven officers and 971 men.

On 13 August the Munsters left Farnborough for Le Havre via Southampton where it boarded the *RMS Dunvegan Castle*. The 2nd Battalion was part of the 1st Infantry Brigade of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). At that time, in addition to the Munsters, the brigade also included 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards; 1st Battalion, Scots Guards and the 1st Battalion, Black Watch.

After disembarking at Le Harve, the Munsters moved by train to Le Nouvion and went into billets at the village of Boue three miles east of Etreux. After five days it moved to the Belgian border arriving on 22 August. It was held in reserve during the Battle of Mons and at the start of the epic retreat that followed. Then, on 27 August, the battalion was ordered to provide a rear-guard near the village of Etreux to cover the withdrawal of I Corps from Mons. As Lieutenant Colonel Meagher had been relieved a few days earlier, that day, the battalion was under the command of Major Paul Charrier. It

was under his command that the 2nd Munsters would write a new chapter in the history of the regiment when it faced and halted the advance of nine German battalions. The unit sustained a high number of casualties as the Germans fought hard all day to break its ranks. Some members managed to withdraw in the face of the German onslaught but others were surrounded by their opponents. Finally, around 9 p.m. four officers and 240 men were forced to surrender after their commanding officer had been killed and their supply of ammunition had been depleted. when it was forced to surrender. On 27 August the roll call of the remnants of the Munsters revealed that only five officers and 196 men were all that remained of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers.

Private William Mulcahy from Cork was one of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers who were killed in action during the rear-guard action at Etreux. Today he is one of ninety-one members of the battalion who are buried in Etreux British Cemetery. William was posthumously awarded the 1914 Star with clasp, the British War Medal, and Victory Medal. According to the record of his soldier's effects his father received €6.19.5 and a €5.0.0 war gratuity. His mother Mary received his British Army Pension.



Etreux British Cemetery
the final resting place of Private William Mulcahy



Headstone of Private William Mulcahy

Gordon Shephard – the man who never was?

Dr Trevor Adams

Introduction

My interest in Gordon Shephard stems largely from the fact that his Irish adventures are ignored by the British records^{1,2}, and that he and his WWI adventures are ignored by the Irish, certainly those of a republican leaning – hence the title of this article, with apologies to Euan Montague for stealing the title of his WWII true story. But here is another true story which, if written as fiction, would be dismissed as being too far-fetched.

The aim of this article is to try to understand Shephard and, as it were, to get inside his head. To do that, we have to look at his pre-WWI adventures, especially his sailing and his learning to fly. The relationship with the Childers is important. Erskine Childers' only novel *The Riddle of the Sands* plays a role in Shephard's life, as indeed it also does, I would suggest, in the whole episode of the 1914 gun-running on Childers' yacht *Asgard*.

What sources of information about Gordon Shephard are available? Well, he was killed during WWI in a flying accident on 19th January 1918 at Auchel airfield. At the time of his death he was a Brigadier-General in the RFC and was aged 32. He was the most senior RFC or RAF officer to be killed in WWI. People who are killed in a war do not leave behind memoirs, though in Shephard's case there is at least a book composed of his letters over the years and his sailing log, edited by old Etonian – Shane Leslie of Castle Leslie in County Monaghan³. The Leslie family still own Castle Leslie today. The book was privately published by Shephard's parents in 1924 and is hard to find. However, indirect sources of information on him include books on Erskine Childers, the account of the *Asgard* voyage by Mary Ellen Spring-Rice in the National Library of Ireland, Sholto Douglas' memoirs of WWI, and the archives of the RAF. It is a question of putting together a patchwork of information on him. So, let's start at the beginning.

Gordon Shephard's background

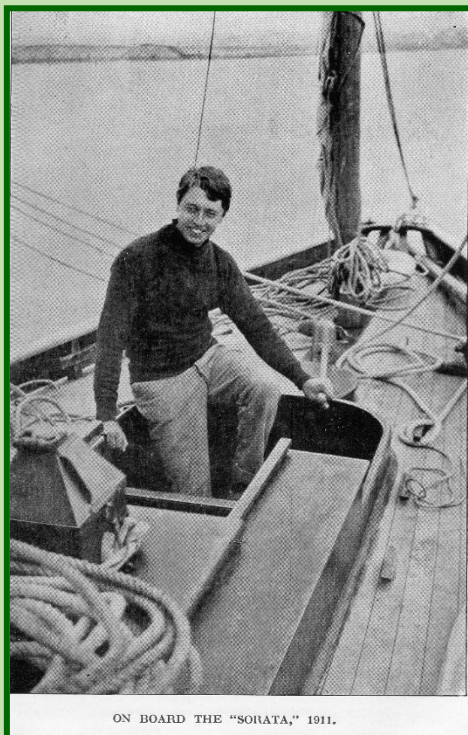
Gordon Shephard was a child of the British establishment. He was born at Madras in India on 9 July 1885. "Gordon" was used as a Christian name by upper crust English of the era to commemorate General Gordon, who died in an ill-fated invasion of the Sudan in 1885. Shephard's father was an advocate-general in the Raj, the British colonial regime, who became a judge shortly after his son's birth. He was awarded a knighthood later in his career. Gordon Shephard and his brother were left in England at an early age, to be schooled, whilst their parents returned to India. Gordon and his brother Jack were sent to preparatory schools and then to Eton. It was at school that Gordon developed his talent for sailing. To quote the Leslie memoirs: "Eton does not dispose boys to hard work so much as to a sense of the world"³. Shane Leslie was speaking from first-hand experience, as he too was an Etonian. Erskine Childers was not at Eton – he had been at Haileybury, which is also a prestigious English public school.

Gordon Shephard left Eton in 1902 and went to Sandhurst and then to the Military College at Camberley. He was commissioned in January 1905 and joined the 7th Royal Fusiliers at Parkhurst on the Isle of Wight. There was little happening there, and the battalion rented the shooting at Parkhurst Forest. Nobody managed to shoot anything, as there did not seem to be anything there to shoot, except Gordon Shephard who did manage to shoot himself, and lost two toes as a result. This made severe marching impracticable for him for the rest of his days. One of his colleagues from those days,

Robert Henry Pipon, describes Shephard as: "From first to last he was certainly the most unmilitary soldier I have ever known"⁵. Incidentally, in 1914 the then Lt Colonel Pipon was asked by Erskine Childers to take part in the *Asgard* voyage, which he refused to do, as he considered Childers to be a crackpot and "something always happens to crackpots"⁶.

Sailing, sailing and more sailing

In their years on the Isle of Wight, Pipon and Shephard bought an old yacht, *Laural*, and sailed her as far as across the English Channel. She was destroyed in an accidental fire at a boatyard in 1908. In 1910, he acquired the *Sorata*, a 12 ton yawl (which is a type of two-masted yacht), on which he undertook extensive cruises, notably to the Friesian Islands and the Baltic. Part of the reason for his choice of destination was that he met Erskine Childers for the first time in August 1909. That date is important when we later come to look at Childers book *The Riddle of the Sands*.



But why would anyone want to go to the Friesian Islands or the Baltic? The Baltic has archipelagos, notably the approach to Stockholm which has more than 20,000 islands, and the area between Turku in Finland and the Aland islands. These provide a maze of sheltered waters which must be heaven for a yachtsman. The Friesian islands lie off the Dutch and German coasts which are low lying, with a myriad of channels through the mudflats. At low tide, you can walk for miles. Of course, the area on the German coast was of strategic interest, with the navy bases at Wilhelmshaven and Bremerhaven, and the airship base near Cuxhaven. A knowledge of the channels through the mudflats would be important for any attack on these bases.

(Photo left: Gordon Shephard aboard the *Sorata*.)

In 1910, Shephard took the *Sorata* on a long cruise to the Baltic and the Friesian Islands. He and his companions set off with 10 weeks of supplies, which were needed as they chalked up 3154 miles. They sailed through the Stockholm islands "[I] had never expected anything so beautiful"⁷, up the Gulf of Bothnia (the sea between Sweden and Finland) "the country is flat, bleak and dismal"⁸, avoiding sea ice, in May, though and went as far as St Petersburg. To do that, they must have sailed through the Russian naval base at Kronstadt^{9,10}.

In 1911, he undertook a cruise to the Friesian Islands and to the estuary of the River Ems, which was, and is, the border between the Netherlands and Germany. Here, he and his friend made the unfortunate decision to go on a day trip to the German town of Emden. Shephard took some snapshots of the harbour there, and ended up being arrested and held for some days as a possible spy¹². In the end, Shephard and his friend were let go by the German authorities and they continued their cruise. However, this was to be the last of visits to the Friesian Islands as his leave for such adventures was stopped for a long period by the War Office.

The response of the War Office and Admiralty to his sailing adventures on the German North Sea coast varied from apathy to hostility. The War Office even stated that they had "no interest" in German coastal defences!

In 1913, after a summer cruise with the Childers, he borrowed the *Asgard* and undertook an autumn cruise from Christiana (Stockholm today) to the west coast of Norway, across the North Sea, thence to the Shetlands, the Orkneys, the Western Isles, Ardglass, Holyhead, and home to Conway. This adventure was awarded the Royal Cruising Club Challenge Cup for that year. The magazine *Yachting Monthly* commented: "It was a truly remarkable performance but...only men of intrepid courage would have attempted it." Crossing the North Sea in a yacht is adventurous at the best of times, let alone with the risk of autumn storms.

Erskine Childers, the Riddle of the Sands, and Charles Carruthers

Childers wrote his one and only novel, *The Riddle of the Sands* about a sailing and spying adventure set round the Friesian Islands. It was published in 1903, and has never been out of print since then. Gordon Shephard was widely assumed by his comrades in WWI to be the person upon whom the key character in the book, Charles Carruthers, was based. Well, one can see the logic, but it is total nonsense. In 1903, Shephard had just left Eton. He and Childers were not to meet for another six years. However, he must have read the book – is there a yachtsman who hasn't? It may well have played a part in Shephard's adventures, and indeed was referred to, at length, in the 1910 trial of the two British officers in Germany. Was the plot of this novel the inspiration for the idea of gun-running from Germany to Ireland on a yacht, in 1914?

Childers and Shephard met for the first time in August 1909. Erskine and Molly Childers became great friends with Gordon Shephard and went sailing with him. So, the scene was set for the *Asgard* gun-running, but before that we need to have a look at his other passion – flying.

Flying

There was an ulterior motive in learning to fly: the Flying Corps was likely to give Shephard the freedom to continue his yachting adventures. He seems to have started around 1910 with flying lessons, and achieved his flying licence in 1912 at the Brooklands flying school. Up until 1916, all RFC pilots had to qualify at a civilian flying school. In 1912, his regiment was based in Dublin but in July he was ordered to join the RFC at Farnborough. The RFC then consisted of 22 aircraft and two airships.

Aircraft of this era could only be flown if there was negligible wind. Up until 1915, they did not have wing flaps but were controlled by flexing the fragile wood and cloth wings. The pilot was very exposed to the weather, flies, birds, and the exhaust from the feeble engine which emitted oil mist from the castor oil used to lubricate engines in the WWI era. Castor oil is a laxative. These aircraft were very hazardous. In a letter of 24 September 1914, Shephard writes: "Things seem to be going quite well now. The casualties of the Flying Corps in war turn out to be about the same as in peace".

During the army manoeuvres of 1913, Shephard took part, both as a pilot and an observer. His views on the lessons to be learned in terms of effective air observation and co-ordination with the ground forces were largely adopted. These improvements appear mundane in some respects but this was the early days of military use of aircraft, e.g. having telephones at the airfield so observers did not have to travel to the local HQ, using message bags to be dropped from aircraft, training for observers, separate compasses for observers, and the army ground commander briefing the air crews on what his troops were going to do on the day.

We will look at some of his wartime flying below but first of all, there is the voyage of the *Asgard*.

Gun-running

Shephard and his friend Robert Pipon, both serving army officers, were both approached by Erskine Childers to take part in the *Asgard* voyage. Both were experienced yachtsmen. Pipon refused and Shephard accepted. The voyage started from the Welsh village of Deganwy, on the Conwy estuary, to where the Childers had sailed their yacht from Holyhead. The diary of the event was written by the Honourable Mary Ellen Spring-Rice¹³.



Shephard, referred to as “Mr Gordon” as some attempt to disguise his identity, met the other participants at Deganwy on Friday 3 July 1914. They set off immediately and hit stormy weather. *(Photo left: Gordon Shephard at the wheel of the Asgard, courtesy of Trinity College Dublin.)*

Gordon Shephard was a big fan of golden syrup, and that seemed to be an easy way of getting him up in the morning. He seems to have always been the last person into breakfast. For supper on one day, he cooked a “sweet omelette” which was buttered eggs cooked with his beloved golden syrup.

Shephard and Childers did the steering and navigating. (It is worth noting that yachts like the *Asgard* would not have had an engine at this stage of her life, which must have made entering and leaving port very difficult for yachtsmen of the era.) Gordon Shephard found his bunk too stuffy, so took to sleeping in the passageway, where everyone had to step over him. On one occasion on the return journey, he spilled coffee over some of the guns and was chastised by Molly Childers for “ruining” the guns. In order to avoid him appearing at Howth with the guns, the aim was to put him ashore on the return journey at St Ives or Milford, and in the end the yacht put into Milford. He travelled over to Howth via Holyhead, so was present there when the rifles landed anyway on 26th July 1914. He and Mary Ellen Spring-Rice lunched with friends, Dermot Coffey and his wife, at Howth and had tea at the Arts Club in Dublin later that day.

Shephard’s letter to his father dated 1 August 1914 states: “The Howth business is rather losing its importance now, but it should stimulate the Nationalists. I will give you a proper description when I see you.” Presumably, “stimulating” the Nationalists to act against the army in which he was a serving captain!



War service

The aspect of RFC activities in WWI which springs to mind is that of aerial combat – Ball, McCudden, Mannock and others. However, the main tasks of the RFC were observation, both in terms of troop movements and construction of new enemy defences, and also for artillery spotting. Later, aerial photography became more important, and with better aircraft, bombing attained some sort of feasibility.

Shephard was involved in the early stages of observation. The report from his observer, Lt Bonham-Carter from 22 August 1914 is below. He and Shephard had seen large scale German troop movements and also had had information from the French army to similar effect. (Shephard spoke

French and German). Unfortunately, the command of the BEF did not pay enough attention to such reports, and were surprised by the German attack on Mons at 06.00 on 23rd August.

He continued his reconnaissance work during the retreat to the Marne and the subsequent advance. On one occasion, his plane was so damaged by ground fire that it had to be abandoned. On another, he found a bullet hole in his breeches which did not concern him in the slightest. He was awarded the Chevalier of the Legion of Honour and awarded the Military Cross 'for services in connection with operations in the field', and was mentioned in despatches six times.

He returned to the UK on 25 November 1914 and was promoted to Major on being given command of No 1 Reserve Aeroplane Squadron. On 4 March 1915, he was on the Western Front. His squadron was involved at Neuve Chappelle doing reconnaissance, photography and artillery spotting. There was some bombing of railway facilities. In March 1915, he wrote *"...our work is considerably altered. It is nearly all with artillery"*¹⁴. Other extracts from his letters of this time are¹⁵:

"The attitude of the Staff towards aeroplanes is amusing. At the beginning they did not believe in them. Now they expect us to end the war!" 10 April 1915.

"I hear the Germans are near Riga. Unfortunately, I am a stockholder in municipal stock of that town." 7 May 1915.

"People seem to make a great fuss of the Lusitania. Her fate can only make the Americans more friendly. Otherwise, the course of the war will not be changed." 15 May 1915.

"I wonder K [Kitchener] does not resign. The job is clearly beyond him. The War Office is filled with retired officers who cannot grapple with the situation." 27 June 1915.

"I see they were not slow to decorate the naval officer who attacked the Zeppelin. Everybody in England seems to think that Zeppelin bombs are directed at them personally". 13 June 1915.

"I do not see eye to eye with you in the matter of conscription, till there is some assurance that the lives of the conscripted will not be thrown away on unprofitable ventures in different parts of the globe according to the ever-changing policy of our leaders." 28 October 1915.

"In my opinion, Grey [Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary] is perfectly hopeless. He is probably sincere and honest with the exception of promises to Serbia, but people seem to take him in right and left. If it were not for Carson's political views, I should become a Carsonite after his fine speech." 12 November 1915.

On 10 December 1915, Shephard was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the 8th Wing. He commanded the 12th (Corps) Wing comprising of three squadrons, in March 1916.

"There will be several other cases like the Sheehy-Skeffington one¹⁶, in my opinion, before the war is over. I think there have been enough executions now. There can be no reason to prolong the Irish trouble in this way." 17 May 1916

*"In my opinion, Kitchener met his death at a well-chosen moment for himself. I don't see that they want anybody at the War Office...I hear that Professor MacNeill was sentenced to penal servitude for life, which seems very severe, though I suppose they will let him out soon"*¹⁰.
12 June 1916

"Why cannot they give home rule to Ireland now that the six Ulster counties are excluded? I cannot see on what grounds the Unionist base their objections. I like Mr Redmond's speech. It

is time the Coalition realised that they should at least make a show of keeping to agreements.”
23 June 1916.

“I have just been reading Casement’s speech, and was specially impressed by the last part of it. If he is hung, it will only make his name remembered in Ireland, whereas now he is not well known in that country”. 1 July 1916.

“But after all, it is not of much significance who runs the government, as the whole policy is evidently dictated by Lord Northcliffe [owner of the Daily Mail and Daily Mirror, who was born in Dublin in 1865].” 12 December 1916.

On 8 February 1917, Shephard was promoted to Brigadier-General on taking over command of I Brigade. This consisted of two Wings totalling seven squadrons.

“I see a number of German yachts are being sold. If I had been at home I might have bought one. I do not hope for much from the Irish Convention, but it was a clever move on Lloyd George’s part to get out of his difficulty.” 25 May 1917.

“It is a very good thing that Erskine Childers has now got the job for which he is most eminently suited, and I imagine the Convention will last for some time ... Mrs Childers says the Sinn Feiners will accept Dominion Home Rule.” 7 July 1917.

Gordon Shephard often flew round the Western Front to visit his squadrons. Such a routine visit took place on 19th January 1918. Shephard flew a Nieuport Scout No B/3610 to the airfield at Auchel to visit the three squadrons based there. His machine went into a nose spin near the airfield and crashed. He died of his injuries.

He was buried at LaPugny CWGC cemetery which lies west of Bethune¹⁸. His funeral was attended by “some twenty generals and a thousand officers, which was preceded by Canadian pipers and a firing party, and conducted by Fathers Grey and Carden according to the Catholic and Roman Church to which friends had always believed that he belonged.”¹⁹

Postscript

In Sholto Douglas’s autobiography “Years of Combat”²⁰, he says of Gordon Shephard:

“There was one other man under whom we came to serve at that time who was also to provide me with a lesson in the matter of leadership. We were in the First Brigade of the RFC which was commanded by Gordon Shephard, a Brigadier who, for all his exalted rank, was only about 35 years of age [he was actually 32]...”

Although he was not a good pilot, Gordon Shephard’s mind was of a brilliance that would undoubtedly have led to his becoming in time one of the great leaders in the Air Force; but the poor flying of his brought about his death in an accident before the end of the war, and so his name came to play only a minor role in the history of flying.”

Oswald Birley refers in a tribute to Gordon Shephard as being intensely unmilitary²¹:

“He hated being either called or considered a general. Promotions, decorations, etc, all that was most dear to the average regular officer, left him completely cold. But his mind was never still and I am sure was nearly always working on the one main theme, i.e. a better combination of all the known modern engines of war.”



THE GRAVE, 1918.

Sholto Douglas recalls the modest origins of those who would be some of the big names in the RAF in WWII, including himself who did not obtain his pilot's licence until June 1915. So, Peter Portal was a ranker in the Royal Engineers, Keith Park was an NCO in the artillery in Gallipoli, Hugh Dowding was a captain in the Royal Garrison Artillery, Hugh Trenchard learned to fly at the age of 41, Arthur Harris was a bugler in the Southern Rhodesia Regiment in German South West Africa, and Arthur Tedder was a colonial civil servant in Fiji²².

So, Gordon Shephard was an experienced pilot at the outbreak of WWI and in 1918 would have outranked the men who became the leaders of the RAF in WWII. What would have been Gordon Shephard's position in the RAF in WWII? Well, we will never know.

What does one make of Gordon Shephard the man? He was not a man for causes, as was Roger Casement. Rather, he

comes across as an amiable adventurer who was game for anything that turned up, be it adventurous sailing, flying rickety aircraft, or being in a world war. There was a German aviator of the era who was the only German PoW to escape from Britain in WWI, Gunther Pluschow, and who after WWI did a lot of aerial exploration in Tiera del Fuego in South America and who died in an air crash there in 1931. I always think that he and Gordon Shephard were two of a kind.

Footnotes

1. His CWGC entry reads:

MC, DSO, mentioned in despatches. Chevalier of the Legion of Honor (France). Royal Fusiliers, att'd staff, Commanding 1st Bde Royal Flying Corps, 19th January 1918. Son of Sir Horatio and Lady Shephard, of 58 Montagu Square, London W.

2. His file at the RAF Museum's archives contained nothing on his Irish adventures, until the Spring-Rice account of the *Asgard* voyage was sent to them by the author, and gratefully received by the Museum.
3. The Leslie family still own Castle Leslie today. It is run as an upmarket hotel.
4. Memoirs of Gordon Shephard, ed. Shane Leslie, London 1924, p36.
5. Ditto, p39.
6. The Howth Gun Running, FX Martin, Dublin 1964, p126.
7. Memoirs p69
8. Memoirs p80
9. Many of the geographical names in Memoirs have changed. Kronstadt has not, but St Petersburg became Leningrad and then back again. Christiana is now Stockholm, Helsingfors is Helsinki, Reval is Tallinn, and Windau is Ventspils.
10. Kronstadt was built to protect the city St Petersburg and the remains of the base still exist today.
11. In fact, there had been a court case in Germany in the previous year where two British officers, Lieutenant Brandon RN and Captain Trench RM were imprisoned for spying, which is indeed what they were doing. So, the German authorities were somewhat jittery in the Shephard case.

12. The Life and Death of Erskine Childers, Leonard Piper, Hambledon and London, London, 2003, p106.
13. Diary of the gun-running voyage by Mary Ellen Spring-Rice, National Library of Ireland. She died on 1st December 1924 in Llan Gwyfan tuberculosis sanatorium near Ruthin in North Wales, so the diary was written some time before that date. The buildings are still a hospital. She is buried on her family's former estate at Foynes, County Limerick.
14. The RFC only started to do artillery spotting in late September 1915 whereas the Germans had been using aircraft for that purpose from the beginning of the war. See Years of Combat, Sholto Douglas, Collins, London, 1963.
15. Memoirs p205 onwards.
16. Francis Sheehy-Skeffington was a pacifist who was arbitrarily arrested and shot by the British army without trial during the Easter Rising.
17. Professor Eoin MacNeill was the leader of Sinn Fein, which took no part in the Easter Rising, nor did he.
18. Lapugnoy CWGC cemetery lies 6km west of Bethune and is not easy to find in the village as it is down a track between some houses. The cemetery also contains an RAMC lieutenant aged 42 who was an Irish Presbyterian church's medical missionary to Western India, Neil Murphy Gavin. There is a YMCA volunteer there as well – Charles William Bowick, aged 18. The author has visited the cemetery on two occasions.
19. Memoirs p221.
20. Years of Combat, Sholto Douglas, Collins, London, 1963.
21. Memoirs p226.
22. Years of Combat, p69 onwards.

Additional references and acknowledgement

The Zeal of the Convert, the Life of Erskine Childers, Burke Wilkinson, Second Chance Press, Sag Harbour, New York, 1976.

A Thirst for the Sea. The sailing Adventures of Erskine Childers, Hugh and Robin Popham, Stanford Maritime, London, 1979.

The Howth Gun-running and the Kilcoole Gun-running, FX Martin, Merrion, Dublin, 2014.

The author is grateful to Stuart Haddaway, who is the RAF archivist, for information on Gordon Shephard from their records.

Copy extract from AH.204/3/8.

App. I.

Reconnaissance No.10.

Date

Reference Map

Time	Place	Observations
8.15	Maubeuge	From Aerodrome.
8.30	Fort Boussois	
8.32	Erquennes	
8.37	Reissant. $\frac{1}{2}$ mile W. of station.	Our cavalry, 2 regiments on Crois-Reissant road.
8.42	Binche	Mist.
8.50	La Louvriere	
8.58	Arquennes	Motor transport moving S.W. length of column $\frac{1}{2}$ mile - Head at 35.M.S.
9.2	Wivelles	Head of column at 34.M.S. on move and extending N.E. into Wivelles, advancing S.W. Cavalry circled round S.W. side Wivelles. Nothing seen on side roads. Deserted camp at 15 north of railway $\frac{1}{2}$ mile due W. of W of Wivelles, formerly occupied by mounted troops. 29 M.S. east of Wivelles - Braine l'Alleud road. Estimated 1 battery. All clear.
9.6	Lillois-Witterzee	
	Braine l'Alleud	No troops seen.
9.14	Ottignies	Cloudy - road fringed by thick trees - no troops seen.
9.15	Wavre-Gembloux road	
9.20	Gembloux	2 camps W. of 42 M.S. on Wavre-Gembloux road (between road and railway). Column cavalry leaving G. to S.W; head of column 1 mile S.W. of Gembloux. Trees on either side thick.
9.27	Sombreffe	No troops seen.
9.30	Fleurus	W. of U of 1st U of Fleurus. Landing mark. No troops seen.
9.29	Ligny	Column baggage from station to main road.
	Fleurus	Cavalry halted, column head at S. of Wange- nies, tail $\frac{1}{2}$ mile S. of F of Fleurus.

Landed 9.50 near Beaumont for petrol. Saw G.O.C. XVIII Corps, which arrived last night from Nancy. He informed me that French cavalry encountered hostile infantry yesterday after noon and evening N. of Mons - Charleroi Canal. The French retired during night to Binche-Charleroi road.

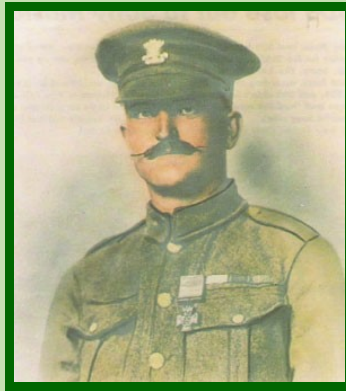
(Sgd.) Lt. Bonham-Carter.

(Observer)

Report dated 22 August 1914 from Shephard's observer, Lieutenant Bonham Carter

Private Martin Moffat VC

Denis Kirby



Private Martin Moffat VC

The Victoria Cross was awarded to two members of the Leinster Regiment on 14 October 1918, Corporal John Cunningham and Private Martin Moffat. This is his story.

Martin Moffat was born in 24 Knappagh Road, Sligo, on 15 April 1882. He was one of eleven children born to Martin & Bridget Moffatt and he attended St. Vincent's National School, Sligo, from 1899 to 1896. On leaving school at fourteen, he worked as a local seaman on the steamship SS Sligo a cargo vessel that belonged to a vessel of the Sligo Steamship Navigation Company.

In March 1913, Moffatt was involved in the Sligo Dock Strike. The dispute began on 8 March when seamen on the SS Sligo demanded more help or higher wages for handling cattle. Five workers who stopped work were arrested, prosecuted for disobeying a 'lawful order' and sentenced to seven days' hard labour. The strike then spread to yards and businesses handling goods in the port, and involved carters and other labourers. it lasted fifty-six days from 8 March 8th to 6 May 1913. During the strike, there were numerous clashes on the docks and riots in the town, resulting in one fatality. An agreement was eventually reached on 6 May which ensured that 'free labour' would not be employed on the docks, only members of the Irish Trade and General Workers Union (ITGWU).

In September 1914, Moffat joined the 6th (Service) Battalion of the Connaught Rangers. This unit was formed in Kilworth Camp, outside Fermoy, Co. Cork that same month and became part of the 47th Brigade in the 16th (Irish) Division.

Moffat commenced his training at Kilworth Camp before moving to Fermoy Barracks. Then, in September 1915 it moved to Aldershot in England for further training. On 10 December it was part of the 16th (Irish) Division deployment to France and three days later it occupied positions on the Loos Salient. In April 1916, while the Easter Rising was taking place in Ireland, the division came under severe gas attack at Hulluch and suffered 1,260 casualties, of whom 338 were fatalities. In September 1916, Moffat and his comrades in the 6th Connaught Rangers took part in the assault that captured the towns of Guillemont and Ginchy, during which the battalion again suffered heavy losses.

In June 1917, the 6th Connaught Rangers were in action again. This time, when the 16th (Irish) Division, took part in the Battle of Messines, alongside the 36th (Ulster) Division. Today, Messines is the location of the Island of Ireland Peace Park opened on 11th November 1998 by President Mary McAleese, Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom and King Albert II of Belgium.

On 21 March 1918, the German Army launched its Spring Offensive. That day, the 6th Battalion of the Connaught Rangers was practically annihilated during the German onslaught. In one week, it lost twenty-two officers and 618 other ranks. As a result of these losses, the survivors were transferred to the 2nd Battalion, the Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians).

Though it suffered severe casualties, the British Army managed to halt the German offensive. Then, on 8 August 1918, it struck back, launching an offensive operation that became known as the Battle of Amiens. This engagement proved to be the opening stage of what later became known as the 'Hundred Days Offensive' or the 'Advance to Victory'. In the oath of the advancing British were many towns and villages that had been occupied by the Germans for over four long years. These locations were fiercely defended by German soldiers, but fall they must if the allied advance was to continue. Any failure to capture to liberate a town or village could both delay the advance, and prolong the misery of occupation for its inhabitants.

This offensive operation is known as the Battle of Courtrai and it took place between 14 - 19 October 1918 along the Flanders Front.

One such village that lay in the path of the advancing British was Ledegem in the West Flanders area of Belgium. Occupied by the Germany army since 1914, it now became an objective of the 29th Division of the Second Army. On 1 October, the inhabitants of Ledegem thought that their day had come when the 12th Battalion, Royal Scots, briefly entered the village. Unfortunately, but their exhilaration turned to disappointment as the Germans put up a staunch defence of their positions and forced the Scotsmen to withdraw. However, as we now know, the British were determined to continue their advance and on 14 October 1918 what became known as the Battle of Courtrai commenced. This time, the 2nd Leinsters, were tasked with capturing Ledegem.

On 13 October 1918 the Leinsters moved up to their assembly positions, about nine miles east of Ypres. They were to lead the attack on very strong and well-prepared German positions, that were defended with artillery and trench mortars. In the early morning of 14 October, the Leinsters advanced through the early morning fog and reached Ledegem at about 9.00 a.m. Moffat's section was held up by severe fire from a fortified farmhouse, when he decided to take matters into his own hands and attacked the farmhouse alone under heavy fire. Tossing grenades at his opponents as he made his way to the back of the house where he crashed through the door shot two of Germans and captured thirty others.

Directly after his capture of the farmhouse, Moffat insisted on marching back by himself 120 prisoners, getting a receipt for them from the Assistant Provost-Marshal and then re-joining his unit later that morning.

Martin Moffat was awarded the Victoria Cross for this action. His citation reads:

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on 14 October 1918 near Ledeghem, Belgium, Private Moffat was advancing with five others across the open when they suddenly came under heavy rifle fire at close range from a strongly held house. Rushing towards the house through a hail of bullets, Private Moffat threw bombs and then, working to the back of the house, rushed the door, killing two and capturing 30 of the enemy. He displayed the greatest valour and initiative throughout.

Moffat remained in the front line for the next four weeks until the Armistice. He was demobilised in 1919 and returned to Sligo after receiving his VC. In June 1919 he returned to Sligo to a deserved hero's welcome. A reception committee had been put together some time earlier to plan for his

reception. A huge crowd had gathered at the railway station to greet him on arrival from Dublin. Outside the station, he was greeted by a military guard of honour and escorted to the courthouse by a brass band. Along the way the streets were decorated with flags and banners.

A presentation was made to Moffat on the steps of the courthouse. In addition to financial and other gifts, he received, he was also presented with a gold watch that was inscribed: *Ledegem 14th October 1918 – Presented to Private Moffatt by Col. H W Weldon and officers of the 2nd Battalion Leinster Regiment.*

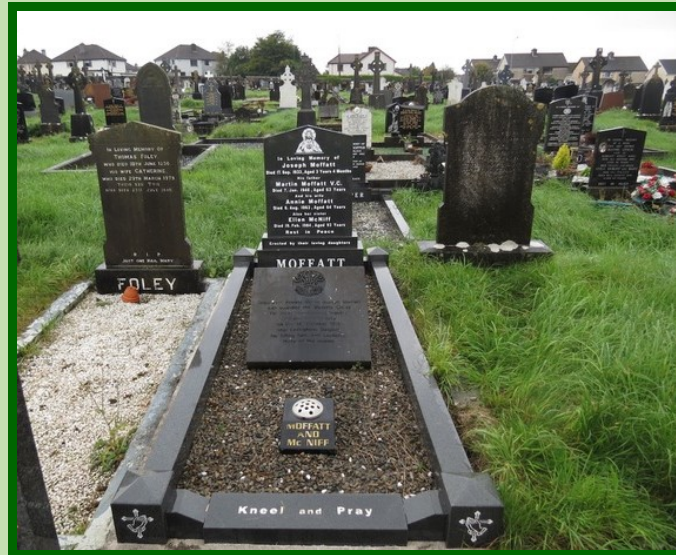


Private Martin Moffat VC at the civic reception held in his honour in Sligo.

After the war, Martin Moffat worked as a Harbour Constable until shortly before his death. In 1921 he married Annie and they had four girls and one boy. Sadly, in 1933, when he was three, the boy died in a drowning accident off Rosses Point, Co. Sligo. After the war, Moffat worked as a Harbour Constable until shortly before his death on 7 January 1946 when he drowned while swimming in Sligo Harbour. He was buried in Sligo Town Cemetery.

Though his exploit at Ledegem was never forgotten by his family and former comrades, a new generation of young boys were able to read of it on the front page of the Victor comic was featured on the front cover of the Victor comic on the 12 May 1973 and again on 25 February 1984.

In September 2018, some members of the Leinster Regiment Association visited the town of Ledegem as guests of the local municipal council, to celebrate the centenary of the liberation of the town in October 1918 by the 2nd Battalion of the Leinster Regiment. On that occasion, three grandchildren of soldiers who took part in the liberation of the town were present: Colonel Mark Weldon, Richard Davis and Anne Moffatt.



The Moffat family grave in Sligo Town Cemetery

Acknowledgements:

- Gerald Gliddon: VCs of the First World War: The Final Days 1918
- Colonel F.E. Whitton: The History of the Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)
- Captain. F.C Hitchcock: "Stand To" A Diary of the Trenches 1915 -1918
- Sligo County Library Service
- Sligo Museum
- The Sligo Champion
- The Connaught Rangers Association
- www.thevictorbookforboys.com
- Francis O'N Rodgers

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