

1916 Commemorations

The Government is committed to respecting all traditions on this island equally. It also recognises that developing a greater understanding of our shared history, in all of its diversity, is essential to developing greater understanding and building a shared future.

The Government is marking the 90th anniversary of the 1916 Rising in Dublin at Easter and the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme with a ceremony at the war memorial in Islandbridge on July 1st.

1916 Easter Rising

- Proclamation Of Independence
- Executed Leaders of the 1916 Rising
- The 1916 Rising
- The Defence Forces
- Easter Sunday Ceremony at the General Post Office, Dublin

Battle of the Somme

- Irish Soldiers in the First World War

Proclamation of Independence

POBLACHT NA H EIREANN

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
IRISH REPUBLIC
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the last three hundred years they have asserted it to arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God. Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, in humanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government.

**Thomas J. Clarke,
Sean Mac Diarmada, Thomas MacDonagh,
P. H. Pearse, Eamonn Ceannt,
James Connolly, Joseph Plunkett**

The Executed Leaders of the 1916 Rising

Seven Signatories:

Éamonn Ceannt: Born in Galway in 1881, prior to the Rising Ceannt was an employee of the Dublin Corporation. He was a co-founder of the Irish Volunteers, partaking in the successful Howth gun-running operation of 1914. His involvement in republican activities was complemented by his interest in Irish culture, specifically Irish language and history, although he was also an accomplished uilleann piper. As the commander of the Fourth Battalion of Irish Volunteers during the Rising, he took possession of the South Dublin Union, precursor to the modern-day St. James's Hospital. He was executed on 8 May 1916.

Thomas James Clarke: Born on the Isle of Wight in 1857, Clarke's father was a soldier in the British army. During his time in America as a young man, he joined Clann na nGael, later enduring fifteen years of penal servitude for his role in a bombing campaign in London, 1883-1898. In 1907, having returned from a second sojourn in America, his links with Clan na nGael in America copper-fastened his importance to the revolutionary movement in Ireland. He held the post of Treasurer to the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and was a member of the Supreme Council from 1915. The first signatory of the Proclamation of Independence through deference to his seniority, Clarke was with the group that occupied the G. P. O. He was executed on 3 May 1916.

James Connolly (1868-1916): Born in Edinburgh in 1868, Connolly was first introduced to Ireland as a member of the British Army. Despite returning to Scotland, the strong Irish presence in Edinburgh stimulated Connolly's growing interest in Irish politics in the mid 1890s, leading to his emigration to Dublin in 1896 where he founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party. He spent much of the first decade of the twentieth century in America, he returned to Ireland to campaign for worker's rights with James Larkin. A firm believer in the perils of sectarian division, Connolly campaigned tirelessly against religious bigotry. In 1913, Connolly was one of the founders of the Irish Citizen Army. During the Easter Rising he was appointed Commandant-General of the Dublin forces, leading the group that occupied the General Post Office. Unable to stand during his execution due to wounds received during the Rising, Connolly was executed while sitting down on 12 May 1916. He was the last of the leaders to be executed.

Seán MacDiarmada: Born in 1884 in Leitrim, MacDiarmada emigrated to Glasgow in 1900, and from there to Belfast in 1902. A member of the Gaelic League, he was acquainted with Bulmer Hobson. He joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1906 while still in Belfast, later transferring to Dublin in 1908 where he assumed managerial responsibility for the I. R. B. newspaper Irish Freedom in 1910. Although MacDiarmada was afflicted with polio in 1912, he was appointed as a member of the provisional committee of Irish Volunteers from 1913, and was subsequently drafted onto the military committee of the I. R. B. in 1915. During the Rising MacDiarmada served in the G. P. O. He was executed on 12 May 1916.

Thomas MacDonagh: A native of Tipperary, born in 1878, MacDonagh spent the early part of his career as a teacher. He moved to Dublin to study, and was the first teacher on the staff at St. Enda's, the school he helped to found with Patrick Pearse. MacDonagh was well versed in literature, his enthusiasm and erudition earning him a position in the English department at University College Dublin. His play *When the Dawn is Come* was produced at the Abbey theatre. He was appointed director of training for the Irish Volunteers in 1914, later joining the I. R. B. MacDonagh was appointed to the I. R. B. military committee in 1916. He was commander of the Second Battalion of Volunteers that occupied Jacob's biscuit factory and surrounding houses during the Rising. He was executed on 3 May 1916.

Patrick Pearse: Pearse was born in Dublin in 1879, becoming interested in Irish cultural matters in his teenage years. In 1898 Pearse became a member of the Executive Committee of the Gaelic League. He graduated from the Royal University in 1901 with a degree in Arts and Law. Pearse's literary output was constant, and he published

extensively in both Irish and English, becoming the editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the newspaper of the Gaelic League. He was a keen believer in the value of education, and established two schools, *Coláiste Éanna* and *Coláiste Ide*, devoted to the education of Irish children through the Irish language. One of the founder members of the Irish Volunteers, and the author of the Proclamation of Independence, Pearse was present in the G. P. O. during the Rising, and was Commander in Chief of the Irish forces. He was executed on 3 May 1916.

Joseph Mary Plunkett: Born 1887 in Dublin, son of a papal count, Plunkett was initially educated in England, though he returned to Ireland and graduated from U. C. D. in 1909. After his graduation Plunkett spent two years travelling due to ill health, returning to Dublin in 1911. Plunkett shared MacDonagh's enthusiasm for literature and was an editor of the *Irish Review*. Along with MacDonagh and Edward Martyn, he helped to establish an Irish national theatre. He joined the Irish Volunteers in 1913, subsequently gaining membership of the I. R. B. in 1914. Plunkett travelled to Germany to meet Roger Casement in 1915. During the planning of the Rising, Plunkett was appointed Director of Military Operations, with overall responsibility for military strategy. Plunkett was one of those who were stationed in the G. P. O. during the Rising. He married Grace Gifford while in Kilmainham Gaol following the surrender and was executed on 4 May 1916.

Other executed leaders:

Roger Casement: Born in 1864 in Dublin, Casement was knighted for his services to the British consulate. He campaigned tirelessly to expose the cruelty inflicted on native workers in the Belgian Congo in 1904, and again in Brazil from 1911-1912, causing an international sensation with his reportage. Casement had become a member of the Gaelic League in 1904, beginning at that time to write nationalist articles under the pseudonym 'Seán Bhean Bhocht'. He retired from the British consular service in 1913, after which he joined the Irish Volunteers. Casement was despatched to Germany on account of his experience to raise an Irish Brigade from Irish prisoners of war. He was captured in Kerry in 1916 on Good Friday having returned to Ireland in a German U-Boat. Casement was imprisoned in Pentonville Gaol in London, where he was tried on charges of High Treason. He was hanged on 3 August 1916, the only leader of the Rising to be executed outside of Ireland.

Con Colbert: Born in 1888, Colbert was a native of Limerick. Prior to the Easter Rising he had been an active member of the republican movement, joining both *Fianna Éireann* and the Irish Volunteers. A dedicated pioneer, Colbert was known not to drink or smoke. As the captain of F Company of the Fourth Battalion, Colbert was in command at the Marrowbone Lane distillery when it was surrendered on Sunday, 30 April 1916. His execution took place on 8 May 1916.

Edward Daly: Born in Limerick in 1891, Daly's family had a history of republican activity; his uncle John Daly had taken part in the rebellion of 1867. Edward Daly led the First Battalion during the Rising, which raided the Bridewell and Linenhall Barracks, eventually seizing control of the Four Courts. A close friend of Tom Clarke, their ties were made even stronger by the marriage of Clarke to Daly's sister. Daly was executed on 4 May 1916.

Seán Heuston: Born in 1891, he was responsible for the organisation of *Fianna Éireann* in Limerick. Along with Con Colbert, Heuston was involved in the education of the schoolboys at *Scoil Éanna*, organising drill and musketry exercises. A section of the First Battalion of the Volunteers, under the leadership of Heuston, occupied the Mendicity Institute on south of the Liffey, holding out there for two days. He was executed on 8 May 1916. Heuston Railway station in Dublin is named after him.

Thomas Kent: Born in 1865, Kent was arrested at his home in Castlelyons, Co. Cork following a raid by the Royal Irish Constabulary on 22 April 1916, during which his brother Richard was fatally wounded. It had been his intention to travel to Dublin to participate in the Rising, but when the mobilisation order for the Irish Volunteers was cancelled on Easter Sunday he assumed that the Rising had been postponed, leading him to stay at home. He was executed at Cork Detention Barracks on 9 May 1916 following a court martial. In 1966 the railway station in Cork was renamed Kent Station in his honour.

John MacBride: Born in Mayo in 1865. Although he initially trained as a doctor, MacBride abandoned that profession in favour of work with a chemist. He travelled to America in 1896 to further the aims of the I. R. B., thereafter travelling to South Africa where he raised the Irish Transvaal Brigade during the Second Boer War. MacBride married the Irish nationalist Maude Gonne in 1903. He was not a member of the Irish Volunteers, but upon the beginning of the Rising he offered his services to Thomas MacDonagh, and was at Jacob's biscuit factory when that post was surrendered on Sunday, 30 April 1916. He was executed on 5 May 1916.

Michael Mallin: A silk weaver by trade, Mallin was born in Dublin in 1874. Along with Countess Markievicz, he commanded a small contingent of the Irish Citizen Army, of which he was Chief of Staff, taking possession of St. Stephen's Green and the Royal College of Surgeons. He was executed on 8 May 1916.

Michael O'Hanrahan: Born in Wexford in 1877. As a young man, O'Hanrahan showed great promise as a writer, becoming heavily involved in the promotion of the Irish language. He founded the first Carlow branch of the Gaelic League, and published two novels, *A Swordsman of the Brigade* and *When the Norman Came*. Like many of the other executed leaders, he joined the Irish Volunteers from their inception, and was second in command to Thomas MacDonagh at Jacob's biscuit factory during the Rising, although this position was largely usurped by the arrival of John MacBride. His execution took place on 4 May 1916.

William Pearse: Born in 1881 in Dublin. The younger brother of Patrick, William shared his brother's passion for an independent Ireland. He assisted Patrick in running St. Enda's. The two brothers were extremely close, and fought alongside each other in the G. P. O. William was executed on 4 May 1916. Pearse railway station on Westland Row in Dublin was re-named in honour of the two brothers in 1966.

The 1916 Rising

Aspirations of the 1916 Rising

The men and women of the 1916 Rising envisaged a new Ireland as a national democracy; an Ireland which, in the words of the Proclamation, 'guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and [which] declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally.' They believed that this could only be achieved through complete independence.

When they seized the General Post Office in Dublin on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, the leaders of the Rising proclaimed a free Irish Republic in which the egalitarian idea was centrally enshrined. The Proclamation, which was first read out by Patrick Pearse on the steps of the GPO just after noon, declared the rights of the people of Ireland to be sovereign. It looked forward to the establishment of a native Government elected on the democratic principles of self-determination and government by consent. The 1916 rising set in train an unstoppable process which led to the separation of Ireland from Great Britain.

The events of 1916 must be viewed against the backdrop of the broader nationalist movement, the convictions of those who opposed any weakening of the link with the Crown and the momentous events being played out on the battlefields of Europe in one of the bloodiest conflicts that the world had ever seen. It should be noted that the continuing threat of conscription brought about by the manpower needs of the war consolidated the growing rift within the popular opinion. The ongoing frustration within Nationalist Ireland at the lack of progress on Home Rule, the prospect that it would not even be for the whole island, reinforced by the refusal of the British War Office to allow the creation of a distinctly Irish Brigade, and its rejection of even an Irish divisional badge, was compounded by the abhorrence of the executions.

Home Rule

The demand for Home Rule as articulated by the Irish Parliamentary Party had dominated Irish politics since the 1870s. This was strongly resisted by Unionism. As the prospect of some form of Home Rule gained momentum in the early 1900s, Ulster increasingly became the focus of Unionism's attempts to resist Home Rule.

The imminent passage of the third Home Rule Bill, influenced by a British Government's parliamentary dependency on Irish MPs, led to the formation by Unionists of the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1912. This represented an attempt to prevent the implementation of the third Home Rule Bill by the threat of force and precipitated the formation of the nationalist Irish Volunteers. The outbreak of World War I overshadowed the Irish crisis.

The long awaited Home Rule Bill, though placed on the statute book, was not to come into effect until after the war, at which point special arrangements, yet to be negotiated, to meet the objections of Ulster Unionists would be introduced.

World War I

Official British estimates record over 200,000 Irishmen, from both traditions, fought in World War I with approximately 40,000 losing their lives. For Unionism, it was an issue of loyalty to the Crown. For Nationalists the situation was more complex. The leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, was also the nominal political leader of the Irish Volunteers. At a speech in Woodenbridge in September 1914, he pledged his support for the war effort and called on the Volunteers to go "wherever the firing line extends." The

majority of the Volunteers supported Redmond's position and formed the National Volunteers. A smaller contingent led by Eoin MacNeill kept the name Irish Volunteers and refused to support the British war effort.

The war was initially promoted by Britain as "the defence of little Belgium". It later evolved into one fought for the rights of small nations as expressed by President Wilson, and the principle of self determination for such nations, especially in the defeated central European Empires formed much of the debate at the subsequent peace talks at Versailles. For some Irish nationalists there was an irony in fighting in the British army for such a cause. Moreover initial public enthusiasm for the war quickly faded as it was felt that there was little recognition for the contribution of those Irishmen who had enlisted. The rising casualty lists, allied to the threat of conscription, further dented such enthusiasm.

1916 Rising

It was against this backdrop that the 1916 Rising was organised. Elements within the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), a secret association going back to 1858, which had consistently held as their aim the securing of a separate and distinct Irish Republic, formed the plan. It was hoped that the Rising would secure Ireland a place at a peace conference after the war. IRB members had risen to positions of prominence in the Volunteers and it was this force, along with the Irish Citizen Army led by James Connolly, that carried out the Rising.

The broad spectrum of views and backgrounds of the Irish Volunteers was reflected in divisions amongst its leadership. The issue of conflicting orders, by those supporting and opposed to the Rising, made for a confused beginning to the Rising. It should be noted that the membership of the Irish Volunteers had risen from 2/3000 members in September 1914 to circa 15,000 by 1916. The organisation was strongly infiltrated by the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

On Easter Monday, 24 April, 1916, the General Post Office in Dublin was occupied by the insurgents and it became their headquarters. The Proclamation was read from here on the same day. The signatories were Thomas J. Clarke, Sean MacDiarmada, P.H. Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas MacDonagh, Eamonn Ceannt and Joseph Plunkett. It sets out their aspirations not just for freedom from British rule, but to create an Ireland where all people could be free to accomplish their potential regardless of their wealth, class or religion.

The insurgents also occupied other strategic buildings in Dublin, such as the Four Courts, Boland's Bakery, Jacobs Factory, the College of Surgeons and the South Dublin Union. While most of the action took place in Dublin, sizeable numbers of Volunteers turned out in Louth, Wexford, Galway and Ashbourne.

Fighting lasted a week and resulted in the deaths of over 250 civilians, 130 members of the crown forces and over 60 insurgents.

In an effort to prevent further bloodshed, Pearse declared an unconditional surrender which read " In order to prevent further slaughter of the civil population and in the hope of saving the lives of our followers, the members of the Provisional Government present at headquarters have decided on an unconditional surrender, and commandants or officers commanding districts will order their commands to lay down arms. P.H. Pearse, Dublin 30th April 1916."

Many Volunteer units marched in formation to lay down their weapons.

It has to be said that, public opinion was not initially on the side of the insurgents, due to lack of understanding of the purpose, as well as the loss of life; the carnage and bloodshed. However, this was to quickly change.

Aftermath

The suppression of the Rising was immediate and vigorous. The city centre was shelled. Despite the concentration of activity in Dublin, martial law was proclaimed and extended across the country. Over 3,500 people were arrested – over twice the number who took part in the rising. By May 1,600 had been interred in Wales, without trial.

Fifteen prominent insurgents were executed between 3rd May and 12th May. (Roger Casement was subsequently hanged in Pentonville Prison in August 1916). The executions, provoked public outrage, particularly those of William Pearse, for largely being the brother of Padraig Pearse; Major John MacBride, who had played no part in planning the Rising, but had previously attracted British hostility during the Boer War; a gravely ill Joseph Plunkett, and a badly wounded James Connolly. These events, allied to the fate of Francis Sheehy Skeffington, the well known pacifist and writer who was murdered during the Rising, as he sought to moderate its violence and prevent looting, rapidly turned public opinion. The long drawn out period of the executions – nine days- further inflamed public opinion. In the House of Commons, John Dillon of the Irish Parliamentary Party denounced British policy, contending that ‘in the whole of modern history... there has been no rebellion or insurrection put down with so much blood and so much savagery as the recent insurrection in Ireland.’ In lieu of funerals, masses were said for the executed, their bodies having been covered in quicklime. The return of released internees and the funeral of Thomas Ashe following his hunger strike in September 1917, became occasions of public demonstration.

Political Ramifications

The political ramifications of the Rising and its suppression were soon revealed in subsequent elections. The first of these occurred on 17 February 1917 in North Roscommon, when Count Plunkett, the father of the executed Joseph Plunkett was elected as an independent who would abstain from attending Westminster. Having backed Plunkett's campaign, Michael Collins proposed Joe McGuinness as a candidate for the South Longford seat when it fell vacant in May. At the time McGuinness was serving a sentence in Lewes gaol for his part in the Rising. Deported prisoners would provide the nucleus of a resurgent, declaredly separatist, Sinn Féin party who in October would consolidate their link with the Irish Volunteers when a former prisoner, Eamon DeValera, assumed the presidency of both organisations. That July, De Valera had won the East-Clare by-election, defeating a Home Rule candidate.

The Irish Parliamentary Party had continued in its efforts to secure Home Rule, and with a view to this end the Irish Convention first met in July 1917. Despite not concluding until April 1918, agreement could not be reached with Ulster Unionists over the issue, even though Southern Unionists were more accommodating, and Home Rule remained elusive. Simultaneously a new crisis was in its early stages. It would prove to be one which would solidify support for the new Sinn Féin.

The plan to introduce conscription into Ireland and the ensuing outcry from the public, cemented the transformation of Nationalist Ireland. Public indignation was vociferous, and a nationwide movement of resistance ensued. A one-day general strike was called and an anti-conscription pledge endorsed by Sinn Féin, the Irish Parliamentary Party, Labour and independent politicians. Despite the broad alliance formed on the issue of conscription, in the general election of 1918 Sinn Féin would secure an overwhelming victory, their declared aim being the establishment of Ireland as a recognised sovereign independent republic. Nationalist opinion had shifted

The Representation of the People Act 1918 expanded the electorate to include all men over the age of 21 and all women over the age of 30. Later that year, the Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act 1918 gave women over 30 the right to stand for election as an MP. Countess Markievicz was the first woman to be elected M.P. The December 1918 election was the first General Election since December 1910, the 1916 one being

postponed because of the war. A whole new generation of voters had emerged, influenced by 1916 and its aftermath, the conscription crisis, and the war itself. Pursuing a policy of abstention from Westminster by Sinn Féin, the election led to the formation of the Dáil, a democratic institution which survived the upheaval of the tumultuous years of 1919 to 1923.

Dáil Éireann continues today as our democratic parliament. Many of the surviving insurgents went on to serve with distinction as members of the Dáil and Government, as well as in other institutions of the new, independent Ireland.

The 1916 Rising was a seminal event led by men and women who held aspirations of a different type of Ireland, one which would guarantee religious and civil liberty and would pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation, and all of its parts. It occurred at a time of conflict on the international stage, resulting in Irishmen losing their lives on the Western Front, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, and at sea. The Rising resulted in the loss of many lives, be they combatants or innocent civilians. We commemorate these events on this their ninetieth anniversary and mourn the loss of all those who died.

Fact sheet

Battalions in Dublin

First battalion: Under Commandant Edward Daly, took possession of the Four Courts.

Second battalion: Commandant Thomas McDonagh – occupied Jacob's Biscuit factory.

Third battalion: Commandant Eamon de Valera - occupied Boland's flour mills and the railway line from Westland Row to Landsdowne Road.[intercepting the line to Kingstown]

Fourth Battalion: Commandant Eamon Ceannt occupied the South Dublin Union.[James Street Hospital].

The Citizen Army commanded by Michael Mallin and Countess Markievicz occupied St. Stephen's Green

In the Rising, 132 members of the crown forces were killed. Official figures put rebel combatants and civilians together – 318 killed and 2,217 injured.

Republican deaths have generally agreed to number 60 or 62. Over 250 civilians died. Official British estimates record over 200,000 Irishmen fought in World War I with approximately 40,000 losing their lives.

The Defence Forces

The Irish Volunteers, Óglaigh na hÉireann, were founded on 25 November 1913 at a public meeting held in the Rotunda Rink in Dublin. The movement caught the public imagination so that by mid-1914 the Irish Volunteers had a nominal membership of 180,000. It then split over whether its members should enlist in the British Forces and fight in the European war. A number strongly opposed this and kept the original name.

Within the Volunteers a small number were preparing for an insurrection. Although the Rising of 1916 ended in defeat the Volunteers fought with discipline and skill and their conduct helped to ensure that the Rising was soon looked on as something to be proud of. The War of Independence that followed was initiated in January 1919 by a number of young, determined Volunteer leaders. During the war 15,000 Volunteers were actively involved, with around 3,000 in service at any given time. From the autumn of 1919 the force had sufficient strength to attempt more spectacular actions. By late 1920 the force had been organised into 'flying columns' – mobile units of about 100 men, based in remote camps or safe houses. On 11 July a truce came into operation that ended the fighting. At the end of the Civil War that followed the passing of the treaty the new state set about providing a legal status for its armed forces. Under the Defence Forces (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923 the Executive Council formally established Óglaigh na hÉireann on 1 October 1924.

On the outbreak of World War II a recruiting campaign began and an effective fighting force was quickly developed to defend our neutrality. In April/May 1941 the strength of the Emergency Army reached a high point of almost 41,000 and in June 1943 the Local Defence Force reached a strength of 106,000.

Ireland became a member of the United Nations in 1955 and in 1958 sent military observers on a UN mission to Lebanon. This was the beginning of the Defence Forces' involvement in overseas service, which continues to this day. The bulk of the tours of duty have been completed by units in major force missions deployed in the Congo, Cyprus, Lebanon, Somalia and East Timor and latterly in Liberia and Kosovo. Other commitments have included headquarters and specialist elements, logistical units, military police units and military observers.

In 1969 the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland marked the start of an intense operational period for all elements of the Defence Forces. The Peace Process, heralded by the signing of the Good Friday Agreement on April 10, 1998, has reduced the intensity of the commitment to these operations and has allowed greater emphasis on the international dimension. Crisis management on behalf of the United Nations and response to natural disasters indicate that multinational peace support and humanitarian operations will play an increasing part in the activities of the Defence Forces which today is deployed in support of peace in 19 missions in 23 different countries.

Easter Sunday: Ceremony at the General Post Office, Dublin and Parade 17th April 2006

Parade Begins

To include Army, Navy, Aer Corps, UN Veterans, Gardai. Aer Corps fly past.

11.45am:

- Parade departs from Dublin Castle via Dame Street
- Parade arrives Westmoreland Street and halts.
- Arrival of President at GPO

GPO Ceremony Begins

12.00 noon:

- National Flag lowered on roof of G.P.O.
- Army Officer reads Proclamation
- Taoiseach invites President to lay a wreath
- President lays a wreath
- Minute's silence observed in memory of all those who died
- National Flag raised to full mast
- National Anthem

Parade Continues

- Parade continues through O'Connell Street on to Parnell Square

Note:

The Parade may be viewed as it passes through Dame Street, Westmoreland Street and O'Connell Street.

Large Screens will be placed at strategic locations along the route so that all aspects of the GPO Ceremony and Parade will be visible from individual locations

Battle of the Somme Irish Soldiers in the First World War

Irish Soldiers in the Battle of the Somme

The Battle of the Somme, whose 90th anniversary we commemorate this year, started on 1 July 1916 after an eight-day artillery bombardment of the German front lines. Despite 60,000 casualties in one day, no progress was made in the British sector and the battle continued until the following November when the weather intervened. The total number of casualties in the Battle exceeded one million. This included the deaths of some 3,500 Irishmen from all parts of this island. However, to fully understand and do justice to the significance what happened at the Somme, we must look at the overall context of WW1 and its impact on Ireland and on the Irish participants

Irish Soldiers in the First World War

When the Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip fired the shots that killed the heir to the Austrian crown Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife during their state visit to Sarajevo in June 1914, he started a chain of events that would directly affect Irish people in every part of Ireland and some of those living in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. The course of Irish history was greatly altered, leading to the emergence of forces that still influence the politics of today. The increased awareness of the Irish aspects of the War have helped to put those forces to positive use by allowing people from the two major traditions to meet on common ground.

Ireland at the Outbreak of the War

By 1914, the political efforts to restore some form of self-government to the Ireland appeared to be achieving tangible results with the passing of the Home Rule Bill at Westminster. The prospects of a Dublin parliament had prompted the Unionist opposition to organise the Ulster Volunteer Force and to import 24,600 rifles and 3 million rounds of ammunition from Germany on 24-25 April, 1914. In response, the Nationalists formed the Irish Volunteers who also imported arms from Germany at Howth albeit only 900 rifles and 25,000 rounds. These unofficial armies openly exercised in military formations bearing arms and with many volunteers wearing their own uniforms.

Ireland has a strong military tradition. Even before the departure of the "Wild Geese" after the Treaty of Limerick, Irish soldiers had practised their profession abroad. The recent exhibition of prints by Albrecht Durer contained a watercolour of "Irish soldiers" from 1521. Throughout the 19th century, the British Army in Ireland provided a convenient outlet for young men interested in soldiering. The country was divided into catchment areas for local regiments which offered regular income, attractive uniforms and the opportunity to travel abroad. Others joined the British navy. Irish emigrants to the United States had won distinction on both sides in the Civil War.

The new volunteer organisations and the Irish Citizen Army drew heavily on army veterans for organisational expertise and training.

Ireland goes to war.

When Great Britain declared war on August 4th, 1914, there were some 20,000 Irishmen already serving in the regular British Army with another 30,000 in the first line reserve. The total army strength was 247,000 with 145,000 ex-regular reservists. In contrast to the other major European powers, the British Army relied on volunteer soldiers rather than on National Service. Lord Kitchener, a serving officer who was made Secretary for War on

August 5th, informed the Cabinet that it would be a three-year war requiring at least one million men. Thirty new divisions were formed into what became known as the New Armies or Kitchener's Army. The volunteers were assigned to new battalions of existing regiments of infantry which were given numbers following consecutively on the existing ones. [The word "Service" was added to the battalion number.] Typically, an infantry battalion consisted of 1,000 men. Following huge losses and a decline in volunteers, conscription was eventually introduced in January 1916. It was not applied to Ireland.

The Home Rule Bill was given the Royal Assent on the 18th September 1914 but its operation was suspended for one year or for the duration of the war when it would be reviewed with a view to securing the general consent of Ireland and the United Kingdom. On the 20th September, the leader of the Nationalist Party, John Redmond, who was widely expected to be the first Prime Minister of the new Irish Parliament, called on the Irish Volunteers to enlist. Irish soldiers in the British Expeditionary Force had already been in action in Flanders. The German advance through Belgium, the rumours of atrocities and refugees and the near capture of Paris had created an emotional atmosphere. The organisation split with those who followed Redmond being called the National Volunteers. About 12,000 of the 180,000 retained the Irish Volunteers title and set themselves the objective of gaining full independence for Ireland, by force if necessary. The peaceful achievement of Home Rule was again in doubt due to the failure of the Government to deal with the build-up of arms in Northern Ireland and the public refusal of a cavalry brigade in the Curragh to enforce Home Rule Act if so requested.

About 80,000 enlisted in Ireland in the first 12 months of the war, some half of whom came from Ulster. The First New Army of 100,000 soldiers, K1, contained the 10th (Irish) Division which was formed in late August, 1914. It had three brigades. One had regiments with bases in all four provinces. The second was based in Ulster and the third was based in the other three provinces. The 16th (Irish) Division of the Second New Army was formed in September, 1914. One brigade was from the province of Ulster. The 36th (Ulster) Division was authorised on the 28th October 1914. It was based on the formation and membership of the Ulster Volunteer Force to which a London based artillery unit was added. It contained men from all nine counties of Ulster. Redmond had sought have all Irish regiments organised into a single fighting unit.

Irishmen also joined Irish regiments such as the Irish Guards, the London (Irish), the Tyneside battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers and the 1st/8th (Irish) Kings Liverpool Regiment. Many also joined other English, Scottish and Welsh regiments, the Royal, Artillery, the Royal Flying Corps, the Medical Corps, the Army Service Corps, and the Royal Navy. Women served as nurses in the Voluntary Aid Detachment in the front line. Emigrants enlisted in the armies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa and United States.

Those who went to fight could not have envisaged the changed world that would exist at the end of the War. The reasons for enlisting were as varied as the individuals. Some joined out of economic necessity. Others had the hope that the experience of serving side by side against a common enemy would forge friendships that would transcend the historic differences. Thomas Kettle, the former Nationalist MP for East Tyrone who served and was killed as a Lieutenant in the 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, believed that:

"Used with the wisdom which is sown in tears and blood, this tragedy of Europe may be and must be the prologue to the two reconciliations of which all statesmen have dreamed, the reconciliation of Protestant Ulster with Ireland, and the reconciliation of Ireland with Great Britain."

Important Irish Episodes in the First World War

The virtual disappearance of the First World War from the version of Irish history taught to the first few generations of the new independent Irish state had the result that few are aware of the extent of the Irish participation in the actual fighting. The concentration on the experience of the 36th (Ulster) Division at the Battle of the Somme in Northern Ireland overshadowed the sacrifice of the Nationalist community.

The following are some episodes that have particular significance for Ireland and form the background discussions about the relevance of the First World War to modern politics.

1914 The First Battles

The British Expeditionary Force entered France in August 1914 and advanced to stop the German advance through Belgium and Northern France. The Irish regiments in the BEF were:

Infantry:

- 1st Irish Guards
- 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers
- 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers
- 2nd Royal Irish Rifles
- 2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers
- 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers
- 2nd Connaught Rangers
- 2nd Royal Irish Regiment
- 2nd Leinster Regiment

Cavalry:

- 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards
- South Irish Horse
- 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars
- 5th Royal Irish Lancers
- North Irish Horse

Many Irish men were serving in British regiments and there were some English, Scots and Welsh in the Irish regiments who had been so assigned because of their Catholic faith. The first shot fired by the British Army in the War was discharged by Corporal E. Thomas of the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards just north of Mons on August 22nd. On the following day, Lt Maurice Dease from Mullingar, who was serving with the Royal Fusiliers, attempted to stop the German advance into the city with his machine gun unit. He died fighting and was awarded the first posthumous Victoria Cross of the War.

The well-trained regular soldiers fought a number of battles but had to retreat in the face of the German thrust. The 2nd Dublins had their first casualties near Le Cateau and the 2nd Munsters delayed the German advance for a day with a costly rearguard action at Etreux. The Irish prisoners of war were eventually taken to a camp at Limburg where they were visited by Sir Roger Casement in his attempts to raise an "Irish Brigade" which would not be part of the German forces. Less than 60 of the 2000 Irish prisoners in the camp took up the offer.

The German advance on Paris was halted in the Battle of the Marne. The Allied Armies pursued the Germans until both sides took up positions in opposing trenches which eventually stretched for 350 miles from the English Channel to Switzerland.

The Irish regiments were distributed throughout the British sector and began a routine of alternating periods of days in the front line, days in reserve and days in the rear resting. The routine was broken by the major set piece battles in many of which large numbers of Irish soldiers died.

Some Irish soldiers took part in the Christmas Truce of 1914 when there was a spontaneous cessation in the killing for a short period.

1915

GALLIPOLI

The stalemate on the Western Front prompted an alternative approach to defeating Germany. The capture of Constantinople, now Istanbul, would give a direct link to the Russian ally and a successful eastern front campaign could be undertaken. A British Navy attempt to sail up the Dardanelles on March 18 failed with the loss of several ships. Despite the advanced warning that this gave the Turks, the British and French attempted a land invasion on the 25th April. They went ashore at six locations but the Turkish defence held them close to the beaches. A second attempt was made on the 6th August at Suvla Bay but this also ground to a halt. The campaign was abandoned and last of the troops were withdrawn in January 1916. Churchill, who had proposed the campaign, had to resign from the Cabinet. He subsequently lost his seat in the House of Commons and had to wait until outbreak of the Second World War to return to a position of power.

The 1st Battalions of the Royal Dublin, Munster and Inniskilling Fusiliers took part in the landing on April 25th at Cape Helles which was a perfect defensive location with gun emplacements housed on steep slopes. The naval bombardment failed to neutralize the Turkish defences. The Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the Royal Munster Fusiliers were the first to disembark from the S.S. River Clyde and of the first 200 men to leave the ship, 149 were killed and 30 wounded immediately. The Dublins had 25 officers and 987 other ranks but only, one officer and 374 other ranks made it ashore. There were 637 casualties in the first 36 hours.

The Allies decided to launch a fresh attack against the Turks and chose Suvla Bay, 25 miles north of Cape Helles. The first Irish volunteer unit to go into battle was the 10th (Irish) Division which contained the new service battalions of the Irish regiments. As a result of administrative incompetence, the Division's artillery had been sent to France and the men arrived without either maps or orders. The Division did not fight as a unit. There was a chronic water shortage and the soldiers ran out of ammunition and had to resort to throwing stones at the enemy. At least 3,411 serving with Irish battalions were killed or missing, 569 from the 1st Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers alone.

ST JULIAN, Flanders, May 1915

Near St. Julien, during the second battle of Ypres, the 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers suffered near annihilation just one month after the Helles Landings. On May 24th, 1915, around 2.45am, the Germans launched a poison gas attack. The Battalion strength was 666 men. By 9.30 pm, only one officer and 20 other ranks remained.

SALONIKA, October, 1915

On September 29, 1915, the 2,454 strong 10th (Irish) Division set sail from Gallipoli for Salonika to fight on the Bulgarian front. On the 3rd October, the Royal Dublin and Munster Fusiliers were at the front line and were ordered to take the village of Jenikoj which is now in Macedonia. In the attack, they lost 385 men killed, wounded or missing. There is a granite Celtic cross to commemorate the 10th (Irish) Division near the village of Robrovo in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This complements the ones at Wijtschate in Flanders and Guillemont in France.

1916

HULLUCH, April, 1916

The 16th (Irish) Division arrived in France in December 1915 and was assigned to the Loos sector. The soldiers experienced trench warfare and suffered casualties during each 8-day period in the front line. They were in the trenches at Hulluch when the Germans launched a gas attack on April 27th, 1916. Of the 1980 casualties, 570 were killed and many of the wounded died later from respiratory diseases. The Germans had put up placards opposite the Irish trenches to bring news of the Easter Rising which had begun in Dublin. The Division remained at Loos until August when it moved to the Somme area. The Division had suffered 6,000 casualties (1,496 killed).

THE RISING IN DUBLIN, April, 1916

As the number of casualties continued to rise with little prospect of early victory, the Irish Volunteers continued to train and prepare to resist any attempt to disarm them. The reality of war was brought home in the long lists of dead and wounded which also increased the likelihood of conscription.

When the Rising began on the 24th April, there were about 5,000 soldiers deployed in the Dublin area. An additional 1000 were immediately sent from Belfast and further thousands were dispatched from England. The 4th, 5th and 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers took part in the fighting as did a number of officers and soldiers who were on leave in Dublin at the time. It was generally accepted that the Irish Volunteers fought bravely and honourably. Prime Minister Asquith told the House of Commons that "they fought bravely and did not resort to outrage." The series of executions helped to swing Nationalist support away from the Parliamentary Party and behind Sinn Fein.

THE SOMME, July –November 1916

In an attempt to break the deadlock of trench warfare and to relieve the pressure on Verdun, the British and French launched a major offensive on July 1. The German positions opposite the 14 miles of the British sector had been bombarded with 1.7 million shells since June 24. No resistance was expected when over 100,000 soldiers left their trenches and went forward into no man's land at 7.30 am. In clear daylight, they advanced at a walking pace in straight lines with 100 yards between each assault wave. They were met with a hail of gunfire which caused 60,000 casualties on that day, of whom almost 20,000 were killed.

The 36th (Ulster) Division's was assigned a target that included a huge concrete bunker where German troops sheltered, the Schwaben Redoubt. The Division was one of the few that succeeded in gaining its objectives but the soldiers could not hold them due the failures of the other divisions. The losses amounted to 5,500 of whom almost 2,000 were killed. Almost every community in Ulster was affected. Four Victoria Crosses were awarded to the Division.

Irish battalions serving in other divisions took part in the attack on July 1. The 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, veterans of Gallipoli, went into action in a sector neighbouring the 36th. They had 147 casualties (22 killed) and 64 missing. The 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers were in the second wave of the attack, going into battle with 23 officers and 480 other ranks: 14 officers and 311 other ranks were casualties. The 1st Royal Irish Rifles, 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, 1st and 2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Irish Regiment and the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Tyneside Irish Battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers fought on that day. The Battle of the Somme continued throughout the Summer with little progress. The 16th (Irish) Division captured Guillemont on September 2nd and Ginchy on September 9th. Lt

Tom Kettle, MP, was killed while leading a company of the 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers and Lt John Holland of the Leinsters won a Victoria Cross. The Division had 4,314 casualties (1167 killed).

The Battle petered out in November when 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, attached to the 63rd Naval Division, helped to capture Beaumont Hamel, one of the objectives for the first day. It had 50% casualties.

1917

MESSINES RIDGE, June 1917

The 16th (Irish) and 36th (Ulster) Divisions went into battle together to take the Belgian village of Wijtschate in the well-planned attack on the Messines Ridge. General Plumer had a scaled model of the Ridge made so troops could see what lay ahead. He had mines dug for explosives beneath German defences. About 3 million shells bombarded Messines for over a week. The barrage eased just before Plumer detonated 9,500 tons of explosives under the Germans in 19 mines. Willie Redmond, M.P. and brother of John, leader of the Irish Party, died of wounds received in the attack.

PASSCHENDAELE, THE 3RD BATTLE OF YPRES, July 1917

The 16th (Irish) and 36th (Ulster) Divisions were transferred to General Gough's 5th Army in July 1917. On 31 July, the 36th (Ulster) Division took part in the opening attack on the strong German positions to the east of Ypres. The heavy rain, which continued for a month, made conditions for an attack impossible. Never-the less, both Irish divisions moved forward at Langemarck on August 16th. 65% of the leading units were lost before the attack due to heavy German shelling. The 36th (Ulster) had 3,585 casualties and the 16th (Irish) 4,231. Fr Willie Doyle, MC, chaplain to the 8th Dublins, was killed. The 16th (Irish) Division was in action near Arras and the 36th (Ulster) Division near Cambrai in November. The 10th (Irish) Division went to Egypt in September.

1918

THE SOMME 1918 - THE LAST 100 DAYS

The long-expected German offensive began on March 21st and succeeded in driving the British lines back almost to Amiens. The 16th and 36th Divisions received the full weight of the attack and were effectively destroyed as fighting units. The 16th had 6,435 casualties and the 36th had 6,109. A third were killed.

The battalions of 10th and 16th Divisions were amalgamated and distributed to other divisions on the Western Front. For example, the 1st Dublins went to the 29th Division and the 2nd and 7th joined the 31st Division. The 36th Division remained Ulster in name only as replacements were English conscripts. The Irish battalions took part in the advances which drove the Germans back over all of the territory gained during the four years of war. The 2nd Dublins went into battle near Le Cateau on October 16th, suffering 44% casualties within two days. This was where they had first gone into action in August 1914. The First World War ended within a month.

AFTERMATH

When the soldiers returned to Ireland, they found a changed political climate. The election in December 1918 was a clear endorsement of Sinn Fein outside of the traditional Unionist

areas. The sacrifices made in the war were sidelined in the southern provinces whereas the losses at the Somme became part of the heritage of the new Northern Ireland.

Some ex-soldiers joined the IRA, notably Emmet Dalton who had served with Tom Kettle. He is on record as having no difficulty in fighting for Ireland with the British and fighting for Ireland against the British. Others joined the new Irish army.

On June 12th, 1922, the regiments which had been recruited in the new independent Ireland were disbanded. They were:

- The Royal Irish Regiment
- The Connaught Rangers
- The Prince of Wales Leinster Regiment
- The Royal Munster Fusiliers
- The Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

The Colours were received by the King and were laid up in Windsor Castle where they remain

STATISTICS

There is no agreement on the total number of Irish soldiers who served in the British Army and Navy in the First World War. Professor Keith Jeffery gives a figure of 210,000. There appears to be a consensus that at least 35,000 died though the figure on the National War Memorial is 49,400.

About 140,000 enlisted in Ireland during the war. The increase in 1918 is worth noting.

Period	Recruits
Aug 1914 –Feb 1915	50,107
Feb 1915- Aug 1915	25,235
Aug 1915 –Feb 1916	19,801
Feb 1916- Aug 1916	9,323
Aug 1916 –Feb 1917	8,178
Feb 1917- Aug 1917	5,607
Aug 1917 –Feb 1918	6,550
Feb 1918- Aug 1918	5,812
Aug 1918 –Nov 1918 [3 Months]	9,843

The first year total of Irish recruits exceeded the total of the remaining three years of the War. As the War progressed, Irish losses were replaced by UK conscripts. For example, the percentage of non-Irish soldiers in the 1st Royal Irish Rifles, which was based in Antrim and Down, was 23% in 1916. One year later it was 52%.
As mentioned earlier, Irish soldiers served in other forces.

Recruiting areas for the Irish Infantry and Cavalry Regiments 1914

Regiment Name:	Recruiting area:	Depot:
The (18th Foot) Royal Irish Regiment	Tipperary, Wexford Waterford, Kilkenny	Clonmel
The Royal Munster Fusiliers	Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Clare	Tralee
The Connaught Rangers	Galway, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim	Renmore
The Inniskilling Fusiliers	Omagh, Fermanagh, Donegal, Derry	
The Royal Irish Rifles	Belfast, Down, Antrim, Tyrone	Belfast
The Royal Irish Fusiliers	Monaghan, Armagh, Cavan	Armagh
The Leinster Regiment	Offaly, Meath, Louth, Laois	Birr
The Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow, Carlow	Naas
The Irish Guards	All over Ireland	Chelsea Barracks London.
The Tyneside Irish 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th Battalions of Northumberland Fusiliers	Newcastle	Alnwick Camp
The London Irish Rifles	London, Chelsea	Duke of York Barracks
The Kings Liverpool Regiment	Liverpool	Seaforth Barracks
Mainly only Irish in name The 4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards The 5th (Royal Irish) Lancers The 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons The 8th (King's Royal Irish) Hussars		
The South Irish Horse	Southern Ireland	Clonmel
The North Irish Horse	Belfast, Down, Antrim, Tyrone, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Armagh, Monaghan	Belfast