

The Great War

CHAPTER

18

Britain went to war against Germany in 1914 'in defence of small nations'. In August 1914 the heir to the Austrian throne, Prince Franz Ferdinand, had been assassinated in the town of Sarajevo, by a Serb. What followed was like the fall of a set of dominoes, as each country declared war on another.

Austria declared war on Serbia; Russia, an ally of Serbia, declared war on Austria; Germany, as Austria's ally, declared war on Russia. France was Russia's ally and so declared war on Germany. Germany was caught between France and Russia, to the west and to the east. Her General Staff had a plan for such an event – to defeat France before the slower-moving Russian army could muster her forces for war. In order to carry out this plan, Germany needed to invade France by marching her forces through Belgium. This brought Britain into the war, to defend Belgium but also as an ally of France. People believed that due to advances in the technology of modern warfare in transport and weaponry, the war would be a short one. The popular assumption was that the war would be over by Christmas. It was to last until November 1918.

There was a great enthusiasm among young men to become involved in the 'adventure' of war. Going overseas appealed to many of them as an exciting prospect, increased by the

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propaganda machines in the various countries. Irishmen had the added incentive that they were fighting for Home Rule. Redmond called on the Irish Volunteers to join the British Army as proof of Irish people's worthiness to receive Home Rule. Meanwhile, Home Rule, passed by the House of Commons in 1913 and delayed by the House of Lords, would remain on the statute books until after the war, a war that was to finish at Christmas.

The Irish joined up in their thousands. Many pretended to be older than they were, in case they missed the 'fun'. Young men from Clontuskert and from all over Ireland soon found themselves in the horrors of trench warfare along the Western Front. The battles that were fought over a few miles of ground were bloody in the extreme. Barbed wire and the machine gun made survival almost impossible as young men climbed out of the trenches and stumbled across 'no man's land'. Thousands of Irishmen died or were horribly wounded. Four men from Clontuskert were listed as killed in action during this period. They were William McLoughlin, Francis Cahalan, Patrick Poland and John Loughnane.

William McLoughlin, listed as Private No. 473 in the First Battalion Irish Guards, was born in Coolbeg and died on September 20th 1914. William's involvement in the war was tragically brief. He received his fatal wound in the first days of the war and died some days later as he was being taken back to hospital. His body lies in St. Desir Cemetery, thirty kilometres from Le Havre. He was an uncle of Bernard McLoughlin, Coolbeg.

Francis Cahalan, an uncle of the late Brendan Cahalan, was born in Lismanny and was listed as Private 25097 in the Seventh Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment. He survived into the last days of the war and was killed on March 21st, 1918. His name is chiselled on panel 30-31 on the Pozieres Memorial. Francis and Patrick Poland were caught up in a massive German onslaught

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which followed a bombardment of three million shells on their area.

Patrick Poland, born near the Derry Wood in Lismanny, Private No. 10876, fought as a member the Sixth Connaught Rangers and died on the same day as his friend Francis Cahalan. His name is among 14,000 listed on panel 77 of the same Pozieres Memorial in North Eastern France. Patrick had initially joined the South Irish Horse and fought with them until the regiment was decimated in 1917. He had been a skilled horseman in the South Irish Horse.

John Loughnane, Private No. 13342 of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was born in Crowsnest. His mother was Mrs. Ann Loughnane, whose address was given as Gannaveen. They lived in the house where Iggy Poland now resides. John died on October 10th 1918, just a month before the Armistice. He had been wounded and was drowned when the mail boat R.M.S. Leinster was torpedoed off Dún Laoghaire.

House allocated
to Tom Poland
in Crowsnest



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In 1925, the Irish Land Commission allocated holdings of land in Crowsnest and Barnaboy to twelve soldiers who survived the First World War. Each holding consisted of thirty-six acres of land, a new house and turf-cutting rights in at Lismanny. This was later changed to Kylemore Bog by agreement with Bord na Móna. The following got land in Crowsnest: Tom Poland, Richard Weily, Michael Starr, Paddy Horan, Tom Pardy, Charlie Carry, Paddy Carry and Paddy Cahalan. Ned Forde, Patrick Begley, Ambrose Scott and Joe Fallon received holdings in Barnaboy.

A section of
St. Desir War
Cemetery



The daily lists of deaths, casualties and missing, changed the attitudes of the people when fathers, sons and brothers failed to return from 'the Front'. The pool of Volunteers dried up and Britain introduced conscription. However, this never materialised in Ireland. The 1916 Rising and the reaction of the British in executing the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation changed the attitude of the Irish to the war. Sadly, this also affected their attitude to the Volunteers who returned home in British uniforms. In the 1918 elections the Home Rule Party was almost wiped out and Sinn Féin won a landslide. The agenda had changed. Home Rule was not enough now and independence was the goal. Ireland was now a different country.