

Ireland and World War I

Why Irish Soldiers Fought

LIBERTY
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Outbreak of World War I

- World War I momentous event
- Encompassed much of the world
- Ended with the Treaty of Versailles

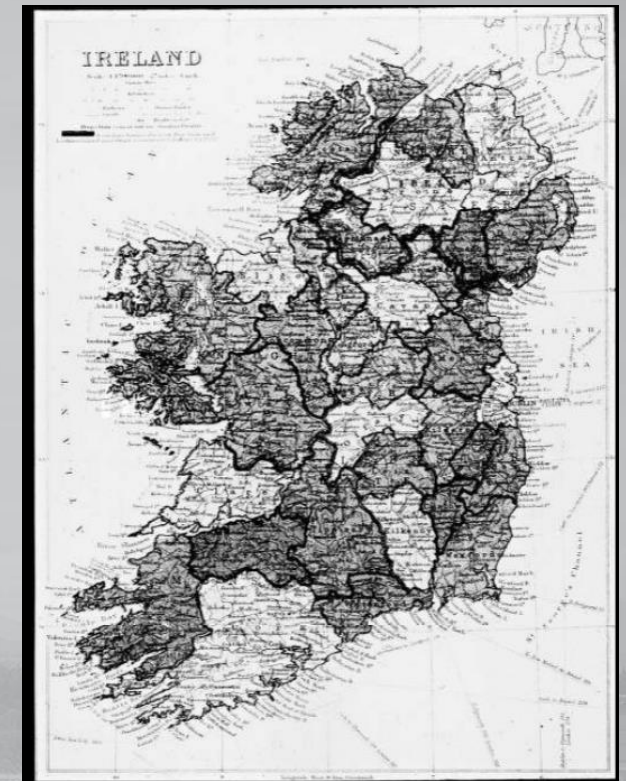


Image from National Library of Ireland

**BRITAIN DECLARES WAR ON
GERMANY.**
TERRITORIALS AND ARMY RESERVE
CALLED OUT.
GERMAN INVASION OF BELGIUM.
HOSTILITIES COMMENCED ON LAND AND SEA.
BRITISH MINELAYER SUNK BY
KAISER'S FLEET.
NAVAL BATTLE IN MEDITERRANEAN.
GRIMSBY TRAWLER'S ADVENTURE.
THE KING'S INSPIRING MESSAGE TO FLEET.

“Britain Declares War on
Germany.” *Aberdeen Journal* iss.
18589 (August 1914).

Home Rule

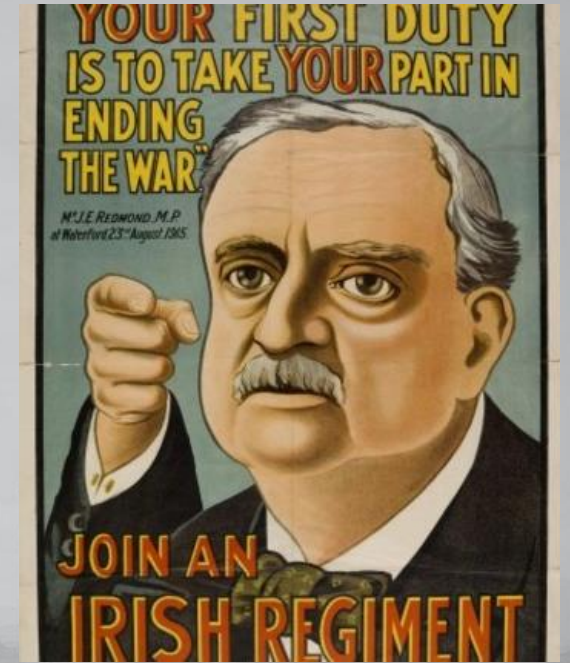
- Before the start of the war, main issue in Ireland was Home Rule
- Had been an ongoing debate since the 1880s
 - Never came to a complete decision until 1911
 - English Parliament agreed that Home Rule should take effect in 1914
- Threatened civil war
 - Reaction in Ulster was to organize militarily “to act as a police force in the event of Home Rule becoming law”
 - In reaction, supporters of Home Rule created the Irish Volunteer Force
- This was the situation in Ireland when World War I broke out



John Redmond and his wife. Image from National Library of Ireland

Enlistment at the Start of the War

- Many in Ireland willing to serve
- Approximately 20,780 Irishmen enlisted in the British army upon the declaration of war on Germany
- Over the course of the war 200,000 Irishmen enlisted in the British army
- Those who enlisted felt little conflicts about joining the British army



John Redmond enlistment poster. Image in public domain



Image from Trinity College Library

The “Why” Question: Belgium

- Some Irish soldiers joined because they sympathized with Belgium
 - Thomas Kettle was vocal about his support of Belgium
 - Expressed disapproval of Germany and wrote, “Germany has thrown down a well-considered challenge to all the deepest forces of our civilization” and that over the flaming coals “justice must walk, were it on bare feet”
 - Noel Drury, an Irish soldier with the 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, admitted that he knew little about the war, and was not entirely sure as to why he joined
 - He did write that ignoring the cries for help that came from France and Belgium was shameful

The “Why” Question: Family and Local Ties

- Northern and Southern Irish soldiers were separated in different divisions
- The 36th Division consisted of Ulstermen and the 16th Division consisted of other regions in Ireland
 - These divisions were based on the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteer Force
 - This was meant to prevent conflict in the divisions
 - Each soldier enlisted in regiments in their local areas



Parliamentary Recruitment Committee “Women of Ireland say GO!”, Hill, Siffken and co. ltd., London, March 1915.

The “Why” Question: Patriotic Fervor

- Dr. J.P. Lynch, a County Cork native, readily enlisted as a doctor in the British army
- J. Staniforth, a signal man with the Connaught Rangers, took pride in serving in the British army and of doing his duty
 - He wrote in his dairy that he was proud of doing his “little bit.”

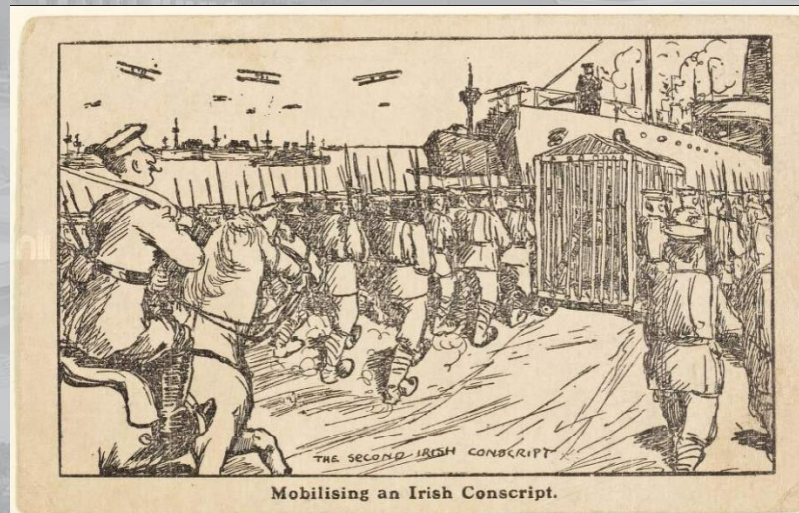


Image from National Library of Ireland

Later on in the War

- The progression of the war provided further reasons why Irish soldiers fought in the war
- J.A. O'Connor of the Royal Irish Rifles accused of anyone who admired Germany and their culture of willing ignorance
- J.H.M. Staniforth witnessed the Germans hang up a Scottish corpse with his backside facing the Irish, and lifted up his kilt
 - Meant to mock the British soldiers

Later on in the War

- As the war drew on, opinions of the war changed
- Staniforth was sad that he was not home for Christmas, and wished he was back with his family
- Staniforth provided a description of the trenches, and wrote he should not describe the trenches, lest he might discourage others from enlisting



Image in public domain



Image from Trinity College Library

Later on in the War

“Imagine a garbage-heap covered with all the refuse of six months: rags, tins, bottles, bits of paper, all sifted over with the indescribable greyish ashen squalor of filthy humanity. It is peopled with gaunt, hollow-eyed tattered creatures who crawl and swarm about upon it and eye you suspiciously as you pass; men whose nerves are absolutely gone; unshaven, half-human things moving about in a stench of corruption.”

-J.H.M. Staniforth

Later on in the War

- As the war dragged on, the war no longer received the same support, and after 1916 soldiers grew sick and tired of the death and dying
- Emmet Dalton of the 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, related that at the Battle of the Somme they achieved their goal, but the cost was high
- Staniforth in 1918 in his diary expressed frustration with the inefficiency of the British army
 - “This war is getting a joke.”
- The defeat at Gallipoli and the Easter Rising of 1916 contributed to growing anti-war sentiments in Ireland
 - The casualties at Gallipoli were high and the executions of Irish leaders of the Easter Rising angered the Irish public
- Such sentiments negatively affected the general perception of Irish soldiers serving in the British army

Later on in the War

“The dead Irishmen of the British Army were viewed as restless in death whereas the dead Volunteer was at because he died for a noble cause.”

- Mandy Link, *Remembrance of the Great War*

Conclusion

- World War I was a devastating event
- Ireland at the start supportive of the war
- Many Irishmen enlisted for different reasons
- The war after 1916 was not as popular as it was at the start

Select Bibliography

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