

## Some background of the German gas attack on the Irish Brigades at Hulluch during late April 1916.

In the week Patrick Pearse declared the Irish Republic on the steps of the GPO, the Irish Brigades of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division suffered horribly in a gas attack launched by the Germans on 27 April 1916 at Hulluch.<sup>1</sup> Like the men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins back in May 1915, many died years later as a result of this attack. On 29 April the Germans launched another gas attack on the Irish lines, however on this occasion the wind turned right round and blew the gas back over the German lines, the result being equally appalling.<sup>2</sup> During April 1916, the Irish Division suffered 2,128 Irish casualties; approx. 538 were killed, the remainder were to suffer chronic lung and breathing conditions for the rest of their lives.<sup>3</sup>

The timing of the attack on 27 April was very poignant indeed. News of the Easter Rebellion in Dublin reached the Irish troops at the front with disappointment. The Easter Rebellion was regarded as a stab in the back for the thousands of Nationalist Volunteers who followed John Redmond's advice. Captain Stephen Gwynn's post-Rising speeches to the House of Commons and his letters to the press were bitter about the damage the rising done to Home Rule.<sup>4</sup> He told his fellow Nationalist MP, Major Willie Redmond MP, 'I shall never forget the men's indignation. They felt they had been stabbed in the back.'<sup>5</sup> John Redmond commented in the House of Commons:<sup>6</sup>

Is it not an additional horror that on the very day when we hear that the men of the Dublin Fusiliers have been killed by Irishmen on the streets of Dublin, we receive the news of how the men of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division - our own Irish Brigade, and of the same Dublin Fusiliers-had dashed forward and by their unconquerable bravery retaken the trenches that the Germans had won at Hulluch?

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<sup>1</sup> Hulluch is a French village in the Arrondissement of Lens in northern France. The village sits approx. 6 kilometers north of Lens.

<sup>2</sup> Denman, Terence. *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers. The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992).p.69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*p.62.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard, Jane. "The Reactions of Irish Officers in the British Army to the Easter Rising of 1916 " in *Facing Armageddon. The First World War Experienced*, ed. Cecil H and Liddle P H(London: Lee Cooper, 1996).p.264.Gwynn was a nationalist MP serving with the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers.

<sup>5</sup> Denman.p.144.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*p.129.

Was there ever such a picture of a tragedy which a small section of Irish faction had so often inflicted on the fairest hopes and the bravest deeds of Ireland.

An officer of the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinster Regiment, Lieutenant Lyon, had the terrible task of gathering the dead. 'They were in all sorts of tragic attitudes, some of them holding hands like children in the dark.' He and his men found themselves pestered for the next few days by 'half-poisoned rats by the hundred.'<sup>7</sup> The Chaplain to the Dublin Fusiliers described the scenes after the attack in a letter home to his father.<sup>8</sup>

Many men died before I could reach them and were gone before I could pass back. There they lay, scores of them (we lost 800, nearly all from gas) in the bottom of the trench, in every conceivable posture of human agony; the cloths torn off their bodies in a vain effort to breathe while from end to end of that valley of death came one long unceasing moan from the lips of brave men fighting and struggling for life.

To commemorate this tragic event which fell on the people of Ireland during the Easter Rising, Dublin City Library and Archive in co-operation with The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association will present a one day seminar at the Council Chamber in Dublin City Hall on Saturday 16 April 2016. We intend to invite a selection of speakers who will present the story from both Irish and German sides of the German gas attack at Hulluch.

Tom Burke.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.p.69.

<sup>8</sup> O'Rahilly, A. *Father William Doyle S.J* (London: Longman's Green and Company, 1920).p.237.

**Hulluch Seminar  
Running Order of Events.**

| <b>From</b> | <b>To</b> | <b>Duration<br/>(Mins)</b> | <b>Speaker</b>  | <b>Title of lecture and abstract</b>   |
|-------------|-----------|----------------------------|---|--|
| 10:15       | 10:30     | 15                         | Lord Mayor of Dublin<br>representative. Councillor Ruairi<br>McGinley | Introduction   |
| 10:35       | 11:05     | 30                         | Mr Kevin Myers  | <i>The Eve of Hulluch: Ireland and the first twenty months of war:</i><br><br>An overview of the war to date, with particular regard to Irish service and Irish losses, both on land, in the air and at sea.   |
| 11:10       | 11:40     | 30                         | Mr Ronan McGreevy   | <i>“In every conceivable posture of human agony” – the story of the Easter week 1916 gas attacks at Hulluch.</i><br><br>Where, how and why did the Hulluch gas attacks take place? What happened and why did so many men die in such a short time. What was the purpose of the gas attacks as far as the Germans were concerned? What was the political aftermath of this ghastly attack? Ronan will also tell the story of the “Irishmen! Heavy uproar in Dublin” sign that links the gas attacks and the Easter Rising, the men who captured it and the All-Ireland winning footballer who ordered it to be captured and later had to leave Ireland because of his involvement in the British army during the First World War. Finally, Ronan will tell the story of the statue to the 16 <sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division at Nouex-les-Mines. |

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|-------|-------|----|------------------------|--|
| 11:45 | 12:15 | 30 | Mr Philip Lecane       | <p><i>Easter Week 1916: Dublin at Hulluch.</i></p> <p>Who were the Royal Dublin Fusiliers? The formation of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the RDF. An overview of the casualties of both battalions at Hulluch. Some of the RDF men who fought at Hulluch : casualties and survivors. Some pictures on the theme of remembering the Irishmen who died at Hulluch, with an emphasis on the men of the RDF.</p>  |
| 12:20 | 12:50 | 30 | Dr Elaine Byrne        | <p><i>We let him be forgotten.</i></p> <p>This is the story of my great-grandfather, of Ireland, and of the importance of remembering. Private Sylvester Cummins, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, survived Hulluch, but not the consequences of it.</p>  |
| 12:55 | 1:30  | 35 | Lunch                  | Lunch  |
| 1:35  | 2:05  | 30 | Ms Carole Hope         | <p><i>Fr Willie Doyle's Baptism of Fire.</i></p> <p>Fr Willie Doyle, Chaplain with 16th (Irish) Division, was a prolific and engaging letter writer and regularly updated his father about his life on the Western Front. His letters were uncensored and provide a detailed, on the ground, looking glass into events such as the gas attacks at Hulluch. Carole will give a brief overview of Fr Doyle's involvement and read from his letter home about the gas attack.</p> |
| 2:10  | 2:40  | 30 | Ms Anne-Sophie Douchin | <p><i>Hulluch then and now – A pictorial presentation of Hulluch during and after the years of war.</i></p> <p>An pictorial presentation of the impact the First World War had on the people and village of Hulluch.</p>   |
| 2:45  | 3:15  | 30 | Mr Sebastian Barry     | Reading passages from his book <i>A Long Long Way</i> .  |

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|------|------|----|---|-----------------------------|
| 3:20 | 3:40 | 20 | Michael James Ford and Bairbre Ni Chaoimh | Poetry readings.            |
| 3:45 | 3:55 | 10 | Mr Francy Devine                          | Song.                       |
| 4:00 | 4:15 | 15 | Seamus Greene                             | Act of Remembrance.         |
| 4:20 | 4:30 | 10 | Tom Burke                                 | Closing remarks and thanks. |

Note: Entry will be on first come basis only. Some seats will be reserved for speakers and organising committee only.