



The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association

In co-operation with

Dublin City Council

Present a Seminar

The Tragedy of Hulluch April 1916

Background to Seminar

In the week Patrick Pearse declared the Irish Republic on the steps of the GPO, the Irish Brigades of the 16th (Irish) Division suffered horribly in a gas attack launched by the Germans on 27 April 1916 at Hulluch.¹ Like the men from the 2nd 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.² 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.³

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.⁴ 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.'⁵ John Redmond commented in the House of Commons:⁶

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 16th Division - our own

¹ Hulluch is a French village in the Arrondissement of Lens in northern France. The village sit approx. 6 kilometers north of Lens.

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

³ Ibid.p.62.

⁴ 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 6th Connaught Rangers.

⁵ Denman.p.144.

⁶ Ibid.p.129.

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? 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 7th 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.'⁷ The Chaplain to the Dublin Fusiliers described the scenes after the attack in a letter home to his father.⁸

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.

⁷ Ibid.p.69.

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

To commemorate this tragic event which fell on the people of Ireland during the Easter Rising, The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association in co-operation with Dublin City Council presents a one – day seminar on 16 April 2016 at the Council Chamber in City Hall Dublin.

The RDFFA Committee would like to thank Dublin City Council for providing the elegant Council Chamber of Dublin City Council; Dublin City Archivist, Dr Mary Clark and her deputy Ms Ellen Murphy for their assistance; our distinguished speakers and you our members and friends who attended the seminar.

Spectamur Agendo.

Tom Burke. B.A.,M.Litt.,MBE.

Chairman

The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association.

**Hulluch Seminar
Running Order of Events.**

From	To	Duration (Mins)	Speaker	Title of lecture and abstract
10:15	10:30	15	Lord Mayor of Dublin representative. Councillor Ruairi McGinley	Introduction
10:35	11:05	30	Mr Kevin Myers	<i>The Eve of Hulluch: Ireland and the first twenty months of war:</i> 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> 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 th (Irish) Division at Nouex-les-Mines.
11:45	12:15	30	Mr Philip Lecane	<i>Easter Week 1916: Dublin at Hulluch.</i> Who were the Royal Dublin Fusiliers? The formation of the 8 th and 9 th 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.

From	To	Duration (Mins)	Speaker	Title of lecture and abstract
12:20	12:50	30	Dr Elaine Byrne	<i>We let him be forgotten.</i> This is the story of my great-grandfather, of Ireland, and of the importance of remembering. Private Sylvester Cummins, 9 th Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, survived Hulluch, but not the consequences of it.
12:55	1:30	35	Lunch	Lunch
1:35	2:05	30	Ms Carole Hope	<i>Fr Willie Doyle's Baptism of Fire.</i> 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.
2:10	2:40	30	Ms Anne-Sophie Douchin	<i>Hulluch then and now – A pictorial presentation of Hulluch during and after the years of war.</i> An pictorial presentation of the impact the First World War had on the people and village of Hulluch.
2:45	3:15	30	Mr Sebastian Barry	Reading passages from his book <i>A Long Long Way</i> .
3:20	3:40	20	Mr Michael James Ford and Bairbre Ni Chaoimh	Poetry readings
3:45	3:55	10	Mr Francy Devine and Mr Luke Cheevers	Song
4:00	4:15	15	Seamus Greene	Act of Remembrance
4:20	4:30	10	Tom Burke	Closing remarks and thanks

Mr Kevin Myers

The Eve of Hulluch: Ireland and the first twenty months of war:

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.

Kevin Myers is a journalist who has been writing about the Irish and the Great War for well over thirty years. He interviewed some of the last of the survivors of the war. He performed the first critical analysis of Ireland's Memorial Records, exposing its exaggerations in *The Irish Times* in 1980, and used his column, 'An Irishman's Diary' to reveal some of the forgotten truths of Ireland's role in the war.

Mr Ronan McGreevy

“In every conceivable posture of human agony” – the story of the Easter week 1916 gas attacks at Hulluch.

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 16th (Irish) Division at Nouex-les-Mines.

Ronan McGreevy is a journalist and videographer with *The Irish Times*. He has previously been a television and radio producer with the BBC and Sky News. He is the author of the forthcoming book *Wherever the Firing Line Extends – Ireland and the Western Front*. He has edited two books for *The Irish Times*, one was *Twas Better to Die; The Irish Times and Gallipoli 1915-2015* and the other was *Was it for This, Reflections on the Easter Rising* which will be published in early April.

Mr Philip Lecane

Easter Week 1916: Dublin at Hulluch.

An overview of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and in particular the 8th and 9th Battalions of the regiment; who they were; where they came from . Examples of some of the RDF men who fought at Hulluch, casualties and survivors. Remembrance of Hulluch in Irish history and in particular some of the Dublin Fusiliers.

Philip Lecane is a committee member of the RDFA. Philip Lecane was educated at Christian Brothers College, Cork and University College Cork. He is the author of two books. *Torpedoed! The RMS Leinster Disaster* which tells the story of the sinking of the Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead mail boat in the dying days of the First World War. *Beneath a Turkish Sky: The Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the Assault on Gallipoli* tells the story of the 1st Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers in Gallipoli.

Dr Elaine Byrne

We let him be forgotten.

This is the story of Elaine's great-grandfather, of Ireland, and of the importance of remembering such men. Private Sylvester Cummins, 9th Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, survived Hulluch, but not the consequences of it.

Dr Elaine Byrne is a governance consultant with the European Commission and a Sunday Business Post columnist. She is the author of *Political Corruption in Ireland 1922-2010: A Crooked Harp?*

www.elaine.ie

Ms Carole Hope

Fr Willie Doyle's Baptism of Fire

Fr Willie Doyle SJ, MC, 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.

Carole Hope is an independent researcher and writer and a regular visitor to First World War battlefield sites. Following seven years of research and writing she had a biography of Fr Willie Doyle published in November 2013. The biography contains previously unpublished primary source material.

Ms Anne-Sophie Douchin

Hulluch then and now – A pictorial presentation of Hulluch during and after the years of war.

Through the use of old and contemporary photographs of Hulluch, Anne Sophie's presentation is on the village of Hulluch and the impact the war had on the village and its people.

This centenary year of the attack, the people of Hulluch will present a remembrance ceremony to mark the gas attack of April 1916. This ceremony will involve the unveiling of a memorial plaque. As the person in charge of organizing the commemorations, Anne-Sophie will present the villager's plans for the remembrance ceremony which is being held on 30 April 2016.

Anne-Sophie Douchin was born in Lens and grew up in Hulluch. She holds a Master's Degree in Multilingual Specialised Translation specialising in English and Swedish. As a student she studied in Scotland, Wales and Sweden. In 2010, she became a freelance translator. In 2013, she became an Associate Member of the Durand Group who are:⁹

⁹ Website of The Durand Group. <http://www.durandgroup.org.uk/>

A fraternal organisation who voluntarily undertake to work together to further research and investigation of military related subterranean features including military mining systems ; tunnels; sub ways; dugouts and bunkers.

Mr Sebastian Barry

Poet, playwright and novelist Sebastian Barry is one of Ireland's finest writers. He attended the Catholic University School and Trinity College Dublin where he read English and Latin. His academic posts have included Honorary Fellow in Writing at the University of Iowa in 1984, Villanova University in 2006 and Writer Fellow at Trinity College, Dublin 1995–1996.

His notable works include *The Steward of Christendom*, *Annie Dunne*, *The Secret Scripture* and the subject of his talk today, *A Long Long Way*, which Frank Mc Guinness described as being a, 'possessed powerful novel.'¹⁰

The totality of Sebastian's work was summed up by the Trinity academic Nicholas Grene when he described it as:¹¹

Writing back into the story of Ireland those parts of it which our nationalist master-narrative has most signally left out, the pieces of our past that do not fit with the way we want to imagine our history.

Part of that absent uncomfortable narrative is the story of Willie Dunne who like so many young Irishmen who joined up in 1914 was, according to Hew Strachan, 'caught between the competing and irreconcilable loyalties of family, faith and fatherland.'¹²

The motivational energy that fuelled Sebastian to confront that singular nationalist narrative of 1916, was, perhaps like many of us, driven from a desire to balance an historical injustice. It is that same energy to give a voice and place within our history to the thousands of Willie Dunne's, that brought us here today.

From being hidden away in a shoe box in the attic, to being placed in the window box in the front parlour, Willie Dunne's story has indeed come *A Long Long Way*.

¹⁰ Barry, Sebastian. *A Long Long Way* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005). Back page note.

¹¹ "The Irish Independent." 9 July 2006. Book Review by Emer O'Kelly. *Young Barry: putting away childhood things*.

¹² <http://www.amazon.com/A-Long-Way-Sebastian-Barry-ebook/dp/B004EPXX7Y>

Mr Michael James Ford

Michael James Ford has been working in the Irish theatre for over thirty years.

He recently appeared in *Educating Rita* at the Lyric, Belfast.

His many appearances at the Gate Theatre include :

Present Laughter, Anna Karenina, Salome, Cyrano de Bergerac, Lady Windermere's Fan, Pride and Prejudice, and The Rivals.

Work at The Abbey includes:

Translations and Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme.

Film and TV includes;

Michael Collins, Widow's Peak, Becoming Jane, Ripperstreet, Vikings , Penny Dreadful and Mrs Brown's Boys D'Movie.

His one-man versions of Wilde's *The Happy Prince* and *The Remarkable Rocket* have toured widely in Ireland and overseas.

Bairbre Ni Chaoimh

Bairbre Ní Chaoimh is an award-winning actor and director. She has acted extensively on stage, screen, radio and television, performing with all the major Irish companies in theatre venues and site-specific locations. She has also toured internationally with various productions. She was an Associate Artist at The Abbey Theatre and received an Irish Times Award for her work with *Calypso*. She is currently working on a dramatic adaptation of Lia Mill's book *Fallen* which will be staged as a promenade production in the Irish Writers' Centre on the 21st and 28th April 2016.

Mr Francy Devine and Mr Luke Cheevers

Our singers

Capt. (Retd) Seamus Greene

Membership Secretary of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association

Act of Remembrance – Call out the names of Dublin Fusiliers and German (Bavarian) soldiers who died at Hulluch in April 1916.

Notes