

BATTLE LINES

Issue: 24



Journal of The Somme Association



Editorial

Dear Friends, please accept my apologies, it has been a while since you received any correspondence but I am delighted to bring you our new look digital magazine 'Battlelines' which we aim to send you twice a year by email. We also hope to email two newsletters a year, that will keep you informed of ongoing developments within the Somme Association.

2024 is an important year for the Association. In January it was 34 years since the official incorporation of The Somme Association and the Somme Museum (formerly the Somme Heritage Centre) will celebrate 30 years since the doors opened on the 21st March.

We are pleased to announcement that plans are underway to open two new exhibitions in the first half of the year. The first in partnership with the Ulster Scots Agency is entitled Victoria Cross Heroes of the Great War. The second is a photographic exhibition that features 33 images from Father Frank Browne's collection. Father Browne had become famous in 1912 when photographs he had taken on the maiden voyage of Titanic were published in newspapers across the world. This new collection, was donated to the Museum by The Hunt Museum, Limerick and is from his time as chaplain with the Irish Guards in the First World War. They gave a unique insight into military life during the FWW.

The 6th June 2024 marks the 80th anniversary of D-Day, when Allied forces mounted the largest amphibious invasion, the world has ever seen. To mark this, in May & June, we will have a temporary exhibition on display entitled 'D-Day Voices.' This exhibition features first-hand accounts from the Somme Museum's oral archives.

In France we continue to welcome visitors to the Ulster Tower and Thiepval Wood. The staffing of the site will continue to be covered by staff rotation, a system that worked very well for the Association in the 2023 season. A hardworking team of volunteers continue to maintain the trenches within Thiepval Wood.

I thank everyone who has supported us over the years and look forward to continuing with the Association's mission of educating future generations of the sacrifices of past generations.

We Will Remember Them

Carol Walker MBE
Director

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Guided Tours of Thiepval Wood

available by prior arrangement

Tuesday to Sunday

11.00hrs and 15.00hrs

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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of The Somme Association.

Company Sergeant Major Jimmy Scott**14th Royal Irish Rifles, YCV****By Mark Scott**

My great grandfather James (Jimmy) Scott was born in Tullyhue, Tandragee, County Armagh on a date which isn't actually known to me. I do know that on the 22nd January 1917, the day of his death, he was recorded as being 35 years of age. I also know that on the 12th of October 1898 he stated on a military attestation form that he was 18 years and 7 months old. Simple mathematics tells me that those dates don't add up. It is one thing to lie about a date of birth, but there is no denying, generally speaking, a date of death. On that date in January 1917 Jimmy was the Company Sergeant Major in charge of 'C' Company of the 14th Royal Irish Rifles, the Young Citizen Volunteers or YCV.



His life ended when he took over position in the headquarters bunker at a trench position known as Gabion Farm on the British front line at Messines, just at the bottom of the hill on which the Ireland Peace Tower stands today. The YCV had just taken over the positions of this sector having relieved the 9th Inniskilling Fusiliers. Change-over time on the front line was a period of high risk. As the men from the occupying battalion left their positions and the men from the incoming battalion took their places the numbers of soldiers in and around the front line trenches effectively doubled, presenting a target rich environment for the enemy.

On the late afternoon of the 22nd January 1917 the Germans occupying the high ground along Messines Ridge took advantage of this opportunity. The bunker in which Jimmy Scott had just entered received a direct hit from a German artillery shell, Jimmy was killed outright. The men of his battalion recovered his body and carried it back along the communication trenches along 'Currie Avenue' and through 'Stinking Farm' for almost a mile until he was finally laid to rest, with full military honours at 'Ration Farm,' known today as La Plus Douve Farm Cemetery. A great adventure had come to an end.

Jimmy, back in October 1898, had enlisted at around 16 years of age, in the 2nd Battalion The Royal Irish Fusiliers. He came from a family of 12 siblings, his enlistment undoubtedly relieved something of a burden on his parents as it meant they had one less mouth to feed. The alternative for Jimmy was a life of hard labour at the nearby Sinton's mill. At 16 years of age, he could never have imagined that he would play a part in some of the most defining events of our history and that the notes he made would help change the narrative surrounding our most sacred point of remembrance, the Unknown Warrior.

One year after he enlisted, on the 23rd October 1899, the 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers left their barracks at Colchester and boarded the Howarden Castle, the ship which took them to South Africa and Jimmy's first theatre of war. En route the Howarden Castle stopped at Las Palmas to coal and it was there that the men on board received the news that the Boer forces had besieged the towns of Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley. During a further re-supply stop at Capetown further bad news was received, the 1st Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, along with other units had been forced to surrender at the Tugela River. The 2nd Battalion sailed on, eventually deploying at Durban before making their way inland on the 17th November 1899.

Jimmy Scott served with the 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers as part of the British 6th or 'Union' Fusiliers Brigade. He kept a record of his service in the form of a diary. In July 1900 he made an entry which outlined the battalion's achievements up to that date when he transcribed an extract from Brigade Orders issued by General G Barton. It read as follows:

"The 6th or Union Fusiliers Brigade has achieved a record of which any infantry may be proud. Since the day it was formed viz 26th November 1899 it has marched 877 miles often on 1/4 or 1/2 rations and seldom on full. It has taken part in the capture of eight towns viz Christiana, Lichensburg, Ventersdorf, Fredrickstaad,

Potchefstroom, Krugersdorf, Rutland and Kraaipan. It fought in 11 general engagements viz Mooi River, Willow Grange, Colenso, Hussar Hill, Spion Cop, Montichristo, Green Hill, Hlangwani, Horseshoe Hill and Room'dam. In a period of 28 days it has fought on 25 of them and on 27 other days, small reconnaissances and actions. It holds the record of the campaign for marching, having marched 272 miles in 265 hours and the unique record only held by the Brigade in being present and effecting two reliefs in different parts of the country viz Ladysmith and Mafeking, the latter being a most brilliant achievement over a country practically desert. Casualties between 700 and 1900. Defeats Nil."

In April 1901 Jimmy Scott answered a call for men with experience of horsemanship to volunteer to join a composite regiment of mounted infantry led by Major Hubert Gough in an attempt to counter guerrilla tactics employed by the Boers; the mounted infantry unit providing a more fluid and rapid response to Boer aggression. On the 17th September, at Blood River Poort Gough attacked a Boer unit with poor prior reconnaissance. A larger party of Boers were camped nearby, concealed behind a hill. Before long Gough found himself surrounded and out-gunned, his entire unit, including Jimmy Scott was captured.

Jimmy, minus all of his equipment, managed to escape the following day and made his way back to the nearest base, some 20 miles away, on foot.

After his South African adventure Jimmy Scott returned to Ireland and civilian life on transferring to the Army Reserve in December 1902. He moved to Belfast and took up employment with the Belfast Corporation as a tram conductor and moved into a house at Elm Street, off Donegal Pass in the South of the City on marrying his wife, Jane. In 1910 his period of engagement with the Army Reserve ended and shortly after, in 1912, his military training was put to use in training the newly formed civilian organisation, the Young Citizen Volunteers of Ireland (YCV). This organisation set out to

provide an outlet for young men, too old to attend organisations like the Scouts or Boy's Brigade, where they could still partake in drill, first aid sports training in a disciplined environment. In its constitution the YCV was set up to be non-sectarian and non-political.

At around the same time and with the backdrop of the 'Home Rule Crisis' Jimmy's military skills were also drawn upon by the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), he joined the South Belfast UVF, and was attached to the Windsor Club. He soon became a member of a part of the UVF known as the Ulster Special Service Force (USSF) formed exclusively of trusted men with previous military experience. In this capacity he became involved in gun-running operations and is mentioned in Colonel Fred Crawford's publication 'Guns For Ulster' as being one of

five men employed in a covert operation to assist Crawford in smuggling six Vickers machine guns from the Vickers factory in Birmingham by various routes to Ireland, intended for use by the UVF. Crawford had the guns marked 'UPG' which stood for Ulster Provisional Government, and they were



numbered 1 to 6, an indication of the political attitude to Home Rule in Ulster at that time.

With the outbreak of war in August 1914 the political tension brewing in Ulster was placed on hold. Jimmy enlisted along with the YCV lads whom he had helped train as civilians. He was appointed as sergeant rank and he began training the same lads as soldiers in a newly formed 14th Battalion of The Royal Irish Rifles. This battalion stood apart from the other newly formed Royal Irish Rifles battalions, they had for the most part all trained together as civilians, and they kept their unique identity by retaining their YCV cap badge and shoulder titles. They could best be described as Ireland's only 'Pals' battalion, having been formed from a group of men who already existed before the war.

In September 1915, following training at Bundoran, Shanes Castle in Templepatrick and Seaford in East Sussex the YCV battalion, then part of the 109th Infantry Brigade and 36th (Ulster) Division, deployed in France. The YCV's continued with a syllabus of training devised to gradually expose the men to trench warfare before they finally took up front line positions in March 1916, rotating between Auchonvillers, Hamel and eventually Thiepval Wood which they occupied from early May 1916. At this time Jimmy Scott was a sergeant in charge of No. 8 platoon, part of 'B' Company.

At the front Jimmy began to keep a note of men from the battalion who were killed in action along with the location of the cemeteries in which they were buried. These notes were kept in a little book, returned to his widow after his death and retained in the family. The deaths were recorded up to the 1st July 1916 battle but were not just men from his platoon, nor even solely of 'B' Company, recently a letter came to light written by Corporal George Donald to the mother of Rifleman Harry Grainger of 'C' company which highlights Jimmy Scott's role and the reason for including the notes of the burials. Harry Grainger had been killed on the 3rd of May 1916, Jimmy Scott made a note of his name and the date along with the location of the burial at Authuile, a village close to Thiepval Wood. Corporal Donald, Harry Grainger's friend, in his letter dated 5th May 1916 wrote: *"I am sorry to have to write this news to you. We have been in the trenches since Saturday 2nd May. Harry was wounded by a shell that fell in our trenches, after everything that could be done for him poor Harry passed away. He was buried that evening. Sergeant Scott and myself were with the funeral party. Enclosed you will find poor Harry's identity disc which my officer gave to me to send home to you. We have suffered very severely in this tour of the trenches. Please accept the sympathy of all our boys in this your sad bereavement.*

I remain yours truly, George Donald." **See note 1.**

This letter, short and tragic as it is, sheds light on the list of names in Jimmy's notebook; I can now say that he was not just recording the deaths, he was recording the burials which he actually took part in, eleven of which took place at Authuile Cemetery in Early May 1916.

I have researched my great grandfather's notebook in depth for around 12 years now, that research has led to the making of a film documentary and me publishing two books, it has also uncovered background information to artefacts and exhibits held by the Somme Museum relating to men who served alongside Jimmy Scott. This research began with me visiting Authuile Cemetery and matching the names written with those on the line of headstones in the cemetery.

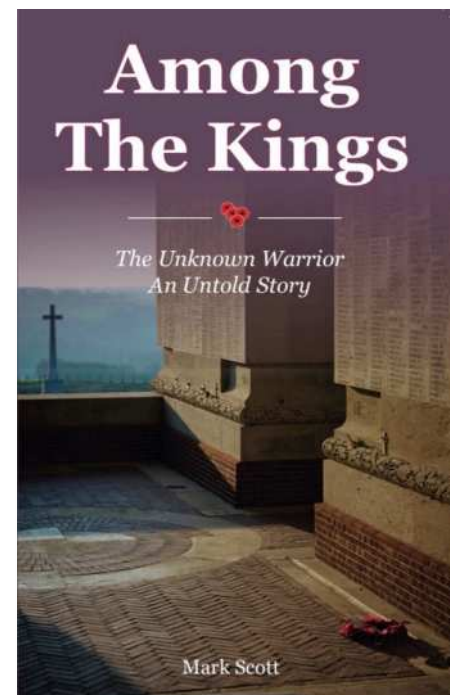
Authuile Cemetery is worth stopping at on a visit to the Somme, a short distance from the Ulster Tower it can easily be included in a battlefield tour itinerary. It is a remarkably peaceful and tranquil location, historically, many of the graves there are of casualties resulting from the first trench raid carried out by the 36th (Ulster) Division on the 8th/9th May 1916 at Thiepval and a counter raid carried out in retaliation by the Germans at the same time.

I intend to return to Authuile soon and visit the graves of the Riflemen noted in my great grandfather's book. I have been there many times over the past dozen years, on this occasion however I will be in the knowledge that Sergeant Jimmy Scott actually laid the men there to rest on the morning of the 6th of May 1916, as strong a family link as one can have.

Quis Separabit.

Note 1: The letter written by Corporal George Donald is courtesy of Mr. Peter Delaney.

Note 2: Mark Scott's recent publication *"Among The Kings - The Unknown Warrior an Untold Story"* tells the complete story of Jimmy Scott, his notebook and the men he served with. Copies are for sale at the Somme Museum and the Ulster Tower.





CSM Jimmy Scott can be seen 6th from the right in the front row of the picture above of USSF parading with the West Belfast UVF seen in the rear ranks unarmed. 6th June 1914.



The Memorial Room at the Ulster Tower

Ulster Remembers and Commemorates

By Carol Walker MBE

In the years following the end of the Great War, memorials in memory of those who lost their lives were erected in cities, towns and villages across the United Kingdom, the British Empire, Europe and the Middle East but the first official memorial on the Western Front was the Ulster Memorial Tower which was unveiled on the 19th November 1921. Others ranged from the impressive grandeur of both the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme and the Menin Gate in Ypres to modest individual memorials to be found in such places as churches and civic buildings.

In Ulster when demand grew for the construction of a publicly-funded battlefield memorial at Thiepval in honour of Ulster's fallen, Sir James Craig, who in 1921 became the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, proposed at a meeting held in Belfast's Old Town Hall on 17th November 1919, that the monument should take the form of a prominent Ulster landmark.

The proposal struck a chord with all present and Helen's Tower seemed the ideal choice. Helen's Tower, stands on the Dufferin and Ava Estate at Clandeboye, County Down and was built in 1867 by Lord Dufferin and dedicated to his beloved mother Helen, Baroness Dufferin, who was the grand-daughter of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan. It was in the shadow of Helen's Tower that the men of the newly formed Ulster Division drilled and trained on the outbreak of the Great War. For many of the men of the 36th (Ulster) Division the distinctive sight of Helen's Tower rising above the surrounding countryside was one of their last abiding memories of home before their departure for England and subsequently the Western Front.

There were varying responses throughout Ulster in raising the funds to build a memorial on the Somme battlefields, with the main one being the Ulster Volunteer Force Patriotic Fund. Much of the money raised through this welfare fund went to support the UVF hospitals where those with severe wounds, neurasthenia and psychological issues could be treated. For those who were unemployed after War some funds were used to provide temporary work in Harland and Wolff but over £1,400 of the UVF Patriotic Fund money supported the building of the Ulster Tower at Thiepval and to paid the wages of the caretaker of the Tower.

The construction of the memorial started soon after the appropriate site had been chosen. The Ulster Memorial Tower stands on what was the German front line during the Battle of the Somme, 1st July to 18th November 1916. It is opposite Thiepval Wood from where the 36th (Ulster) Division made its historic charge on the opening

day of the battle and is in close proximity to the village of Thiepval.

The Tower stands some 70 feet tall and is a lasting tribute to the sons of Ulster who gave their lives during the Great War. Forever associated with the old Somme battle sites around Thiepval, the Tower is more specifically regarded as a memorial to the Officers and Men of the 36th (Ulster) Division - its position on the battlefield is a permanent reminder of the Division's heroic actions at the Battle of the Somme.

On Saturday 19th November 1921 the completed Ulster Memorial Tower was opened by Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff and at that time Ulster's most famous soldier. It had been planned that Sir Edward Carson would have the honour of unveiling the Ulster Tower but he was unable to attend due to illness. There was no time to replace the plaque in the Memorial Room and so today it still states that it was Sir Edward Carson who did the honour rather than Sir Henry Wilson, who sadly in 1922 was assassinated on his own doorstep by two IRA gunmen whilst returning home from the unveiling of a war memorial at Liverpool Street Station.



From 1921 up until the early 1970's the Tower had a resident caretaker and served as a focus for pilgrimages to the Somme Battlefields. By the late 1980s however the Tower had fallen into disrepair and public access was limited.

In 1988, a cross community group known as the Farset Somme Project began to raise public awareness of the Tower and lobbied government to have the memorial refurbished. On 1st July 1989 the Tower was rededicated in the presence of HRH Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester and The Somme Association was founded to manage the Tower and enable it to be open for visitors. In 1994, a Visitors' Centre, adjacent to the Tower, was opened and a full-time caretaker appointed. The upper portion of the Memorial Tower provides accommodation for the Somme Association's staff.



In March 2004 the Somme Association purchased Thiepval Wood, which is facing the Ulster Memorial Tower and what was the most heavily fortified German area known as the Schwaben Redoubt. In July 2006 the Association opened a small area of the Wood which is now available for guided tours by prior arrangement.

Thiepval Wood is a working wood and is private under French law and should not be entered without permission from the Somme Association. The Association has over the last number of years, with the assistance of a dedicated team of volunteers, carried out archaeological and re-construction work on the original trenches in Thiepval Wood and today it is extremely popular for educational tours and group visits. The Somme Association's aim is to maintain Thiepval Wood as a lasting memorial to the men who fought, served and died in the wood and the surrounding countryside, and to create a tranquil environment where people can pay their respects.

Today it is very moving to travel the Great War battlefields and see so many cemeteries and memorials. Memorials to so many with no known grave and see the words – "Known Only unto God". It is hard not to be deeply moved by the sheer volume of dead as a consequence of war. As we approach the 108th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, it is just as important today that we educated the next generation of the sacrifices of our forefathers and that we never stop forgetting. In the now famous words chosen by Rudyard Kipling, 'Their Names Liveth For Evermore' and we must all continue to remember.



The Aftermath of the First World War

By Carol Walker MBE

The First World War was a human catastrophe. It tore nations and families apart and shaped the history and politics of so many countries. Millions of lives had been lost and millions more were wounded. Many returned with physical injuries and others bore the mental scars. Traumatized by the effects of war and the sights witnessed, many of these men felt they could not talk about their experiences to their loved ones. Life for them could never be the same.



The Nation mourned privately and publicly and the wounded and their families had to learn to deal with these injuries. Prior to this there had been no state aid apart from the workhouse. Changes had to be made as the Nation owed these men a debt of gratitude.

There were significant developments in medical practises and new medicines to deal with the mass casualties and life changing injuries as a result of the First World War. In subsequent wars most battle injuries were caused by sword wounds, canon fire and small arms fire. The First World War changed this with the development of mechanisation and mass production of more powerful weaponry.

The weapons used during this period like heavy artillery, machine guns and the development of poisonous gas, created injuries of a severity and scale never seen before. Trench life did nothing to help matters, with men peering over parapets on a routine basis, adding to the dramatic rise in the number of facial injuries sustained by soldiers.

Today it is celebrities, getting plastic surgery but a century ago it was wounded soldiers. The war saw a huge rise in the number of live changing facial injuries. It was during the First World War in 1917 that Harold

Gillies, a New Zealand surgeon, developed a new and ground-breaking method of facial reconstructive surgery. This has grown into the plastic surgery we know today.



Harold Gillies, Known as 'the father of plastic surgery'

Many of the returning soldiers suffered from neurasthenia, a nervous complaint, with symptoms ranging from extreme fatigue, anxiety, headaches and irritability, most probably brought on by being under constant threat and shellfire during battle; initially treated by the dubious method of electric shock treatment (electrotherapy). It was referred to as shell-shock although not officially recognised. Today we know it as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

These men returned home to a different society than the one they had left and the role of women had now changed significantly.

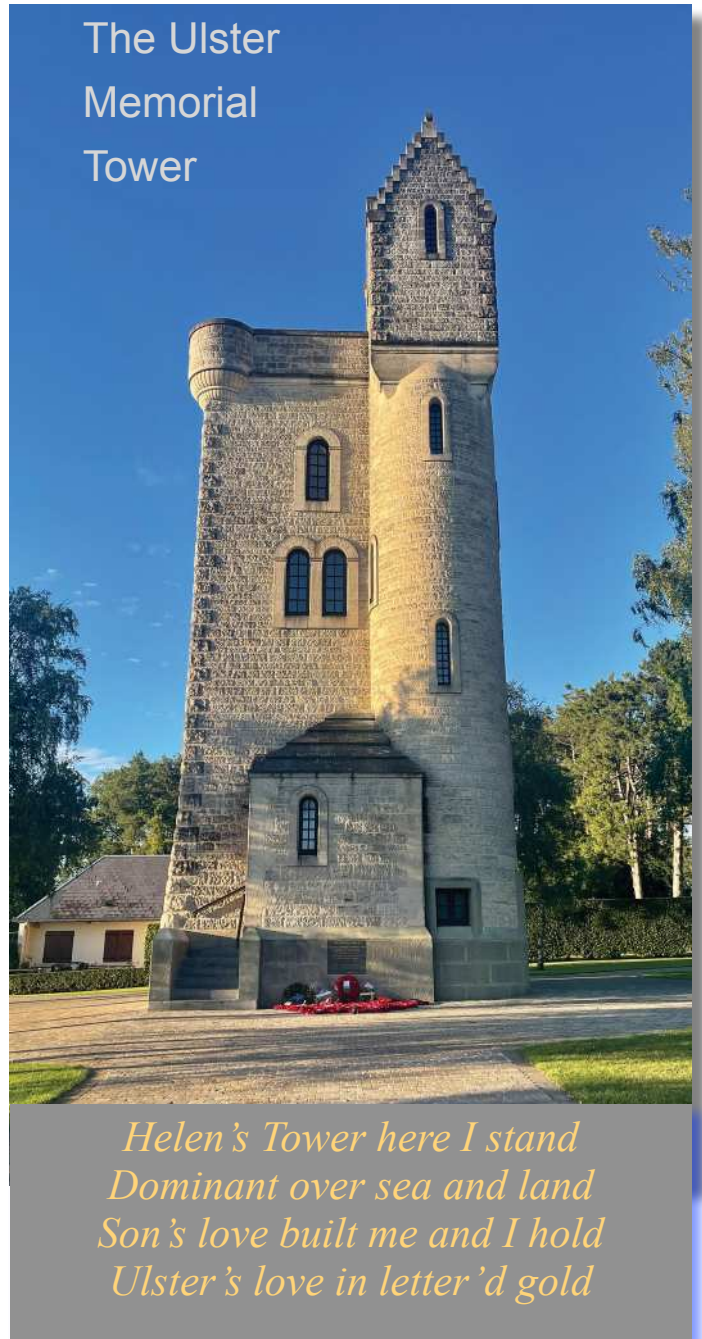
The First World War had been a watershed for women especially in relation to new employment and enhanced voting opportunities.

The work of the suffragists and the suffragettes along with women's contribution in the war made it apparent that a change in the law concerning women's "right to vote" was needed. Women's contribution in the war effort showed the government that women were not as weak and as incompetent as many had previously thought.

It was reckoned that in Britain almost two million women of marriageable age found themselves without men due

to the impact of war. These “surplus” women were at a loss for men to love and marry. In an era of rising unemployment after the war, anger was expressed at women who refused to give up jobs previously held by men. The gender roles had changed forever.

The Armistice and the Treaty of Versailles signalled the end of the First World War but it sowed the seeds of an even greater conflict that was to explode some 20 years later and many of these young men and women who had been lucky enough to come home had to live and fight through it all again.



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Lieutenant Samuel Geddis

By Robert McKinley



On 21st March 2018 a memorial stone was dedicated to Comber war hero Edmund De Wind, 100 years to the day after his award of a Victoria Cross for gallantry. Also in the town square is the Comber and District War Memorial that takes the form of a bronze statue of an infantryman standing at ease in full-service equipment. The statue, sculpted by L. S. Merrifield, cost £1,200 with the money being raised by local subscriptions. It was unveiled and dedicated on 14th April 1923.

A bronze tablet on the front of the granite pedestal lists the names of 79 officers and men from the area who gave their lives for King and country. One report stated that 'no town of its size or population did better than Comber'. One name on the memorial is that of Lieutenant Samuel Geddis from Tullynakill who served in the 1st Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment (the Tigers) and was killed in action on 19th September 1918 aged 25.

Before the War Geddis had an interest in hockey, cricket and football and had gained some legal experience by working as a solicitor's clerk. When war broke out the 1st

Battalion was in Fermoy and in 1915, he was commissioned before being sent to France at the end of the year.

Before his death in 1918 he wrote home frequently to his mother Minnie, who ran the family farm after his father's death, elder brother Andy and sister Liz. This collection of letters, now held by the Somme Museum, provides a valuable insight into the experiences of an army officer from Ulster serving in an English Regiment during the closing days of the War.

Early War Service

In 1915 Geddis was lecturing at a sniping course. During the year he was sent to the 16th (Irish) Division Cyclist Training Centre where he had '**splendid billets ...better than any of my previous camps**'.

Some undated letters to his sister have comments about the Division: '**Did you see the piece in today's paper about the 16th (Irish) Division not getting an opportunity of proving their true worth?**' At this stage in the War, he felt he would survive but stated '**in any event it is a glorious death and I'm not afraid to die**'.

During 1916 at least 19 letters were sent home - some giving thanks for mittens, some requesting socks and one wishing no more sardines as he was '**horribly sick after eating some of the last ones**'. He provides interesting views about the Germans who '**are going to get a proper hiding when we like and I do believe they couldn't break through our lines now even if our Tommies had only pea-shooters instead of rifles**'.

Geddis was wounded twice and gassed once but in his letters, he continually assures his family that they shouldn't worry: 'You bet I shall look after my own life but I will never be guilty of asking any of my men to do anything or run any risk that I would be afraid to run myself'.

He enjoyed '**dining with William Redmond MP**' who was '**a Major out here and he treats me pretty decently**'.

However, by 1917 he appears unhappy with company life as there are '**some new prime asses**' and '**some officers nowadays have not as much grit as a mouse**'.

His Last Letters

In the Geddis archive there are 25 dated letters sent to his family in 1918. He wrote mainly from Patrington Camp near Hull. In a letter to his mother on 27th March 1918 he comments ruefully on the impact of the German Offensive: '**I suppose you are feeling that the War is being lost and all sorts of silly things...I hope it is only a temporary success. I don't know where the Ulster Division and the 16th Division were - but I'm sure they are somewhere in the thick of it...It seems strange no doubt that in 5 days the Germans take back what it took us 5 months to get**'.

He missed the draft of officers for France due to a Pioneers course of laying railways and building bridges - **'I like this work very much'**. On this course he encounters an Irish Guards officer who reassures him that **'Irishmen could march or fight any other unit into a cocked hat'**.

Commenting about the Conscription issue in Ireland he felt more Irishmen should be joining up and that **'Irish men are coming up to scratch and not waiting for the Conscription Bill'**. In May he does not feel that conscription will operate in Ireland although he has been told that **'the Government intend forcing it if at all possible'**.

He disagreed with newspaper comments about German success in the Offensive **'because I firmly believe we could hold him up any old time, any old place if we wanted to - but the idea is to keep him on the top and then you can see them to shoot. He will get it in the neck some of these fine days'**.

The End 1918

In his July 1918 letters Geddis provides details of the impact of the War on him: **'While it makes one sad you cannot help admiring the pluck of some of the PBI' (Poor Bloody Infantry). The failure of the 1918 German Offensive leads to further comment: 'The War News is good today and I think this summer will probably see the end of things...The Huns are really a pack of cowards when you show any real go at all... Old Jerry is scratching his head as we have upset his apple cart, and if we can punish him this summer and hold him, more or less it should be alright next spring. This has been a very gruelling time but it will only stiffen our backs'**.

By August he felt **'the Show is bound to finish up sometime this year'** and he hoped for the best while realising he was not invincible: **'the Luck is in the game and I am a lucky blighter'**. His final letters home, dated 6th September 1918, refer to the hoped-for end of war: **'It's no cake-walk nowadays. It's much too soon yet to expect the end but we are approaching it rapidly'**.

On 19th September 1918 Lt Samuel Geddis aged 25 was killed leading 'A' Company in battle west of St. Quentin. In the memorial service held in 2nd Presbyterian Church Comber the Rev. McConnell paid tribute to him who **'fell at the head of his men in some of the fiercest fighting of the whole war'** and who **'surrendered his life for King and country... he died that we might live'**.

Memorial Service

On 6th October 1918 there was a memorial service for Lt Geddis (1st Leicestershire Regiment) at 2nd Presbyterian Church, Comber officiated by the Rev McConnell who commented:

'Already twenty of these brave men have, in the soldier's expressive phrase 'gone west' and he wants the church to remember them forever. He suggests that this could be achieved by means of a memorial tablet in the church 'so that children yet unborn may be inspired by their heroism to emulate that heroism by living lives unselfish and heroic too.'

He went on to say that Samuel Geddis had taught in the Sunday School, was a church and choir member but also **'my own personal friend.'** He described Samuel as having a **'bright cheery winsome personality'** and was always **'prepared to put his legal knowledge at the disposal of the countryside.'** Samuel had worked as a solicitor's clerk in Belfast and, according to the Rev McConnell, **'a large and successful career lay before him.'**

The Rev McConnell emphasised the close relationship that he had with Samuel who **'feeling the temptations and dangers with which he was beset he sought my help in prayer.'** The minister quoted from the last letter sent by Samuel in which he hoped he would soon have the privilege of leading his company **'in the good old Irish style.'** Lt Geddis was reported missing after an attack on the Germans near St Quentin, his body being found days later.

The Colonel and Medical Officer involved after Samuel's body was recovered commented:

'The men loved him and he and they fought most gallantly.'

'A most willing, energetic and splendid officer... he kept his men going under very trying circumstances.'



The Letter Collection

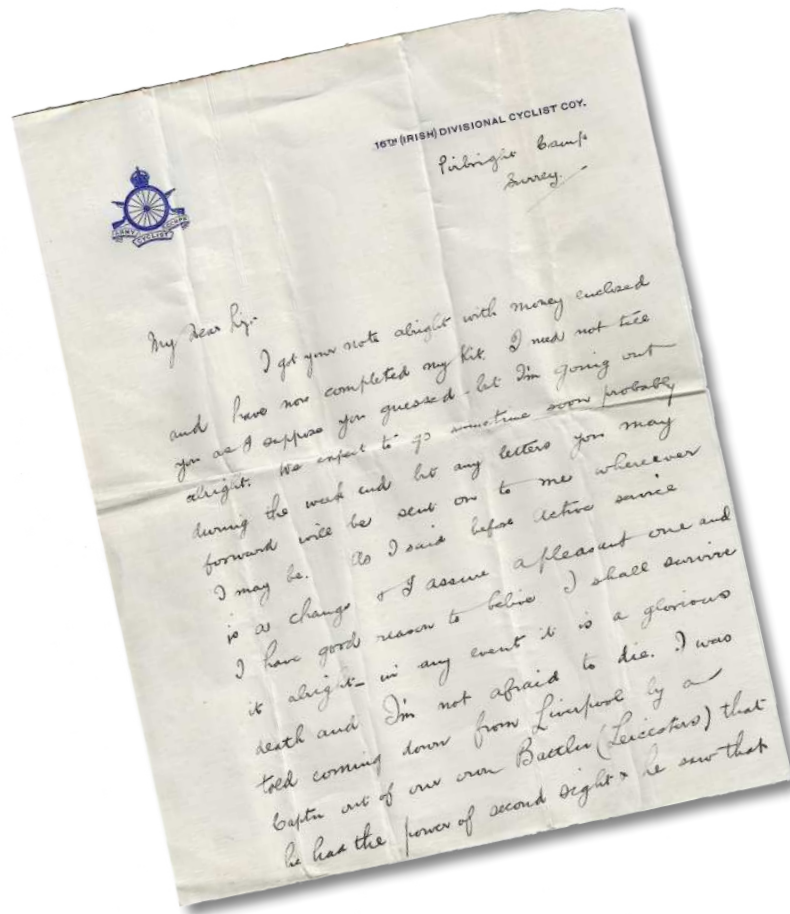
The Collection contains 37 sympathy letters written to his family, mostly from people within the Comber community. The Chairman of Comber Football Club acknowledged that Samuel was **'associated in the various forms of sport throughout his life, as in death, he always 'played the game''** whilst Alfred Hadden wrote **'he was the life and soul of our choir.'**

Alice de Wind noted that her brother Edmund (awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross) had been with Samuel at the previous Harvest service and Lt Murphy, writing from Catterick, felt that it is **'only those that have lost their dear ones who realise in the fullest sense its dreadfulness.'** Margaret Brand, Ballyholme, advised Miss Geddis to **'try and bear up for your mother's sake.'**

A letter by John Andrews, Comber, stated that Samuel would be **'remembered as one of the gallant Comber men who have given their lives for their country.'** Hamilton and Mabel Coulter, Comber, echoed similar views writing: **'many sorrowful hearts today for the loved ones who have sacrificed their lives with honour for their country.'**

David Boyd, Belfast, advised Mrs Geddis that **'it is hard to think that this cruel war should call away so many of those we would like to keep.'** Besides sorrow, other sentiments were expressed. An Army pal wrote that he hoped to be **'in a position to get revenge and I assure you it will be sweet.'**

William Munce wanted it to be known that soldiers such as Samuel 'defeated the enemy, the Huns, and offered up their lives as sacrifices that we at home should be spared and protected and our country saved from German militarism.'



The theme of these letters is exemplified by this line from Josephine Ritchie, Comber:

'You know that your son died doing his duty nobly and honourably.'

An exhibition about Lt Samuel Geddis is currently on display in the Somme Museum, Newtownards and his collection of letters is preserved for future generations to read.