Anzac Day Commemoration 2014*

One hundred years ago the world was at peace, with little or no suggestion that in just a few months Europe would be plunged into a war that would kill millions and topple empires.

In Britain and Ireland, what talk there was of war was confined to the prospect of civil war in Ireland over the issue of Irish home rule. For, on this day one hundred years ago guns were being smuggled into Larne, Donaghadee and Bangor, thus arming one side in the potential conflict, the Ulster Volunteer Force. Soon their potential opponents, the Irish Volunteers, would receive their own shipment of guns. With an acceptable compromise eluding the politicians, the prospect of war in Ireland loomed ever larger.

Yet, as we know, it was not in Ireland but on the continent where the peace was broken, delaying the outbreak of hostilities here. Instead of fighting each other, Irishmen, unionist and nationalist, found themselves in the same uniform and on the same side fighting a common enemy.

In Australia, too, where the debate over the third Home Rule Bill had exacerbated chronic sectarian tensions between the British Protestant majority and the Irish Catholic minority, the outbreak of war in Europe brought the bickering to an end, and Australians, Catholic and Protestant, found themselves, like their Irish counterparts, in the same uniform and on the same side fighting a common enemy.

In both countries the unity prompted by the outbreak of war in Europe would dissipate in the wake of the Easter Rising of April 1916. But, one year before that monumental event, Irishmen and Australians had found themselves fighting together in a bloody campaign which began 99 years ago today.

For Australians, the word "Gallipoli" resonates, for, despite strongly-held views to the contrary, it is widely accepted by Australians that the Gallipoli campaign was the crucible in which the inhabitants of the six former British colonies were forged into citizens of the Australian nation. For the Irish, the word largely has a hollow ring today, for, despite the contemporary prediction that Gallipoli would "ever be to the Irish race a place of glorious pride and sorrow",[1] the crucible of the Irish nation would be found elsewhere and at another time. For in the words of *The Foggy Dew*, "'Twas better to die 'neath an Irish sky than at Suvla or Sedd-el-Bahr".

Nevertheless, as we gather this morning under an Irish sky on the 99th anniversary of the landings at Sedd-el-Bahr and Anzac Cove, we do remember, if not with glorious pride, certainly with sorrow, all those who died in that campaign whether they be Australian or Irish, New Zealander or British, Indian or French, Newfoundlander or Nepalese or those gamely defending their homeland, the Turks.

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* Address given by Professor Jeff Kildea, Keith Cameron Chair of Australian History at University College Dublin, at Grangegorman Military Cemetery, Dublin on 25 April 2014.

[1] Michael MacDonagh, *The Irish at the Front*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1916, p.102.

While we will never know exactly how many died in the Gallipoli campaign, their deaths well exceeded 100 000, a shocking number whose incomprehensibility numbs us to the reality of the individual lives cut short and of the families bereaved.

So, let me dwell for a moment on a group of but 13 men out of the many hundreds, if not thousands, who were killed that day during the landings at Anzac Cove and Cape Helles.

Each member of this baker's dozen happened to have been born here in Ireland, but, unlike their compatriots in the Dublin, Munster and Inniskilling Fusiliers, these Irishmen died that day wearing the Australian uniform.

Let us pause then to remember:

> Michael Brown of Cork, Labourer, age 31, private in the 12th Battalion who enlisted in Western Australia.
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> William Calderwood of Belfast, Labourer, age 31, private in the 11th Battalion who enlisted in Western Australia.
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> Patrick Foley of Wexford, Seaman, age 34, private in the 6th Battalion who enlisted in Victoria. Married with a daughter and two sons.
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> Charles George Gordon of Kingstown now Dún Laoghaire, Grazier, age 45, major in the 2nd Battalion who enlisted in New South Wales. Married with one son.
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> David Hawkins of Letterkenny, County Donegal, Labourer, age 27, private in the 7th Battalion who enlisted in Victoria.
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> Patrick Kiely of Cork, Engineer, age 28, private in the 11th Battalion who enlisted in Western Australia.
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> Frederick Dennis Mangan of Dublin, Telegraph Operator, age 27, private in the 9th Battalion who enlisted in Queensland. Married with two sons.
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> Patrick McDonnell of Bruff, County Limerick, Bank Clerk, age 29, private in the 6th Battalion who enlisted in Victoria.
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> Robert Douglas Niblock of Belfast, Brick Layer, age 32, private in the 8th Battalion who enlisted in Victoria. Married with a son.[2]
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> John Mullan of Limavady, County Derry, Draper's Assistant, age 31, private in the 5th Battalion who enlisted in Victoria.
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> William Henry Munro of Derry city, Stockman, age 33, private in the 10th Battalion who enlisted in South Australia.
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> William Miller Smylie of Belfast, Mechanic, age 22, private in the 10th Battalion who enlisted in South Australia.
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> Albert George Stapleton of Dublin, Student, age 26, private in the 5th Battalion who enlisted in Victoria.

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[2] The exact date of Niblock's death is not known as the ROH shows him as having died of wounds sometime between 25 April and 3 May 1915. That there is no record of his having been seen after 25 April suggests that he went missing on the first day and was then either dead or dying.

This disparate group of men are but 13 of the more than 6000 Irish-born who enlisted in the Australian forces during the war, about 900 of whom were killed or died of wounds or illness due to their war service. Many had come to Australia to pursue a new life in a young country removed from the persistent problems of the old, only to be flung back into the vortex of old-world rivalries.

In Australia the façade of denominational unity cracked in the wake of the Easter Rising. Thereafter, the Irish in Australia would be maligned as shirkers, Sinn Feiners and pro-German. Among those propagating that view was the Australian prime minister William Morris Hughes, who in March 1917 wrote to British prime minister Lloyd George that "the non-Irish population are going out of Australia to fight ... [the] Irish remain behind".[3] Yet we now know, and it was known at the time, that the Irish in Australia did pull their weight, enlisting generally in line with their proportion of the population and, if you take into account enlistment age, more than their proportion. Recent research has exposed their denigration for the calumny it was, though it continues to linger in some quarters even to this day.

For Australia and Ireland the First World War provided a defining moment in the emergence of each as an independent nation-state after the war. For Australia that defining moment was the 25th of April 1915; for Ireland it was Easter Monday 1916. But the two events are inextricably linked in history, for as dawn was breaking in Australia on the first anniversary of the landing, the first Anzac Day, Irish rebels were consolidating their position in Dublin's General Post Office and in other locations around the city.

Australian soldiers on leave in Dublin were called on to take up arms against the rebels, a task many of them begrudged for they had not enlisted to fight Irishmen with whom they had no quarrel. They had come to Ireland to get away from battle not to participate in it. But that is the pity of war: it turns peaceful men into combatants and makes enemies of those we have no personal desire to fight.

Some Australian soldiers who visited Ireland during the war have remained here, like the seven men buried in this graveyard, not far from where we stand, four of whom died when, just one month before the armistice, the RMS *Leinster*, was torpedoed off the coast and sank with the loss of more than 500 lives, men, women and children. In all, 144 of them lie here in Grangegorman, their names inscribed on headstones.

This year, a hundred years on from the start of the war, the people of Ireland and of Australia, of Britain and France and New Zealand and elsewhere, are engaged in a process of commemoration that will last four more years. Already a plethora of publications on the causes, course and consequences of the war has emerged and we can anticipate many more.

Yet I doubt we will ever find definitive answers to the big questions: why did Europe go to war; how could it have happened; was it Australia's war; was it Ireland's war; and so on. Nevertheless, it is essential, particularly today when faintly we hear in the east the same drum beat heard a century ago, that we

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[3] Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes: The Little Digger, 1914-1952*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979, p. 261.

continue to ask these questions and be ever conscious to the tragedy of war – in the words of Pope Paul VI at the United Nations in 1965: "numberless and unprecedented suffering, useless slaughter and frightful ruin".[4]

Mindful that the loss of life in war is "always personal, always tragic, and always has consequences",[5] it is right that we remember the individual men and women killed in the war and their families left with long mourning and deep grief. In that way, we commemorate our war dead, not to glorify their deeds, for there is no glory in war, but to see them as our father, our mother; our brother, our sister; our son, our daughter, whose life was precious, and then to echo Pope Paul's exhortation to the UN: "No more war, war never again".

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[4] Pope Paul VI's Address to United Nations General Assembly, 4 October 1965.
[5] Michael McKernan, *Gallipoli*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2010