

# Limerick and the 1918 Armistice

by Des Ryan

The end of the First World War, on Monday the 11 November 1918, received very little coverage in the local press in Limerick. The newspapers of the time were preoccupied with reports of a bakery strike, the forthcoming general election and deaths from the 'Spanish flu'. One of the many victims of the flu in Limerick was James Frawley, of 2 Sheep Street, who died the day the War ended. Frawley, who worked as a sandman, on the local canal, left a grieving wife, Annie, and four young daughters; one of whom died three years later. It is estimated that around fifty million people died from the effects of the flu worldwide.

The events leading to the end of the war began in autumn 1918, when the Germans requested an Armistice. The German Army was on the verge of collapse and the country was threatened

with civil unrest and revolution. Prior to that in April 1917, the German military had helped create the monster of Communism, when they sent the Russian Bolshevik<sup>1</sup> leader Vladimir Lenin, and his comrades, back to Russia in a 'sealed train' via Germany, Sweden, Russian Finland and on to Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg).<sup>2</sup> Russia was in a state of revolution and the Germans hoped the Bolsheviks would further destabilise the already chaotic situation in the country. Seven months later, on 7 November 1917, Lenin seized power and promised to withdraw Russia from the War. On 22 December negotiations were opened with Germany and her allies, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Turks in the Polish town of Brest-Litovsk [now in Belarus]. A few days later, on Christmas Day, a joint communiqué was issued announcing their agreement on the principles of a peace without annexations or indemnities.<sup>3</sup>

When it became clear at another meeting on 10 February, 1918, that the Germans were not prepared to give up Russian territory already occupied, the Bolshevik delegation led by Leon Trotsky, walked out of the meeting to the amazement of the Germans and their allies.

Two weeks later one million German and Austro-Hungarian troops<sup>4</sup> advanced along the Russian front. In order to stop the German advance and consolidate Bolshevik (Communist) power over Russia, Lenin was prepared to accept peace at any price. After notifying the Germans that they would accept a treaty, a Bolshevik delegation returned to Brest-Litovsk where on 3 March they

signed the document placed in front of them, without discussion, and departed.<sup>5</sup>

The Germans imposed a brutal peace on the Russians. They lost Russian Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Kars Oblast in the South Caucasus to the Ottoman Turks and had to recognise the independence of Ukraine. In economic terms the loss represented 32 per cent of Russia's cultivatable land, 27 per cent of her railways, 54 per cent of her industry and 89 per cent of her coal mines, in addition to a third of her population.<sup>6</sup>

After the early success of the spring offensive in the west, in March 1918, the German Army was worn out. On 4 October 1918, the acting German Chancellor, Prince Max von Baden, under pressure from the German Supreme Military Command, which was under the influence of Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, sent a note via Switzerland, to the President of the United States Woodrow Wilson, requesting an immediate Armistice in the fighting on land, sea and air.<sup>7</sup> After notifying the allies, of the German request, Wilson sent a letter to the Chancellor demanding that the Germans accept a peace plan based on his 'Fourteen Points', which he had announced in early January 1918, in the U.S. Congress. He also called on the Germans to evacuate all occupied territories and give an assurance that the government represented the people and not the military elite. A few days previously Germany's ally Bulgaria had surrendered to the British and French at Salonica, Greece.

John (Johnny) Carroll, a Limerick man serving with the British Army in the Struma Valley in Macedonia saw the Bulgarians coming down to surrender. Johnny had joined the Royal Garrison Artillery, around 1916, at the Strand Barracks, Limerick. After serving for a brief period on the Somme, in France, John's regiment sailed for the British Army camp at Summer Hill in



James Frawley with his two daughters  
Mary Jo (left) and Patricia (c.1915)

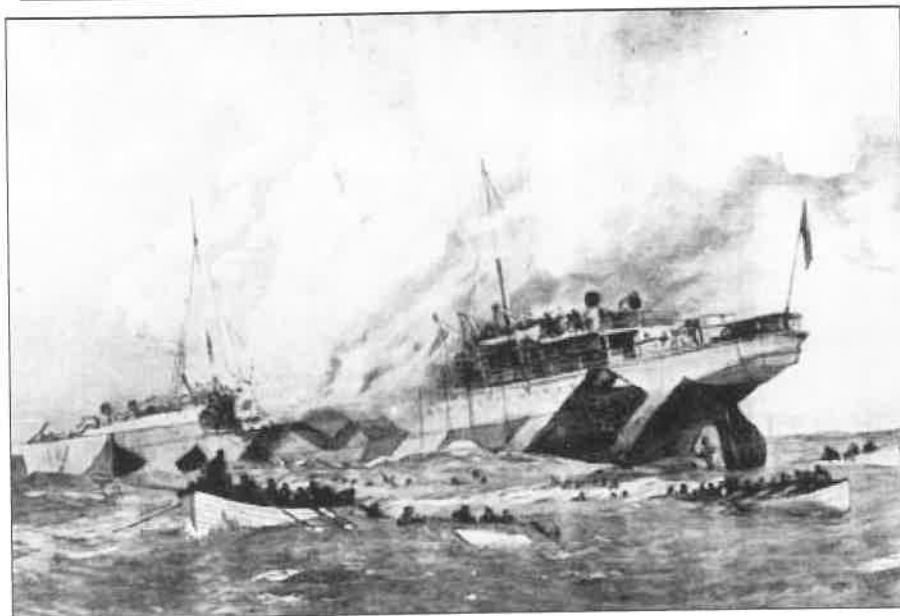


Image of the sinking of the RMS Leinster.



Michael Joyce

Salonica. From there they moved to the Macedonia front where he served with a heavy artillery battery. John recalled that "shells for these guns, some of them weighing 50 kilos, had to be transported by rail, while smaller guns could be dismantled and brought up by mule." John's regiment returned to Salonica after the Bulgarian surrender.

After Turkey surrendered John's task was to disarm Turkish soldiers. It was, he said, "a hard job because they did not want to be disarmed."<sup>8</sup> He later served as a Military Policeman in the Turkish capital, Istanbul.

On Thursday 10 October, the passenger ship *Leinster* on its way to Holyhead, Wales with over 700 passengers was torpedoed and sunk in the Irish Sea, after it left Kingstown [now Dun Laoghaire] Dublin, with over 500 casualties. Amongst those who lost their lives was Catherine Gould and her daughters; May, Alice, Angela, Olive and her son Michael. Catherine and her family had left their home at 3, Creagh Lane, Limerick the previous day on the

train for Dublin. They were on their way to meet their father John, an ex-soldier who, was working in the munitions industry in England at that time.<sup>9</sup> John Gould, originally from Nelson (Parnell) Street, Limerick, joined the Royal Munster Fusiliers in Tralee in 1890. Six years later, on 15 August 1896, he married Mary Catherine (Kate) Whelan, in Tralee. Mary Kate was a daughter of Patrick and Mary Whelan of Kings Island, Limerick.<sup>10</sup> John Gould served in the Anglo-Boer War and was discharged when it ended in 1902 and returned to Limerick. In September 1917, at the age of 47 he enlisted in the Inland Water Docks Corps of the Royal Engineers and was stationed at Bristol. The only member of his family to survive the sinking of the *Leinster* was his second eldest daughter Essie. In the confusion that reigned, after the torpedo hit the boat, it is believed that her young brother Michael, who was thrown down towards a lifeboat, fell between the lifeboat and the ship. It is thought that his body was recovered sometime later and buried in Glasnevin cemetery in Dublin.<sup>11</sup> Essie Gould arrived back home, by train, and

was met at the station by some of her friends.<sup>12</sup> One of her fellow passengers on the train was Michael Joyce M.P. who also survived the disaster.

Other Limerick casualties were:

Miss Anna Maud Barry of Sandville House, Ballyneety, county Limerick was a member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). The VAD were temporary nurses and Anna had received her training with the St. John Ambulance Brigade.<sup>13</sup> Anna Maud had been home on leave for ten days and she was returning to England to resume her duties. She was buried on Monday 14 October at the family burial plot at Rockstown, Fedamore, county Limerick.<sup>14</sup>

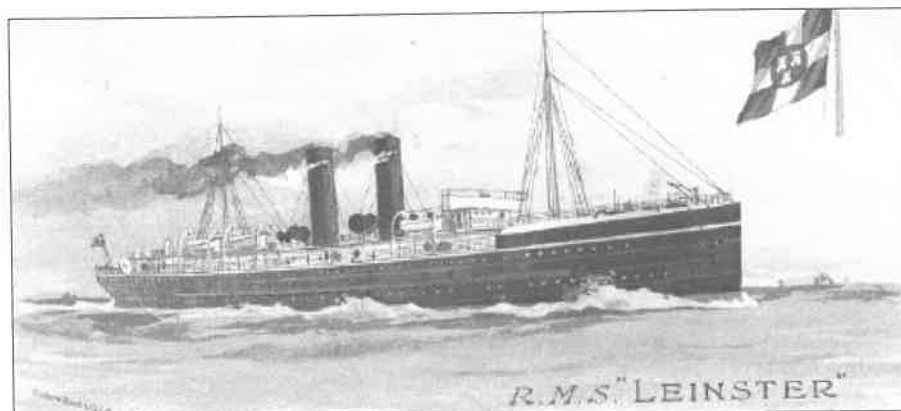
John D. Fitzgerald was a native of county Limerick and a former staff member of the *Cork Examiner* newspaper.<sup>15</sup>

Louisa Frend, aged 68, was from Boher, Caherconlish, county Limerick. Louisa stayed overnight in Dublin before boarding the *Leinster* to visit family members in Eastbourne.<sup>16</sup>

Five Limerick men, who were serving in the British Army, also died.

The five soldiers who drowned were James Honan, Timothy Heenan, Michael Barry, Joseph Cronin and William Murphy.<sup>17</sup>

Private James Honan, of Upper Carey's Road, was the 50 year-old son of Michael Honan, Denmark Street, Limerick and



was serving with the Royal Defence Corps (300th Protection Company).<sup>18</sup> He had served previously with the 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers, serving in the East Indies between 1888 and 1896. His wife Mrs. B. Honan, lived in Wembley, London when he was drowned and he is buried in Mount Saint Lawrence Cemetery.<sup>19</sup>

Corporal Timothy Heenan was the 28 year-old (Limerick born) son of Patrick and Sarah Heenan, of Clareen, County Offaly. He was a Shoeing Smith in the 7th (South Irish Horse) Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment.<sup>20</sup>

Gunner Michael Barry of the 1st Anti-Aircraft Mobile Battery Royal Garrison Artillery was also drowned.<sup>21</sup> The bodies of both Heenan and Barry were never recovered.

Private Joseph Cronin, was the 20 year-old son of James and Bridget Cronin. He was serving in the Royal Army Service Corps 4th Reserve Horse Transport Unit. He is buried in Grangegorman Military Cemetery, Dublin.<sup>22</sup>

Private William Murphy, the son of Mrs. Margaret Murphy, was serving in the Irish Guards (Reserve battalion) and both he and Cronin were from Cappamore, county Limerick.<sup>23</sup> Like Barry and Heenan; Murphy's body was not recovered and all three men are commemorated at the Hollybrook War Memorial, Southampton, England.<sup>24</sup>

The sinking of the *Leinster* caused an outcry among the Western Allies and rallied people, especially in the United States where there was a call to oust the German Kaiser, Wilhelm, before making peace.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the Germans replied to Wilson's letter, on 12 October 1918, accepting the conditions that he had outlined and assured him that their government was representative of the people. In his reply Wilson stated that although the military terms of an Armistice were a matter for the allied governments, he demanded that the Germans cease the systematic destruction of evacuated territory and put an end to naval warfare as proof that arbitrary government was an at an end. The German reply of 20 October persuaded Wilson to recommend to his European allies that they consider an Armistice.<sup>26</sup> On 30 October, Germany's

middle-eastern ally, the Ottoman Turks surrendered and soon afterwards, on 4 November, the Austro-Hungarian Empire threw in the towel. The following day Wilson sent a final note, via the Swiss embassy, to the German Chancellor informing him of the allied terms. These included the evacuation of all invaded territories, compensation for damage done to allied civilians and their property by German aggression on land, sea and air<sup>27</sup> and "if they wanted, an Armistice" they would have to "contact the allied commander-in-chief, Marshal Ferdinand Foch for further details."<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, on 6 November, matters were moving fairly quickly in Berlin. An Armistice delegation, led by the politician Matthais Erzberger, leader of the Catholic Centre party, was hastily put together as the Allies were not willing to deal with the Kaiser or his army.<sup>29</sup> This was probably a major error on the part of the Allies, because it would give rise to the myth that the German Army was not defeated on the field of battle, but was stabbed in the back by civilian politicians or the 'November Criminals' as they were named by German nationalists after the war. It was thought that the German Generals should have been forced to accept the responsibility for a German capitulation.

Erzberger and his party left Berlin later that evening, and after travelling through the night by train they arrived at 8 a.m. the following morning at the German Military H.Q. at the town of Spa, near Liege, in Belgium. By that time, Foch had informed Hindenburg where the German delegation was to cross into the Allied lines. At Spa the Armistice commission were taken to the *Hotel Britannique*, where they discussed the situation with Field-Marshal von Hindenburg and his staff. After having lunch, they were ready to make their way to the French lines. Before they left, Hindenburg pointed out to them that it was the first time in the annals of war that a military armistice was to be concluded by civilians, he asked them to do their best for Germany.<sup>30</sup> As they began their journey out of Belgium into no-mans' land and nearer to the French lines, an old white sheet was cut up to make flags for the cars. Two German soldiers stood on the running boards of the lead car with a trumpet and blew the call for ceasefire as they approached the French lines.<sup>31</sup> At around 8 30 p.m. that evening Erzberger and the other

delegates reached the crossing point and were taken to La Capelle. From there they were transferred to a fleet of French cars. At 3 a.m. on the morning of Friday 8 November they arrived at a bombed-out railway station, at what was left of the town of Tergnier, which had been dynamited by the retreating Germans. The delegates climbed over broken bricks and stones to board a French train with two carriages that took them on the final stage of their journey.<sup>32</sup> As the train carrying Erzberger and his party pulled out of the station, the delegates settled down, still in their clothes, to get some sleep. They arrived at a secluded spot known as the Rethondes Clearing, in the forest of Compiègne, north of Paris at about 7 a.m., where Marshal Foch was already waiting for them. The train with Erzberger and his party pulled up about a hundred yards across from the Foch's train<sup>33</sup> and duckboards were laid to connect the two trains.

General Maxime Weygand approached the Germans and told them that Marshal Foch would receive them in his carriage at 9 a.m. At the appointed time the German delegates were shown to Foch's dining car by General Weygand. Erzberger said they had come to hear the Allies proposals for an Armistice. Foch told them that he had no proposals. Count Alfred von Oberndorff, who was with Erzberger, asked the Marshal what were the conditions for an Armistice? Foch replied that he had no conditions to offer. Seeing that delegates looked a bit baffled the Marshal asked them if they wanted to ask for an Armistice, the Germans replied that they did. Foch then instructed General Weygand to read out the Armistice conditions. Some of the main points were: that all occupied land was to be given up, all cash and gold reserves were to be returned, all German territory west of the Rhine was to be occupied by the Allies, all German ports would remain blockaded until a peace treaty was signed within fourteen days and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was to be annulled. The Germans, stunned and visibly upset with what they felt were harsh conditions, were given seventy-two hours to accept the conditions or not. Rather than send the terms for the Armistice by radio link to Spa and Berlin it was decided to send a courier. Captain Wolf-Heinrich von Helldorf, one of the German interpreters, was chosen to carry the text of the Armistice conditions back to the German lines.<sup>34</sup> At this stage

Germany still had a large army in France and still occupied Belgium.

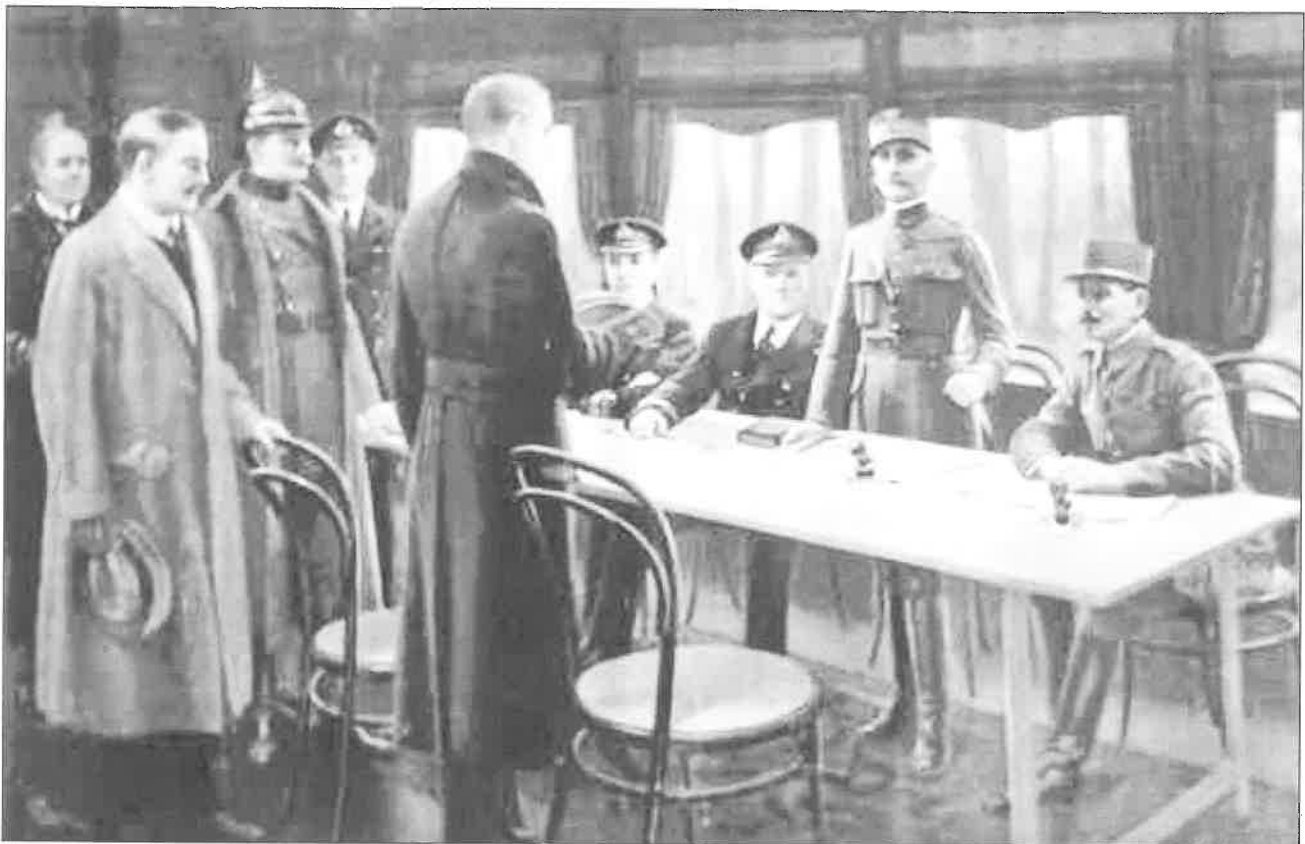
Meanwhile in Germany, revolutionary disturbances, which began with a mutiny of German sailors in Kiel, were gaining momentum in some cities, where red flags were flown. In Berlin, on Saturday 9 November, the Chancellor Max of Baden, fearing that revolutionaries might seize power there, resigned and handed the governing of the country over to the Social Democratic Party leaders Freidrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann, while the Kaiser had abdicated.<sup>35</sup> As acting Chancellor, Ebert transformed the government into a Council of People's Delegates. While soldiers and civilians demonstrated on the streets of Berlin sporadic outbreaks of gunfire could be heard as rival groups fought each other. In the Reichstag several hundred shop stewards set up a Council of Peoples Commissars in an effort to depose Ebert and the SPD ministers and set up a Bolshevik state.<sup>36</sup>

On Sunday afternoon of 10 November, acting Chancellor Ebert, knowing that he had the backing of the Supreme Army Command, to quell any civil unrest, attended a mass meeting of soldiers

and workers in Berlin, which had been called to elect a new government and was attended by all the main political leaders. Ebert convinced the gathering that social upheaval or revolution was not the way forward, and to accept a government led by Social Democrats. In order to achieve this Ebert had to make some concessions, one of them being that his new title as head of the government would be People's Commissar instead of Reich Chancellor.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile a telegram arrived from Spa urging the government to ask Erzberger to try and get some concessions from the Allies, but to sign anyway if they failed. At 7 p.m. that evening Erberger received a message from Berlin, telling the delegates to accept the conditions of the Armistice as received on 8 November. Later that night, at 2 a.m. on Monday 11 November, another message arrived from Berlin stating that the new revolutionary government upheld the delegate's authority to sign the ceasefire.<sup>38</sup> Just after 5 a.m. on that morning the Germans signed the Armistice agreement. Officially the ceasefire would come into operation at 11 a.m. that morning.

Jack Hourigan, serving in the Royal

Artillery, was at Tourcoing, near the Franco-Belgian border that morning when a Frenchman came shouting "le guerre finie, le guerre finie", meaning the war is ended. Jack had joined the Royal Field [Horse Drawn] Artillery in 1917, at the Strand Barracks. But, as he said, "there was not much use for horse-drawn artillery at that stage of the war," so he was transferred to the Royal Artillery and shipped out to France. Jack said: "Big guns took ten or twelve men to operate them. If German planes were flying over head the guns had to be covered so that the Germans could not detect their location. One day he and some other soldiers had to take twelve German prisoners, by train to a P.O.W camp. They did not know where they were going and one of the German prisoners, who spoke French, had to ask for directions along the way. On another occasion, when he was coming home on leave, he met a Dublin Fusilier, on board the ship, whose uniform was still covered in mud from the trenches. Jack also said that "on the morning of the Armistice, they were not stood down as there was still a fear that the Germans might [reject the terms and] launch another offensive."<sup>39</sup>



*The signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918.*

On 28 June 1919, the Germans were brought to the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, where they signed the Treaty that ended the First World War and where forty-nine years earlier they had proclaimed the German Empire. Amongst the many clauses, or conditions, in the Treaty, were the following: that Germany was to be held responsible for causing the war, Alsace and Lorraine, captured in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 were to be returned to France, part of East Prussia was given to the new Polish state, the Rhineland was demilitarised and the German armed services were to be reduced in size. In 1933, the German Chancellor, Adolf Hitler set out to destroy the 'Dictated Treaty of Versailles' and build a new and greater Germany- the Third Reich- which ultimately led to the Second World War, when he invaded Poland in September 1939. After the defeat of Hitler's armies in 1945 Germany and Berlin were divided into four zones of occupation by the United States, Britain, France and Russia. Germany was not re-united until 1989, when the monster that they had helped to create in 1917 (Communism) collapsed.

#### References

1. At a meeting in London in 1903, the Russian Social Democratic Party split into two factions, those who supported Vladimir Lenin became known as the Bolsheviks, (majority) while those who opposed him, were known as the Mensheviks (minority).
2. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge*, (London, 2015).
3. Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923*, (London, 2017).
4. Adam Tooze, (op. cit.)
5. Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, (London, 1998).
6. Gregor Dallas, *1918 War and Peace*, (London, 2002).
7. Find a grave at: [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)

8. Interview with John Carroll (aged 86), on 8 August 1985.

9. *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 October 1918.

10. Ibid.

11. A search of Glasnevin and Grange Gorman cemetery records has not revealed any further information on him or any of his family.

12. Kevin Johnson, *Home or Away: The First World War and the Irish Revolution*, (Dublin, 2010).

13. *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 October 1918.

14. Ibid.

15. Find a grave at: [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)

16. Gregor Dallas (op. cit.).

17. Patrick J McNamara, *The Widow's Penny: The Memorial Record of The Limerick Men and Women who Gave their Lives in the Great War* (Limerick, 2000).

18. The Royal Defence Corps was formed in 1916 by converting Garrison battalions, composed of soldiers either too old or medically unfit for active front-line service. The role of the corps was to provide troops for security and guard duties inside the United Kingdom; guarding ports or bridges and was never intended to be employed on overseas service.

19. For further information see:

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/98156430/james-honan>  
<https://www.greatwarforum.org/topic/168490-james-honan>

20. See website: <http://www.irishmedals.ie/RMS-Leinster.php>

21. Ibid

22. Ibid and <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/57621309/joseph-cronin>

23. Ibid and <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13244322/william-murphy>

24. The Hollybrook War Memorial bears the names of those who were lost or buried at sea, or who died at home but whose bodies could not be recovered for burial.

25. Alan Sharp, *The Versailles settlement: peace-making after the First World War, 1919-1923*, (London, 2008).

26. Gregor Dallas (op. cit.).

27. Purnell's *History of the First World War*, (London, 1968).

28. Nicholas Best, *The Greatest Day in History: How the Great War really ended*, (London, 2008).

29. Gregor Dallas (op. cit.).

30. Nicholas Best (op. cit.).

31. Gregor Dallas (op. cit.).

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Purnell's *History* (op. cit.). Captain Wolf-Henrich von Helldorf joined the Nazi party and was police chief in Berlin. He was executed in 1944, after being implicated in the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

35. Nicholas Best (op. cit.).

36. Nigel Jones, *A Brief History of the Birth of the Nazis: How the Freikorps Blazed a Trail for Hitler*, (London, 2004).

37. Nicholas Best, op. cit.

38. Adam Tooze, op. cit.

39. Interview with Jack Hourigan (aged 89), on 22 August 1985.

Des Ryan is a native of Limerick city and has devoted much time to researching the history of the city and its people. He is the longest running contributor to the *Old Limerick Journal* and is an active member of the editorial committee of that journal. His wide range of interests includes Limerick Military history, Jewish Limerick and the Spanish Civil War.