

Talk to Huguenot Society Irish Section AGM
Saturday 05 April 2014.
Royal Hospital Kilmainham.

Madam Chairman - Dr. McKee,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am James Saunderson, perhaps better known as Sandy.

I am a retired officer of the Irish Defence Forces and former chairman of the Board of the Military Heritage of Ireland Trust (MHoIT) but I must tell you that today I am a stand-in as the present Chairman; Brig Gen Paul Pakenham is unable to be here. He sends his best wishes to you for the success of your meeting and his compliments to the Huguenot Society as a whole.

Having said that, I feel honoured that you have thought fit to invite a representative of the MHoIT to address your annual general meeting and for my part I am proud and pleased that the task has fallen to me. I hope that I can do both the Society and the MHoIT justice.

Not by any stretch of the imagination am I a historian, so if by accident, I stray inaccurately into the realms of the Edict of Nantes or Fontainebleau, about which you know far more than I do, please forgive me.

The MHoIT was established in 1990, prompted I understand by former President McAleese, as a North – South body which would attempt to add an impetus towards the reconciliation of the different traditions on the Island. It planned to achieve this objective by encouraging and facilitating research into the Military Heritage of Ireland as a whole and by the study and commemoration of Irish People who had served in military forces wherever in the world and for whatever country or group of countries. The Trust is a limited company with charitable status and in the context of recent events having mentioned charitable status I am pleased to tell you that no member of the trust is paid and all work is voluntary.

Because of its small size the Trust has played a mainly coordinating and directional role, for students, for researchers and for relatives seeking information on antecedents who had served in various armies. In addition it has commissioned a number of books:

A Guide to Irish Military Heritage, by Dr. Brian Hanley (2004): *The Irish Brigades 1585-2006* by Dr. David Murphy (2007): and *An Anthology of Irish War Poetry, 1914-1945* by Gerald Dawe: and it has played a major part in the creation of a most successful and popular - *Soldiers and Chiefs Exhibit* - in the National Museum Collins Barracks and has recently funded the launch of *Irish Brigades Abroad from the Wild Geese to the Napoleonic wars*, by Stephen McGarry (2013):

The Trust also maintains a close connection with museums North and South which have military heritage links and has helped them with their projects. The courtesy cooperation and advice of the curators and staff of the National Museum Collins Bks. towards us is phenomenal and deserves mention here. Contact is also maintained with Regimental Associations and with universities. In addition the trust through the kindness of a benefactor and with the help of a panel of judges drawn from the history departments of various universities sponsors an annual prize for a student essay on a military heritage theme.

Mr. John Cullinane, of the Ireland Fund, an American citizen was a founder member as indeed is Harvey Bicker your Secretary's husband.

In June 2012 we put forward some suggestions as to how the momentous and in some cases divisive events which have centenaries occurring during this decade might be appropriately remembered. The following were suggested as possible suitable vehicles of commemoration: a museum exhibit which would run over an extended period and which would capture on a timeline the following groups and their keynote involvements.

The forming of the Ulster Volunteers and the Irish Volunteers,
The Irish Citizens Army, Cumman na mBan, National Volunteers,
Gallipoli, The 1916 Rebellion and The Somme,
The war of Independence and The Civil War,

A commemoration of The Five Regiments and the South Irish Horse, which were recruited in areas mainly in what is now Southern Ireland and which were disbanded in 1922 together with Regiments recruited in what is now Northern Ireland and their main engagements in WW1.

Many of these commemorations have already occurred, or are in train, whether because of our suggestions or on the ideas of others is immaterial.

We suggested that a fitting theme might concentrate on the manner in which the events criss-crossed lives in all social strata and political opinion on the Island:-

Nationalists fighting in the Dardanelles: - The clash of British soldiers with their peers and possibly neighbours during 1916 fighting:-

Unionists and Nationalists dying side by side on the Western Front:-

Soldiers returning from WW1 and adopting leading roles in the War of Independence and the Civil War: - The irony and tragedy which is well, if not best illustrated by the fate of Erskine Childers --- gunrunning with the Asgard (now on exhibit in the Collins Barracks museum) --- subsequent experience on the Western front, his anti treaty stance and finally his execution for possession of a pistol ironically a gift from his friend Michael Collins.:-

The airbrushing from the pages of Irish History of soldiers who left with public approval but having fought bravely and idealistically returned to opprobrium while their brothers in all respects BUT Arms are lauded as heroes.:-

It was suggested that a series of lectures could be arranged near where incidents of interest took place, such as Wynn's Hotel, The Curragh (an event has been held there in the past week or so) or further afield, perhaps Messines or other significant locations. That talks on battle poets such as Pearse, Sassoon, McDonagh and Ledwidge might find a niche in the public mind.

The Trust also suggested that arrangements be instigated to have Ireland represented at Gallipoli in 2015 as the 10th Irish Division played a significant part in the landings and Irish units suffered heavy casualties. It was the first Irish Div in action and is often overlooked, by comparison with the 16th and 36th Divisions and often forgotten and overlooked in the ANZAC

remembrance. This Southern Irish representation we believe is now being arranged.

Projects in hand.

Room of Reflection,

Money is a problem for the Trust as it is for most voluntary organisations so plans may have to be curtailed but due to a good relationship with the museum a tentative plan has been put in place. It is a plan to provide a room of reflection through which visitors to the military galleries would exit and which would give them the opportunity of rehearsing and reflecting on the world wide contribution of the Irish to military events – some good, some less wholesome. It would be both comprehensive and inclusive of all military endeavours wherein, to paraphrase Rudyard Kipling “*..the Irish move to the sound of the guns like salmon to the sea*” A feasibility study is underway and will be assessed by Mr. Lar Joye curator, Harvey Bicker and Gen Pakenham.

Streamlining of the website,

This is in progress and necessary as there is an upsurge of family interest in ancestors as we approach the centenary of WW1. On the way in, I was asked by some members to establish links on our web site as your society is also in the process of research. There is a likely symbiosis here and I will bring the matter to the attention of the board and have no doubt but that it will react very positively.

In preparing this talk I have increased my knowledge of Huguenots in France, Ireland and worldwide by about one thousand percent and I have become acutely aware of the Religious and Political forces which influenced their Diaspora. I noticed that the army of William and Mary in Ireland had three Huguenot Regiments but I also discovered that King Louis XIV who had sent 6,600 troops to Ireland to the army of King James demanded the same number of Irish troops in return. These soldiers arrived in France in 1690 and formed the nucleus of the Regiments of Mountcashel, Clare and Dillon. These were the pathfinders of the Wild Geese and the foundation of the traditions of Irish service in the French, Spanish, Austrian and other European armies leading in time to the battles of Fontenoy, Cremona

and other battles where Irish were in direct armed confrontation on each side of the Religious and Political divide

Another thing that struck me about the coming of the Huguenots was that having been invited at the highest levels by Ormond and the Earl of Galway, having settled in and put their Commercial, Farming, Trading, Artistic and Military skills to good use they fell foul of what would nowadays be termed anti-competitive trade laws particularly in the trade of fabrics imposed to protect English industry with the consequent financial repercussions. So boom and bust are nothing new in Ireland people continue to arrive to what appears to be a good economic climate only to soon find themselves on the wrong side of the balance sheet.

There has been a great improvement in Religious and Political tolerance over the past quarter century or so. The ground breaking visit of Queen Elizabeth to Ireland in May 2012, the warmth of the welcome she received from almost all sections of society, and the acknowledgement by both heads of state of incidents, - some of which were a credit to neither side, followed now by the reciprocal state visit of the President to the UK have normalised relations to what would be expected of two neighbouring and friendly states.

Many events could be noted as the instigation of this improvement in relations, President Robinson's visit to the Queen, the opening of the Peace Park near Messines attended by the heads of state of Belgium, UK and Ireland, and including both sides of the Northern Political divide. In a much greater attendance by representatives of what had hitherto been regarded as opposite sides at ceremonies such as the National day of Commemoration, the Memorial Gardens Inchicore, St. Patrick's Cathedral and Irish Regimental Associations' functions.

The Defence Forces I believe have been to the fore in laying the ground work for these developments with UN Veterans and the Organisation of National ex-Servicemen as it was then called being to the fore in commemorating the fallen, in many cases their ancestors, well before it was considered popular or profitable to do so. There were also visits of senior forces personnel to and from both sides of the Irish Sea. This meeting of minds and growing friendship was probably due in at least some respects to the fact that Irish defence Forces personnel since 1958 had the experience of

international service in UN missions, in many cases for long periods alongside their UK counterparts and soldiers of other nations who had been involved in wars in the relative recent past. This led to a growth in mutual respect and a wider understanding of views debated and shared in difficulties and in the “brotherhood of arms”. It evolved to the stage where British soldiers attend courses mainly peacekeeping courses in the Irish Military College as Irish Soldiers had routinely attended UK military courses. Last year a Platoon of Irish joined as part of a Company of the present-day Royal Irish Regiment on an international training mission to the army of Mali. I have not spoken yet to any of the RIR personnel but the views of the Defence Forces soldiers to whom I have spoken are very positive.

Before I finish I must go on a tack of mine which I have been reiterating as Chairman of the MHoIT for some considerable time. We know from bitter experience that commemorations in Ireland can be both emotive and divisive so to every group I have addressed over the past few years and they were mainly military or former military from both traditions I have exhorted them *“to commemorate the events that you feel should be commemorated and to show tolerance towards those who are commemorating events of which you thoroughly disapprove and let us remember with Pride and Thanks the bravery and sacrifices of so many from our nations and particularly from Ireland North and South who died at home or in foreign lands and all those who served their espoused cause in honesty, with honour and in good faith”*.

Thank you for your attention:

QUESTIONS.