

SHOT AT DAWN: 26 Irish soldiers

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The cases of the 26 Irish soldiers serving in the British Army who were executed in the First World War were set out in a recent report released yesterday by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Private A Smythe

- *1st Irish Guards*

Executed on January 28th, 1915

Charged with deserting when on active service in France on November 1st, 1914. Military police found him in a barn on January 15th. He said that on the evening of November 1st his battalion was under heavy shell fire and he volunteered to go and help carry wounded men back to dressing stations. After walking for most of the night he met some French troops but they could not help him with the whereabouts of any British troops. He was only resting at the farm, and planned to leave that night. "I had no intention of deserting, I had a complete set of equipment."

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Private T Cummings

- *1st Irish Guards*

Executed on January 28, 1915.

Charged with deserting November 6th, 1914. Apprehended with Smythe on 15th January 1915. On November 7th Cummings was one of the many of the 1st Irish Guards absent from roll call after heavy fighting. Cummings stated that during the fighting he became separated from the rest of the men and lost his way. He met a group of French troops and stayed with them for some time while attempting to locate his battalion. The day before being apprehended he heard that there may be Irish Guards in La Bassee and was intending to go there to find them.

Private T Hope

- *2nd Leinster Regiment*

Executed March 2nd, 1915.

On February 14th, 1915 Pte Hope was charged with deserting his majesty's service, drunkenness and conduct prejudice to good conduct and military discipline. On February 9th, 1915 Pte Hope was arrested when drunk, wearing a police badge and when asked for his name provided Lance Cpl Stout. In his defence Pte Hope stated that on the night of December 23rd, 1914, he was very upset owing to the news of the death of two of his brothers. "I had no intention of going absent when I left the trenches. It was a sudden impulse". He said he had by mistake entered German trenches later that night where he was kept some days before being taken to Lille. During an attack he managed to escape and got into the French trenches where he stayed for some days before moving on and trying to find his own regiment.

Driver J Bell

- *57th Battery Royal Field Artillery*

Executed on April 25th, 1915

Driver Bell was charged with three counts of desertion. The prosecution alleged that on October 20th, 1914, both Bell and his associate Wilkinson were ordered to march with a dismounted party. On arriving at billets that evening both men were reported absent, and not seen again by their battery until February 10th. In his defence Driver Bell stated that on October 20th, 1914, he had asked to fall out, which was granted, and upon returning 10 minutes later he found the battery had moved on without him.

Private T Davis

- *1st Royal Munster Fusiliers*

Executed on July 2nd, 1915.

Charge of quitting his post without permission on June 22nd, 1915. Disappeared while on sentry duty. Pte Davis stated that around 2.15am he got a bad cramp in his stomach and had to visit the latrine. He was there about two hours and upon leaving had another attack and had to return.

Lance Corporal P Sands

- *1st Battalion Royal Irish Rifles*

Executed on September 15th, 1915.

Sands was granted 4 days leave from his Battalion in France on February 26th, 1915, but did not return on 1st March as arranged. He was subsequently arrested in Belfast on July 7th, 1915. Sands said he reported to Belfast Depot on March 2nd, 1915 as he had lost his warrant card and could not return to France without a new one. He spoke to a corporal who was unable to help, so he then went back home.

Private J Graham

- 2nd Battalion Royal

Munster Fusiliers

Executed on December 21st, 1915.

On December 9th, 1915 Pte Graham was present with his battalion in the trenches at Cuichy, but that he was absent from his company from January 26th until the following November. Apprehended in Bethune on November 20th following an altercation in a brothel.

Private P Downey

- 6 Leinster Regiment

Executed on December 27th, 1915

At Salonica, Greece, on December 1st, 1915, it was alleged that Pte Downey had refused to fall in when ordered, and refused to put on his helmet when ordered. With a history of minor insubordination and pleading guilty to the charge, Downey was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Rifleman J Crozier

- 9th Royal Irish Rifles

Executed on February 27th, 1916

It was alleged that on January 31st, at 9pm Rifleman Crozier was found to be absent from the trenches. He was apprehended on February 4th, when walking aimlessly around without his identification or pay book. In his defence Rifleman Crozier stated that on January 31st, he went into the front line trenches with his platoon and was feeling very unwell, with pains all over his body.

Rifleman J.F McCracken

- 15th Royal Irish Rifles

Executed March 19th, 1916.

On February 21st, 1916, McCracken was told to be ready for duty in the trenches with his platoon but later that day could not be found. He gave himself up a few miles away the same night. In his defence Rifleman McCracken stated that he had only just come out of hospital and was not feeling fit enough for duty in the trenches.

Rifleman J Templeton

- *15 Royal Irish Rifles*

Executed March 19th, 1916.

Evidence heard that on February 20th the 15th battalion were told that they were to proceed to the trenches later that day, and Templeton himself was told that he would be on sentry duty on arrival. At the 9pm parade Rifleman Templeton could not be found. Three days later he gave himself up to an officer behind the lines. He offered no defence, and simply stated "I am sorry for what I have done".

Private J Cassidy

- *1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers*

Executed July 23rd, 1916.

Went missing on June 24th, 1916. On June 30th, Pte Cassidy was apprehended by the French authorities and handed over to the British military police. In his defence Pte Cassidy stated that on the morning he went missing he went to the latrine and while there a shell exploded beside him, covering him with clay. He got nerve shock and for a couple of days he wandered around dazed before being picked up by the French.

Private J Carey

- *8th Royal Irish Fusiliers*

Executed September 15th, 1916.

Charged with two counts of deserting. Alleged on June 14th, he absented himself until June 15th and on June 20th, 1916, after being told to parade for the trenches, he absented himself until apprehended on June 21st,. In his defence at courts-martial Pte Carey stated: "I lose my head in the trenches at times, and I do not know what I am doing at all. My family is afflicted the same way. My father committed suicide over it. My brother's death in the Phoenix Park five years ago on March 17th, 1911, was due to the same thing".

Driver J Mullany

- *72nd Battery, Royal Field Artillery*

Executed on October 3rd, 1916.

Mullany was alleged to have knocked a Sgt Major to the ground and punched him when they fell. The two men were pulled apart but Mullany again went toward his superior hitting him and

knocking him to the ground again. Mullany stated that he did not strike the Sgt Major, but that they had confronted each other and ended up tumbling to the ground.

Private B McGeehan

- *1/8 (Irish) King's Liverpool*

Executed on November 2nd, 1916.

On October 21st, 1916, it was alleged that McGeehan had gone absent on the night of September 19th. Apprehended five days later near Montreuil when looking for food and water. In his defence McGeehan said that ever since he had been in France (18 months) the other men had picked on him and made fun of him. He didn't know what he was doing when he went absent.

Rifleman S McBride

- *Royal Irish Rifles*

Executed December 7th, 1916.

Charged with desertion while serving on Vimy Ridge between May 15-17th. The court heard that during the time that they were positioned on Vimy Ridge they had been subjected to heavy and sustained shelling with McBride's platoon suffering severely, especially from trench mortars. McBride was subsequently apprehended on September 17th near Boulogne.

Private A Hamilton

- *14th Battalion Durham Light Infantry*

Executed March 27th, 1917.