

— THE BATTLE OF —
MESSINES



**Creative
Centenaries**

The story of
William Redmond and John Meeke

Key Stage 3 Learning Resource



Creative Centenaries

The Battle of Messines graphic novel has been developed by the Nerve Centre's Creative Centenaries project which produces innovative resources around events in the Decade of Centenaries.

This is a Key Stage 3 curriculum linked resource looking at the impact of the Battle of Messines on Irish soldiers, through the experiences of William Redmond MP and John Meeke MM.

Developed in partnership with The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Artwork by David Campbell. With thanks to Keith Beattie for historical input.

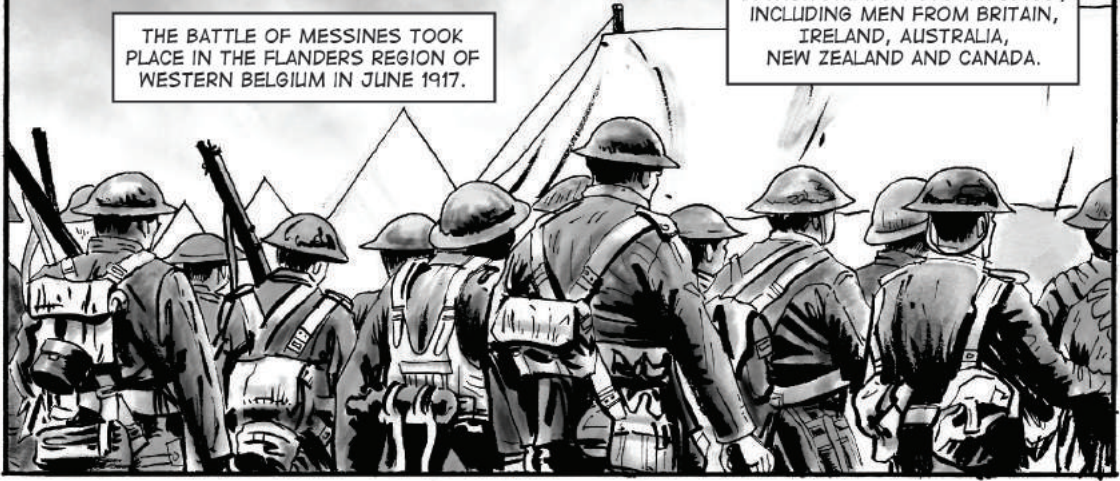
www.creativecentenaries.org



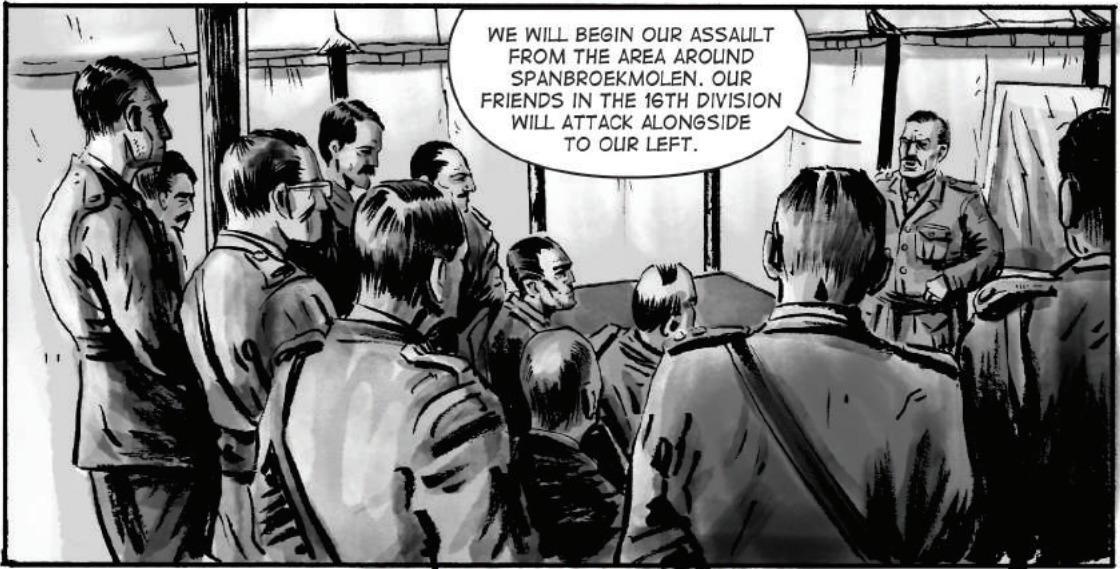
FLANDERS, MAY 1917.

THE BATTLE OF MESSINES TOOK PLACE IN THE FLANDERS REGION OF WESTERN BELGIUM IN JUNE 1917.

FORCES FROM ACROSS THE BRITISH EMPIRE WERE INVOLVED, INCLUDING MEN FROM BRITAIN, IRELAND, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND CANADA.



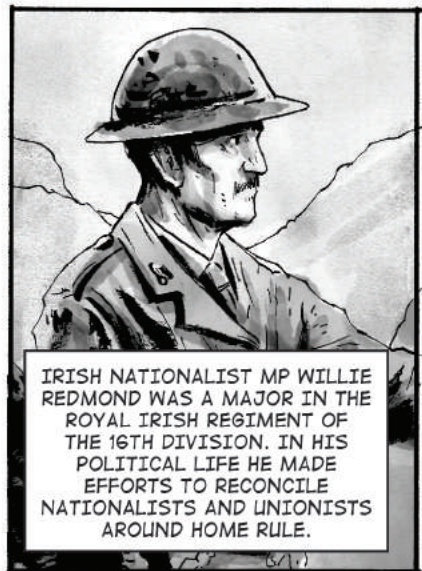
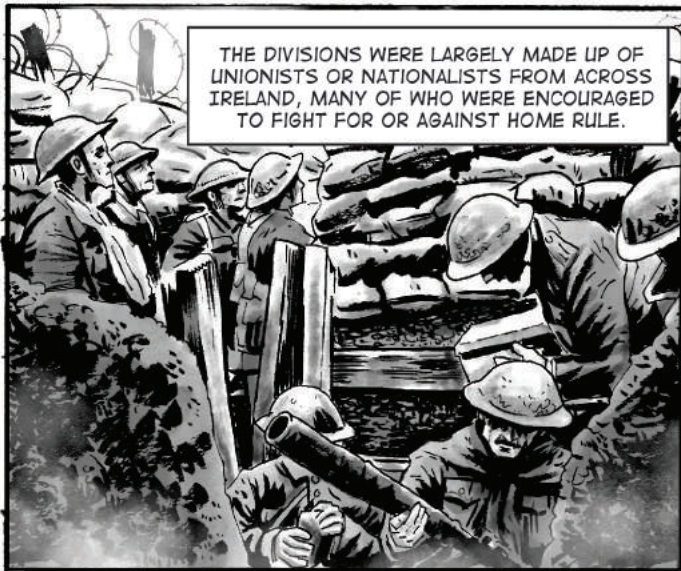
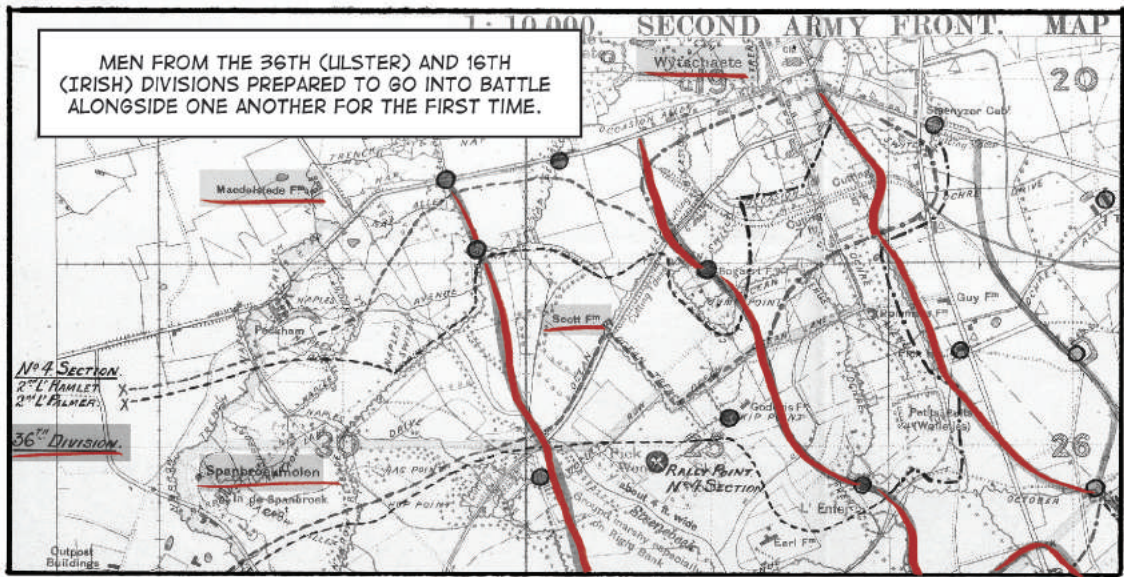
WE WILL BEGIN OUR ASSAULT FROM THE AREA AROUND SPANBROEKMOLEN. OUR FRIENDS IN THE 16TH DIVISION WILL ATTACK ALONGSIDE TO OUR LEFT.



FOR TWO YEARS AN UNDERGROUND WAR HAD BEEN WAGED.

MINERS AND SAPPERS HAD DUG TUNNELS THOUSANDS OF METRES LONG UNDER GERMAN TERRITORY, PLANTING OVER 450 TONNES OF EXPLOSIVES.








PRIVATE JOHN MEEKE OF THE 11TH
BATTALION, ROYAL INNISKILLING FUSILIERS...

...A 23-YEAR-OLD FROM BENVARDEN NEAR
BALLYMONEY IN COUNTY ANTRIM, WAS A
MEMBER OF THE 36TH (ULSTER) DIVISION.



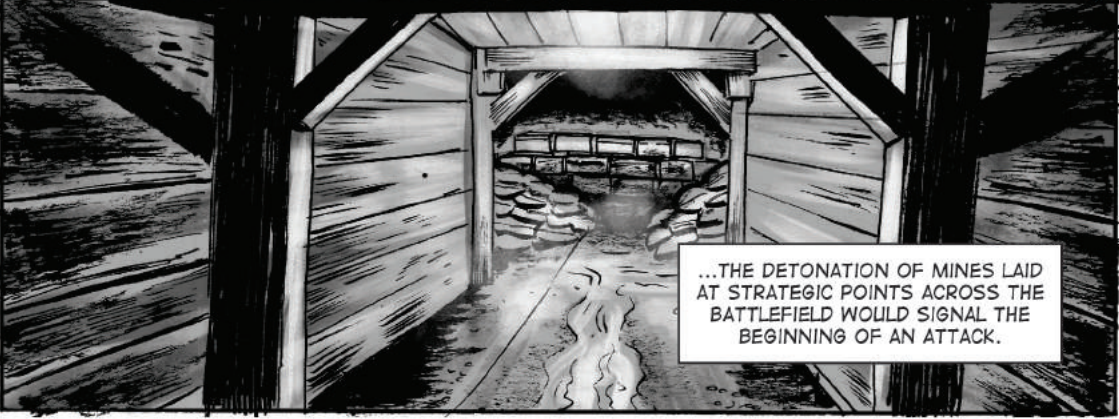
PRIVATE MEEKE, YOU
WILL ACT AS STRETCHER
BEARER DURING THE
ATTACK. STAY ALERT,
YOUR SERVICES WILL
NO DOUBT
BE NEEDED.

YES, SIR. I
HOPE THE
MINES CAN
CLEAR THE WAY
FOR US.

MEEKE WAS AN ORANGEMAN AND A
MEMBER OF THE ULSTER VOLUNTEER
FORCE, FORMED TO OPPOSE THE
INTRODUCTION OF HOME RULE IN IRELAND.



JUNE 7, 1917. 3.05AM. SOLDIERS
FROM BOTH DIVISIONS WAITED
TO ADVANCE...



...THE DETONATION OF MINES LAID
AT STRATEGIC POINTS ACROSS THE
BATTLEFIELD WOULD SIGNAL THE
BEGINNING OF AN ATTACK.

JUNE 7, 1917. 3.10AM

MINES CONTAINING NEARLY
A MILLION POUNDS OF
EXPLOSIVES WERE DETONATED
ACROSS THE BATTLEFIELD.



AROUND 10,000 GERMAN
TROOPS WERE KILLED
ALMOST INSTANTLY.



THE 36TH (ULSTER) DIVISION
BEGAN THEIR ADVANCE.



BY THIS STAGE, ONLY 18
OF THE 25 LAID MINES
HAD EXPLODED...



THE EXPLOSIONS WERE SO LOUD THAT THEY WERE HEARD AS FAR AWAY AS LONDON AND DUBLIN AND CREATED MASSIVE CRATERS AS WIDE AS 260 FEET.



GOOD GRIEF...

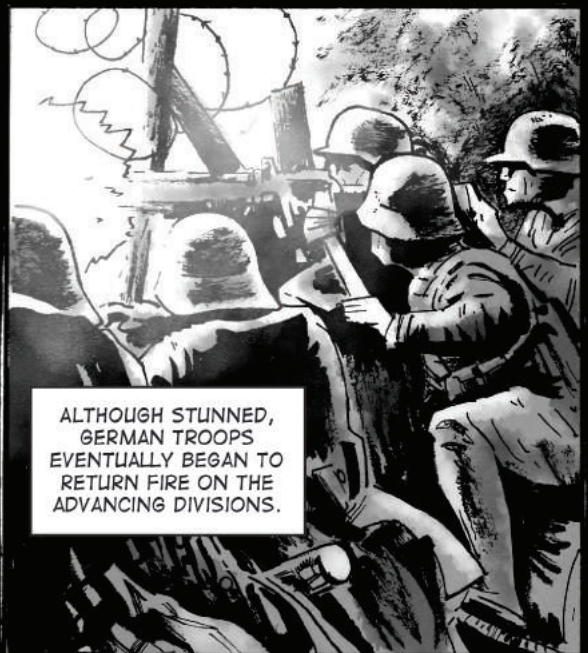
A MINE AT SPANBROEKMOLEN DETONATED LATE CATCHING SOME OF THE ADVANCING DIVISION UNAWARES.



ON THEIR LEFT SIDE THE 16TH (IRISH) DIVISION WERE ALSO MAKING THEIR CHARGE...



...WITH MAJOR WILLIE REDMOND ONE OF THE FIRST OUT OF THE TRENCHES.



ALTHOUGH STUNNED, GERMAN TROOPS EVENTUALLY BEGAN TO RETURN FIRE ON THE ADVANCING DIVISIONS.

WILLIE REDMOND WAS SHOT AND INJURED SHORTLY AFTER THE ADVANCE BEGAN, FALLING ON THE BATTLEFIELD.



LET'S GO MEN!
ATTA...

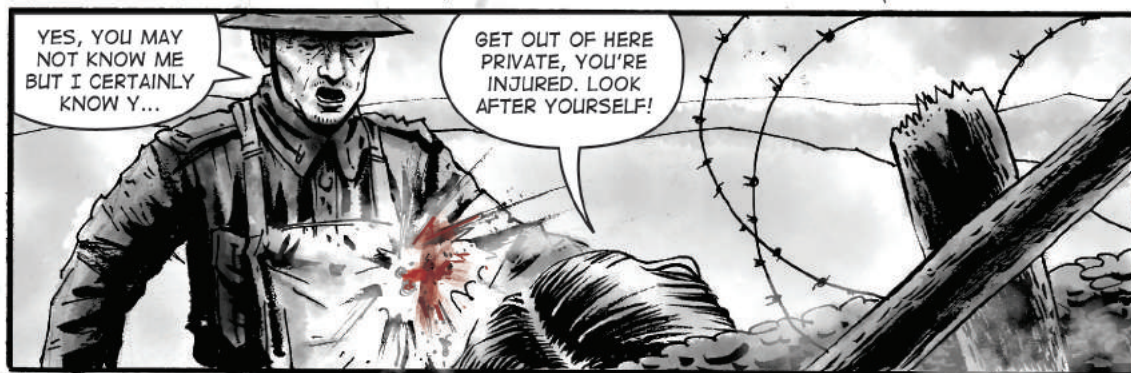


THAT LOOKS
LIKE MAJOR
REDMOND!



IT'S OK MAJOR,
WE'LL SOON GET
YOU PATCHED UP
AND OUT OF HERE,
DON'T WORRY.

THANK YOU
SON. ARE
YOU WITH
THE 36TH?



YES, YOU MAY
NOT KNOW ME
BUT I CERTAINLY
KNOW Y...

GET OUT OF HERE
PRIVATE, YOU'RE
INJURED. LOOK
AFTER YOURSELF!



I'LL BE OK. I'M
HERE TO HELP YOU,
NOW LET ME TEND
TO YOUR WOUNDS.

DESPITE BEING HIT
AGAIN BY SHRAPNEL,
MEEKE CONTINUED
TO HELP REDMOND.



PRIVATE,
DON'T PUT
YOURSELF IN ANY
MORE DANGER.
FALL BACK, THAT'S
AN ORDER!

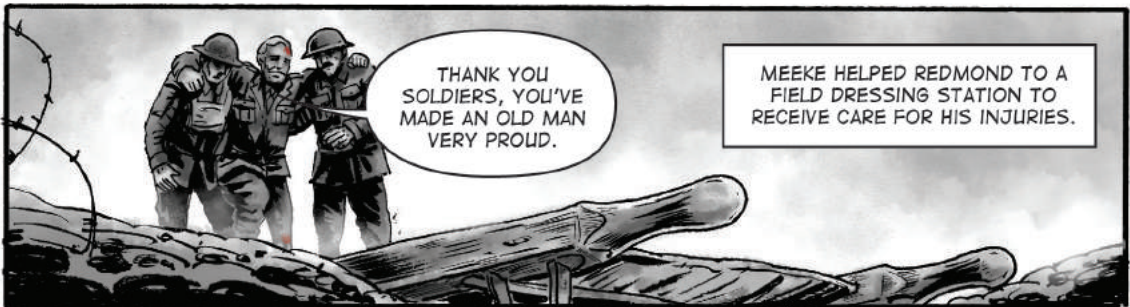
I WON'T SIR,
NOW LET ME
TEND TO YOUR
WOUNDS...



OVER HERE!
WE NEED
HELP!

IS THAT
MAJOR
REDMOND?

YES, NOW HELP
ME GET HIM UP.
HE NEEDS PROPER
TREATMENT.



THANK YOU
SOLDIERS, YOU'VE
MADE AN OLD MAN
VERY PROUD.

MEEKE HELPED REDMOND TO A
FIELD DRESSING STATION TO
RECEIVE CARE FOR HIS INJURIES.



CAN WE GET SOME ASSISTANCE
HERE?! IT'S MAJOR REDMOND,
HE'S BEEN SHOT.

HOW LONG
HAS HE BEEN
LIKE THIS?



HE WAS HIT
JUST AFTER
THE ATTACK
BEGAN

ARE YOU HURT
TOO, PRIVATE?

I'LL BE FINE, GOT TO
GET BACK OUT THERE
AND HELP THE REST.



MY NAME IS JOHN,
JOHN REDMOND.
I'M A CHURCH
OF IRELAND
MINISTER.

JOHN...
FOR A MINUTE
THERE...

...PADRE, I AM
DYING...PLEASE, I
NEED YOU TO WRITE
A FEW LINES AND
SEND THEM TO
MY WIFE.

MEEKE RETURNED TO THE BATTLEFIELD BUT WAS LATER TAKEN TO A FIELD DRESSING STATION FOR HIS INJURIES.



MAJOR REDMOND WAS BROUGHT IN HERE EARLIER, HOW IS HE?

OH, YOU HAVEN'T HEARD... UNFORTUNATELY HE DIDN'T MAKE IT. WE PUT HIM IN AN AMBULANCE BUT HE DIDN'T REGAIN CONSCIOUSNESS.

REV. REDMOND WROTE OF MAJOR REDMOND IN HIS DIARY

After this there was a short conversation between us which must remain confidential. Suffice to say that he asked me for spiritual guidance as he said he was dying. I told him what a comfort to us in the Ulster Division that we would have the 16th Irish on our left when we went over the top and he told me that the 16th had just the same feeling of security for their right flank.



REDMOND WAS BURIED IN THE CONVENT AT LOCRE ON JUNE 8. SOLDIERS FROM BOTH THE 36TH AND 16TH FORMED A GUARD OF HONOUR AT HIS BURIAL.

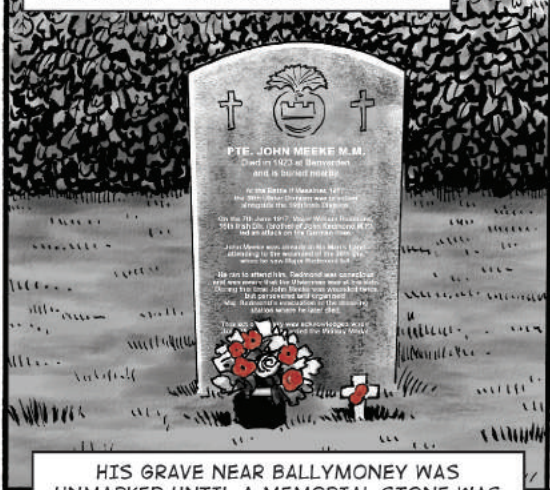
SUCH WAS HIS POPULARITY THAT REDMOND'S DEATH MADE HEADLINES AROUND THE WORLD.



FOR HIS BRAVERY IN TENDING TO MAJOR REDMOND, MEEKE WAS AWARDED THE MILITARY MEDAL. HE CONTINUED ON ACTIVE DUTY AND WAS INJURED IN 1918. HE RETURNED HOME TO BENVARDEN NEAR BALLYMONEY TO WORK AS A GARDENER.

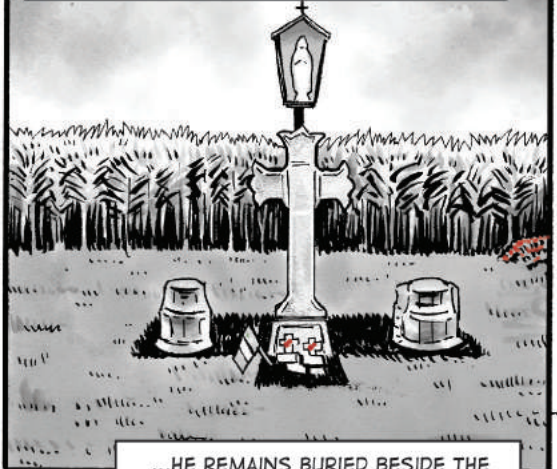


MEEKE DIED IN DECEMBER 1923 AFTER DEVELOPING TUBERCULOSIS, AGED 29.



HIS GRAVE NEAR BALLYMONEY WAS UNMARKED UNTIL A MEMORIAL STONE WAS ERECTED IN 2004 AFTER A PUBLIC APPEAL.

DESPITE PERMISSION BEING GRANTED BY HIS FAMILY, REDMOND'S BODY WAS NEVER MOVED TO A WAR CEMETERY...



...HE REMAINS BURIED BESIDE THE OLD CONVENT IN LOCRE, BELGIUM.

Background image courtesy of PRONI
D3835/E/10/7

THE BATTLE OF MESSINES

The Battle of Messines took place in June 1917, almost one year on from the beginning of the Somme Campaign. The battle is remembered particularly for the role of Nationalist and Unionist soldiers from across Ireland who fought alongside each other for the first time during the First World War.

The strategic importance of Messines meant that its capture would relieve pressure on French forces while also giving British forces important high ground from where they could continue and capture the Belgian coastline.

Men from the 36th (Ulster) and 16th (Irish) Divisions had suffered significant casualties at the Somme and were later moved to Flanders in Belgium to await replacements. Both divisions worked together in building fortifications and carrying out raiding parties. Both sets of men were said to have socialised with stories of football matches and shared dinners a regular feature.

Modern warfare techniques were employed in advance of the attack. A 'creeping barrage' was an artillery bombardment that fell just ahead of attacking infantry, the Royal Flying Corps flew overhead to identify German positions, machine gun and mortars were used to deliver an overhead barrage and tanks were effectively employed for one of the first times during the conflict. The most significant technique used at the battle was the construction of an elaborate tunnelling system underneath enemy lines and the

Further information

VISIT

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) hold a wealth of First World War materials and artefacts, including maps and documents relating to Messines:

nidirect.gov.uk/proni

VIDEO

The Somme Museum have produced a new animation detailing the involvement of Irish Divisions during the battle: irishsoldier.org

ONLINE

Visit CCEA's *Understanding 1917 and Beyond* website for further resources and worksheets on the battle: ccea.org.uk

ONLINE

Read the 'Brotherhood among Irishmen' article on History Ireland for a detailed analysis of the 36th (Ulster) and 16th (Irish) Divisions before and during the battle: historyireland.com

laying of one million pounds of explosives.

19 mines were detonated at 3.10am on the morning of June 7, marking the beginning of the attack. The explosions are considered the largest non-nuclear explosions of all time and were reportedly heard as far away as London.

The local divisions began their advance and, aided by tanks, Ulster Division soldiers captured an entire German Battalion Headquarters. The first objective of the Blue Line was overrun in 35 minutes, followed by the second objective of the Black Line and finally the Oosttaverne Line. By the end of the day the Irish and Ulster Divisions had captured their target of Wytschaete while ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) forces took control of Messines. German forces had been suppressed and the area was now under British control.

2,500 men of the 16th (Irish) and 36th (Ulster) Divisions were killed or injured at the Battle of Messines. The remaining men of both divisions moved out shortly afterwards to prepare for the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as Passchendaele.

Major William Redmond MP

William (Willie) Redmond was born in Liverpool, England, in 1861. He grew up with his family in County Wexford and became a merchant sailor and later a lieutenant in the Royal Irish Regiment.

He was elected MP for Wexford in 1883 and for Fermanagh North in 1885 where he became motivated to reconcile Ulster protestants to home rule.

Willie backed his brother John's support of Irish involvement in

the First World War and enlisted himself in February 1915 as part of the 16th (Irish) Division. He was later affected by the Easter Rising and delivered a final speech in the House of Commons where he pleaded for immediate home rule.

He joined the assault on Wytschaete during the Battle of Messines alongside the 36th (Ulster) Division. He was wounded, removed from the battlefield by John Meeke

and later died from his injuries. Willie's body remains buried near a convent in Locre, Belgium.



Private John Meeke MM

John Meeke was born in April 1894 and lived in Benvardeen near Ballymoney in County Antrim. Along with his brother Samuel he enlisted with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers following the outbreak of war.

A member of the 36th (Ulster) Division, John was a stretcher bearer during the Battle. He saw Willie Redmond fall shortly after the battle had begun and made his way to administer aid. John Meeke was twice

injured by shrapnel while caring for Redmond and was later awarded the Military Medal (MM).

Before the war ended, Meeke was badly injured in the leg by an explosive bullet and underwent a number of painful operations.

He returned to Benvardeen after the war and worked as a gardener, marrying Kathleen Craig in 1922.

He developed tuberculosis and died on 7th December 1923. His grave remained unmarked until 2004 following a public appeal.



Produce a film about the Battle of Messines

Create a short film examining the tactics of warfare used before and during the Battle of Messines. Investigate how tunnels, tanks and aircraft were used to significant effect for one of the first times in the war.

Students will use filmmaking software to combine images from the battle with text descriptions or a voiceover that conveys their findings.

TIP: Search Imperial War Museum's online image collections for non-commercial images to use in your film.



Record a news broadcast from the battle

Script and record a radio news broadcast that gives an account of viewpoints from both the 36th (Ulster) and the 16th (Irish) Division at the Battle of Messines. In a small group, students will assume the roles of soldiers from both Divisions and convey the thoughts and feelings that men may have had towards each other and about the battle.

Students will use audio recording software to compile their broadcast and add sound effects.

TIP: Search online for free sound effects to use in your broadcast.

Areas of Learning

The Arts; English (with Media Education); Environment & Society

Cross Curricular Skills

Communication; Using ICT

Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities

Managing Information; Being Creative; Working With Others

Key Elements

Personal Understanding; Moral Character; Citizenship; Cultural Understanding; Media Awareness