



remembrance ni

Eighth Army Tripoli victory

On this day in 1943 the British Eighth Army entered the Lybian city of Tripoli exactly three months since they had launched the offensive against the Afrika Korps at El Alamein.

On 08/11/1942, Operation Torch landed Allied forces in Algeria (at Oran and Algiers) and Morocco (at Casablanca) to secure the Vichy territories of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.

**On the road to
Tripoli - right**



The intention was to advance to Tunis some 800 km to the east and then advance to attack the rear of the Axis forces fighting Montgomery's Eighth Army in the Western Desert.

The overall strategic aim of the North Africa war theatre was to gain safe Mediterranean passage for Allied shipping and permit transit via the Suez canal instead of having to negotiate the longer passage via South Africa.

38 (Irish) Brigade sails from Greenock

In early November 1942, most of the 38 (Irish) Brigade units had sailed from Greenock, Scotland arriving off Algiers by 22 November. The following week, the Brigade moved to Bougie and then by road into Tunisia. The Irish Brigade was then deployed into the battle area some 100 miles south-west of Tunis.



Churchill reviews troops in Tripoli

When the 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Fusiliers had sailed from the UK to North Africa, the troopship had collided



with another on 4 December. There was then a delay when it steamed eight miles to Gibraltar for repairs. The Faughs had to sort out their baggage and equipment, much of it having been stored in the flooded forward hold.

The Faughs departed Gibraltar on 9 December and arrived at the port of Bougie in Algeria on 11 December. They spent the next few days unloading their equipment and acclimatising before moving to Tunisia on the 18 December.

Three days later on 21 December, the Battalion was reunited with 38 (Irish) Brigade, which included the 6th Battalion The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the 2nd Battalion The London Irish Rifles.

Churchill visits troops after Tripoli is taken

The Brigade commander was Brigadier Nelson Russell MC, a Royal Irish Fusilier and veteran of the Battle of the Somme where he had been awarded his MC. In January he would



lead the Irish Brigade into its first major battles in North Africa north of Bou Arada.

Grandstand Hill

By the morning of 23/01/1943, the 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Fusiliers (1st Faughs) had relieved the 6th Battalion The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers on Grandstand Hill, a long and exposed feature east of the Bou-Arada - Goubellat road. So far, during the advance on Tunis, they had experienced limited action.

Brigadier Russell as a young officer in the First War trenches

Brigadier Nelson Russell, then Commander of 38 (Irish) Infantry Brigade, was to write later of the 1st Faughs:

‘I had often wondered how the ‘Faughs’ would fare. In Scotland their Mess was always full of dogs and Officers, both apparently determined to do nothing in the simplest manner ... I thought privately - being perhaps a little over-



critical of my own Regiment - that they were a slack lot of coots. But they weren't slack at the real thing - the Officers were good Officers and the 'Faughs' teething troubles were practically non-existent'.

Brigadier Nelson Russell

Brigadier Nelson Russell CB DSO MC was born in Lisburn on 7 July 1897 and educated at Campbell College, Belfast. He entered Campbell in 1911 and was a member of the OTC. He played hockey for the CCB Hockey Club captaining in 1914.

Captain Russell MC in WW1

He was gazetted into the Special Reserve of Officers of the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion The Royal Irish Fusiliers as a Second Lieutenant (on probation) with effect from 03/04/1915. He then joined the 1st Battalion in July 1915 for service in France and Belgium.

He was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for his gallantry in leading a daylight raid on an enemy trench on 17/04/1916.

Following five minutes of artillery and mortar preparatory fire, the raiding party of three officers and thirty-three men, led by Lieutenant Nelson Russell, dashed from their sap and entered the German trenches. Bombing those enemy caught sheltering in their dugouts they then fought through the German position, killing at least 15 enemy, including a German officer shot by Russell, and detonating demolition charges as they withdrew. Later that year, on 15 September, the people of Lisburn presented him with a silver Loving Cup and an illuminated address in recognition of his achievement as the first citizen of Lisburn to win an MC in 'The Great War'.

Between the First and the Second World War his overseas service included Egypt, India, the Sudan and Palestine. He had always been a keen sportsman and had played both cricket and hockey for Lisburn Cricket Club and Lisnagarvey Hockey Club, having captained the latter in the 1923/24 season. He had represented Ireland at hockey in 1928 and even played for Lisburn when home on leave from India.

He was appointed to command 38 (Irish) Brigade in July 1942 and led the Irish Brigade through the Tunisian campaign of 1942–43 and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) on 05/08/1943. His experience and leadership were major factors in the success of the Brigade. Having commanded the Brigade in Sicily and Italy in 1943 and early 1944, Russell was invalided home due to poor health.

Any tribute to Brigadier Nelson Russell's war fighting capabilities as an infantry brigade commander would not be complete without listing the distinctions and honours gained

by their forebears and emblazoned on The Queen's Colours of the Royal Irish Regiment :

BOU ARADA
DJEBEL TANNGOUCHE
NORTH AFRICA 1942-43
CENTURIPE
SICILY 1943
SANGRO

Brigadier Russell commanded Belfast Garrison in 1945 and 1946 and became the first commander of 107 (Ulster) Independent Infantry Brigade Group (TA) when the Territorial Army was formed in Northern Ireland in 1947. He was appointed as a Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (CB) in the King's Birthday Honours on 09/06/1949.

In 1951 Nelson Russell was appointed Sergeant-at-Arms for the Northern Ireland Parliament. He retired in 1968 and died on 20/10/1971.

Acknowledgement - Royal Irish Regiment

On this Day – January 23

1917

Armed merchant cruiser HMS Laurentic (ex White Star SS Laurentic) struck German mines off NW Ireland and sank.

354 people died, many of exposure in her lifeboats. Laurentic carried a cargo of gold: not all has been recovered. See this site January 25

Destroyer HMS Simoom was torpedoed by German destroyer S-50 during a night engagement between British and German destroyer flotillas in the Flanders Bight. She was wrecked by a magazine explosion and was scuttled next day. 47 of her 90 crew died.

1940

Britain and France say they will not honour 200-mile Pan-American neutrality zone and will attack German ships there.

Animals in Berlin Zoo placed on war rations—less meat, no bananas or peanuts.

1941

Before Congress, Charles Lindbergh suggests the US negotiate a neutrality pact with Hitler.

HMS Illustrious, heavily damaged, leaves Malta for repairs in Alexandria.

1942

Japanese land at crucial British naval and air base of Rabaul, New Britain and take it.

Japanese land at Kavieng, New Ireland and Kieta, Bougainville, and secure both.

Lt. Gen. Joseph Stilwell placed in command of US Army forces in China-Burma-India Theater.

Australia sends an urgent request for assistance from the Allies after a series of conquests in the Southwest Pacific brings the Japanese within a thousand miles of Australian territory.

1943

British take Tripoli, Libya. The British Eighth Army entered Tripoli this day exactly three months since they had launched the offensive against the Afrika Korps at El Alamein

US takes last Japanese landing beach on Guadalcanal, cutting their supply route.

Japanese continue their fight in western Guadalcanal; they now seem to have given up completely on the New Guinea campaign.

The first Japanese attack on the U.S. mainland as a submarine shells an oil refinery near Santa Barbara, California.

1944

Australians secure Shaggy Ridge in Finisterre Mountains, New Guinea, securing Huon Peninsula.

Off the Anzio landing beaches, destroyer HMS Janus was sunk by a German glider bomb while operating in support of Allied landing operations. 159 killed.

U.S. Aircraft Carrier-based planes attack the Mariana Islands

1945



During their advance on Linne in Holland, 45 RM Commando was held up by well-prepared positions behind the Montforterbeek dyke. After hard fighting in bitterly cold weather and over flat ground covered in snow, the leading Troops achieved their objectives. It was during this action that the actions of Lance Corporal H E Harden, RAMC, the medical orderly attached to 'A' Troop earned a VC. In spite of a determined night counter-attack during which hand-to-hand fighting took place in front of the slit trenches...

...The captured German positions were held until the unit was relieved by No 6 Commando in the morning.

US Ninth Army retakes St. Vith in Belgium from Germans.

Nazis execute Count Helmuth von Moltke, leader of the German Kreisau Circle resistance group.

German Admiral Karl Dönitz ordered the mass evacuation of civilians and military forces from East Prussia, known as Operation Hannibal. Soviet forces had been steadily advancing into Germany in the past months, and by mid January, they were threatening the territory of East Prussia. At this point the German command knew they could not defend this region, so instead they decided to save as many people from the vengeful Soviet armies as they could. The operation used between five hundred and one thousand boats of all types to ferry people from East Prussia to German-occupied Denmark and other safer regions, and lasted over fifteen weeks. Some 800,000 refugees and 350,000 soldiers were evacuated during this operation, making it one of the largest naval evacuation in history. Although this operation saved thousands of lives from Soviet retribution, many were killed during the journey, including over nine thousand in the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff, along with many other sinkings. The operation continued right up to the end of the war, ending with the evacuation of 18,000 soldiers and civilians from Latvia.



Roll of Honour – January 23

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1916

+HALL, John

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 9th Btn. Private. 11300. Died of wounds on 23/12/1917. Aged 39. The death of Private John Hall was reported in the 02/02/1918 edition of the *Newtownards Chronicle* under the headline *Newtownards-Inniskillinger Succumbs*. Born in Newtownstewart, Co Tyrone. He enlisted in Omagh. Son of J J Hall. Mrs M.A. Hall, Mill Street, Newtownstewart, Co Tyrone is listed as his next-of-kin. Abbeville Communal Cemetery Extension, France

+McTAGGART, Thomas

Royal Irish Rifles. 4th Btn. (Royal North Downs) attached to 2nd Btn. Royal Irish Rifles. Rifleman. 6565. Died of disease on 23/01/1916. Aged 31. Thomas McTaggart enlisted in March 1905 (No. 5347) in Newtownards, and it was noted in his attestation papers that he was 5 feet 4 inches tall with a fresh complexion, blue eyes, and brown hair. He served in the Home Service until he was discharged in March 1911. It was noted that he was of good character. He re-enlisted in August 1912 and served in France from 09/11/1914 until

29/01/1915. He was in Home Service until he was discharged on 17/09/1915 when he was deemed to be no longer physically fit for war service. He was described as a quiet, well-behaved man.

In the 29/01/1916 issue of the *Newtownards Chronicle* the funeral of Rifleman Thomas McTaggart was reported under the headline *Military Funeral in Newtownards*. The report stated that Thomas McTaggart who had ten years of military service had been wounded when fighting at the Front and, 'owing to the exposure to which he was subjected at the time, contracted consumption'.

Rifleman McTaggart was discharged from the Army on 17/09/1915 and for several months his mother cared for him in her home at 37 Frederick Street, Newtownards. The Rev W.L.T. Whatham communicated details of Thomas McTaggart's service to the Adjutant of the 10th (Reserve) Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers stationed in Newtownards and Colonel Fitzgerald agreed to provide for a military funeral. The brass band of the Fusiliers with draped drums played on the way to the cemetery. The coffin was covered with the Union Jack on which was placed the deceased's cap, belt and side-arms.

Rifleman Thomas McTaggart had three brothers on active service in the Great War – Private John McTaggart, 2nd Btn Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers attached to the 3rd Btn; Rifleman Watson McTaggart, 4th Btn Royal Irish Rifles and Private Andrew McTaggart serving with the Canadians.

On 04/09/1906, Thomas McTaggart and Sarah Ritchie were married in Newtownards Parish Church of Ireland Church (St Mark's). In civil marriage registration records it is

recorded that Thomas McTaggart from 27 Frederick Street, Newtownards was a son of Thomas McTaggart, a labourer. Sarah Ritchie (aged 20) from Newtownards was a daughter of James Ritchie, a labourer. In the 1911 census it is recorded that Thomas and Sarah McTaggart had no children.

Newtownards Movilla Cemetery, Newtownards.
Newtownards and District WM. Newtownards C of I Parish Church (St Mark's)

1917

+McLEAN, George Alexander

Royal Field Artillery. 74th Brigade. Gunner.41411. Died of disease on 23/12/1916 (aged 23). George McLean was posted initially to Athlone and then on 28/08/1915 to France. On 05/12/1916 he was admitted to No. 39 Casualty Clearing Station where he was diagnosed to be suffering from meningitis. He was pronounced to be 'dangerously ill' and his father was so informed by telegram. In a subsequent telegram his father was informed that George was 'slightly improved' and on 14 December he was informed that George was 'progressing favourably'. Then he got the news that Gunner George McLean had died of acute meningitis on 23/12/1916. One of three brothers who died in WW1 - the others were Rifleman John McLean, Royal Irish Rifles 6/19987 died 25/03/1918 and William Robert McLean, Cheshire Regiment 316275 died 07/09/1918. The parents of the three McLean brothers who died in the First World War were Alexander and Elizabeth McLean (nee Crichton). Alexander McLean was working as a gardener on the Parkhall Estate in the Parish of Muiravonside, Scotland

when he and Elizabeth Crichton were married on 16/04/1886 in Fauldhouse Church of Scotland Church, Linlithgow, West Lothian, Scotland. They later lived in several locations in the south of Ireland including Bandon, Co. Cork and Blackrock, Dublin. George is remembered at Allonville Communal Cemetery, Somme, France. He is commemorated on the McLean family grave headstone in Whitechurch Cemetery, Ballywalter, and in the County Cork Book of Honour entitled *A Great Sacrifice – Cork Servicemen Who Died in the Great War*.

1918

+CAMPBELL, William Henry

RMLI. Gunner. PLY/13623. SS Baykerran. Died 23/01/1918. Aged 30. Lost off Nova Scotia. Enrolled 13/01/1906. Served to 14/11/1913. Joined RFR 20/11/1913. War service 23/11/1913 - 23/01/1918 in Plymouth Division, Charybdis, Alsatian and President III. Born Belfast 10/03/1888. Son of late John and Margaret Campbell. Fingall St., Belfast. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 1. ADM 159/153/13623

1941

+HOLMES, Arthur Peter Buckley

RAF. AAF. Flying Officer. 90038. Died 23/01/1941, Aged 32. 502 Sqdn. Died 23/01/1941. Aged 32. B.A. Son of Buckley Holmes and of Ethel Maud Holmes (Nee Wensley); Husband to Dorothy Margaret Probert Holmes (Nee Newman), Belfast. Drumbeg Parish churchyard

1943

+MAXWELL, William Ernest Norman

RAFVR. Flying Officer (Pilot).118505. Died 23/01/1943. B.A. Hons. (Queen's University, Belfast). Son of William Norman Maxwell and of Edith Maud Maxwell (nee Morrell), of 80 Woodvale Rd., Belfast; husband to Vivienne Isobel Maxwell (nee Draper). Dundonald Cemetery. QUB WM

1944

+JOHNSTON, James

RAFVR. Sergeant (Air Gunner).1481596. Died 23/01/1944. Age 21. 104 Sqdn. Son of Adam and Sarah Johnston of Clough, Ballymena. Belgrade War Cemetery.

VETERANS

BROSNAN, Martin Joseph

RNVR. Surgeon - Lieutenant. MBE - awarded for bravery and initiative during loss of ship. London Gazette 23/01/1945. MB, DPH, QUB 1942

HERRIOT, Thomas Hunter

RN. Flight Officer. MBE. DSC.(Heligoland and Zeebrugge). Mercantile Marine Medal. Croix de Guerre (Belge). Gained pilot's licence 04/06/1917. On Ulster XV v. All Blacks, 1919. 1939-45: Squadron Leader, Pathfinder Force, RAF. Born 23/01/1894. Son of J. S. Herriot, Beaconsfield, Belmont Church Road, Belfast. Campbell College. Queen's University. B.Sc. (Engin.) A.M.I.A.E. M.Inst. B.E. Inspector, Ministry of Commerce, Transport Division.Victoria House, Armagh.

MOORE, William John

William was born in Belfast on 05/10/1919 and was brought up in a Belfast orphanage. He enlisted in the Rifle Brigade on 18/01/1940 then transferred to the Pioneer Corps 27/11/41 as Private 6915833 serving as a Capston Machine Operator. William states his father as being Arthur Moore who served in the Royal Ulster Rifles. William died on 23/01/1973 in Bath, England.

Every day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

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remembrance ni

The **remembrance ni** programme is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD who served as Chaplain to 102 and 105 Regiments Royal Artillery (TA), as Hon. Chaplain to RNR and as Chaplain to the RBL NI area and the Burma Star Association NI. Dr McKelvey is a Past President of Queen's University Services Club. He may be contacted at houstonmckelvey@mac.com

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Please forward - information about those who served - names, regiment, ship or unit, date of death to houstonmckelvey@mac.com
