March 24

remembrance ni

Bernard Law Montgomery


One of the most distinguished commanders in modern History, Bernard Law Montgomery would serve an astonishing 50 year career that saw him rise to the highest rank in the British Army.

A difficult, unruly young man by his own admission, he was nearly expelled from Sandhurst for rowdiness and violence. He commissioned into The Royal Warwickshire Regiment (Now The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers) in 1908 and was the Battalion adjutant when the First World War began.

He saw action at Le Cateau, Mons, Arras and Passchendaele. He was shot through the lung, shot in the
knee and was decorated for his gallant leadership for capturing German trenches at bayonet point.

Between the World Wars, Monty married and was widowed, his wife dying of septicaemia. After this loss he threw himself more than ever into his career and held the rank of Major General at the outbreak of World War Two.

His service in the Second World War was equally incredible, holding command positions during Dunkirk, The North Africa campaign, Sicily, Italy, Normandy, Operation Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge amongst others. He is perhaps best remembered for his rivalry with and defeat of 'The Desert Fox' Erwin Rommel, one of Germany's most brilliant Generals.

His memoirs were published in 1958 after he left the Army.

**Royal Ulster Rifles airborne role in Operation Varsity - crossing the Rhine**

The final hurdle of the Rhineland Offensive was the Rhine itself. The crossing near Wesel (Operation Plunder) was one of several coordinated Rhine crossings. A million Allied soldiers participated.

In support of the crossing, 14,000 paratroopers were dropped behind enemy lines (Operation Varsity). The operations were a complete success. Hitler’s days were numbered.

The 1st Btn. Royal Ulster Rifles was part of the 6th Airborne Division.
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The 6th Airborne Division was tasked to seize the high ground of the Diersfort Wood, overlooking part of the Rhine to be crossed by the British 21st Army Group. 540 aircraft towing some 1,300 gliders flew into the teeth of German defensive fire, enveloping enemy defences and gun emplacements from above and suffering initial heavy casualties as a consequence.

Within five and a half hours all objectives were taken. Despite tenacious resistance from the German 1st Fallschirmjäger Army the link up with ground forces ferrying the river was achieved. Prisoners at first came in hundreds then thousands.

Following the link-up the 6th Airborne Division took the lead in a 300 mile advance through Germany, marching 11 miles per day until they captured enemy transport. Within weeks they linked up at the Baltic port of Wismar with advancing Russians coming from the east.

The Royal Irish Rifles at Cugny 24/03/1918

An extract from Falls' book, First Seven Battalions, relates the events of that day:

About 10 a.m. on the 24th a new attack developed on the 2nd Battalion, the enemy making desperate efforts to debouch from Cugny, and also sweeping in on the flanks ... the attack was beaten off ...

Captain J. C. Bryans now assumed command ... to reorganize the line ... a new attack began.
On this day in 1918, 94 men of the Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Battalion, died in action when they fought to the last man at Cugny, south of St Quentin. By 27/03/1918 the Germans had taken Albert, which had once sat at the heart of the British line in 1916. This image was taken by a German soldier at that time.

Colonel McCarthy-O'Leary sent forward messengers with orders for the 2nd Battalion to withdraw through the 1st. No answer was received, runners being all killed or wounded.

In any case, Captain Bryans had orders to fight to the last, and had, moreover, come to the conclusion that an attempt to retire over open ground, with machine guns on either flank, would mean annihilation. If his little force was to be destroyed it should die to better purpose.
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The attack, accompanied by a flight of low-flying aeroplanes, swept in in overwhelming strength from the left, and a desperate hand-to-hand fight ensued ... many men had not a round left to fire. They sprang from their entrenchments and met the enemy with their bayonets. In a few minutes, all was over. The defenders were simply engulfed by superior numbers ... There cannot be many instances, even in the late war, of a battalion being blotted out so completely as this.

On this Day – March 24

1918

The Germans are held in desperate fighting around Bapaume. They cross the Somme between Peronne and Ham and take Nesle and Peronne, and further south they capture Guiscard and Chauny. It is reported the Germans claim 30,000 prisoners and 600 guns.

1941

Berlin suffers its first raid of the year by the RAF.

German troops on parade in the city of Cherbourg have their show spoiled when British bombers hit the parade ground in the middle of the event.

Rommel conducts a limited offensive to recapture El Agheila from the British, which succeeds with startling ease. This
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encourages Rommel to push forward towards Mersa Brega. British Somaliland is now clear of Italians.

1942

The British Government refuses to hold an inquiry into the loss of Singapore during a Lords debate.

The start of deportation of Slovak Jews to Auschwitz

The Japanese begin an intensive bombing campaign of Bataan and Corregidor. General Homma’s 14th Army receives reinforcement ready for its final offensive against the Bataan and Corregidor. This takes the form of the Japanese 4th Division, which has been shipped from Shanghai.

1943

In the Yellow Sea near Port Arthur, US sub Wahoo sinks 3 Japanese cargo ships.

The first Chindit Raid ends (British/Indian raids in Japanese-occupied Burma); although one-third of men were lost, raid raised morale.
The Great Escape - the largest prisoner of war breakout ever attempted occurred at Stalag Luft III, a German camp for captured Allied airmen. Memorial to RNZAF members who were shot.

The Great Escape - On the night of March 24, a total of 220 British and Commonwealth officers were poised to escape by tunnel from North Compound, Stalag Luft III, the main camp for allied aircrew prisoners of war at Sagan in Nazi-occupied Poland.

The US Fifth Army’s bridgehead at Anzio is bombarded by German heavy long-range guns and Luftwaffe aircraft using guided bombs, causing severe casualties in men, ships and equipment. Persistent US and British attacks against the Gustav Line at Cassino are repulsed by the German defenders. In response to the killing of 35 German soldiers in Rome by the Italian resistance, SS Colonel Herbert Kappler orders the execution of 335 Italians, at least 255 of whom are civilians in reprisal. All are shot by German troops in the Fosse Ardeantine caves outside of Rome.
Horsa gliders used by 6th Airborne Division near the Caen Canal bridge (Pegasus Bridge) at Benouville on 08/06/1944. Similar gliders were used on Operation Varsity 24/03/1945 to transport Royal Ulster Rifles.\textsuperscript{1}. (Airborne) Btn.

A Russian tank army crosses the Dnieper near Czech border. Malinovsky makes crossings of the Bug near the Black Sea.

The Luftwaffe attacks London with 90 medium bombers (He-111s and Ju-88s), while the RAF bombs Berlin with 810 heavy Lancaster bombers. The RAF loses 72 bombers in this, the 16th and heaviest raid of war on Berlin. The ‘Battle of Berlin’ is now over.

Wingate, leader of the Chindits is killed in plane crash.

The Japanese counter-attack on Bougainville is decisively beaten.
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President Roosevelt issues a statement condemning German and Japanese ongoing “crimes against humanity.”

In response to the killing of 35 German soldiers in Rome by the Italian resistance, SS Colonel Herbert Kappler orders the execution of 335 Italians, at least 255 of whom are civilians in reprisal. All are shot by German troops in the Fosse Ardeantine caves outside of Rome.

1945

Montgomery’s 21st Army Group attacks across the Rhine, 15 miles North of Duisberg in the Wesel area, after 3,500-gun barrage. 16,870 paratroops land across the river Rhine in Operation ‘Plunder’ and succeed in linking up with advancing British troops and establishing four bridgeheads. The US Third Army captures Speyer and Ludwigshafen on the upper Rhine.

US Fifteenth Air Force based in Italy sends 660 bombers to Berlin for first time as a diversion for Rhine crossings. The escorting 332nd Fighter Group (the African-American Tuskegee Airmen), shoots down 3 German Me 262 jets and earns Distinguished Unit Citation.


1976

Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery, the most famous British soldier of modern times, died early today. He was 88 years old. Lord Montgomery died in his sleep at his country home in the south of England.
Roll of Honour – March 24

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1915
+NELSON, James
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 9th Bn. Private. 18089. Died 24/03/1915. Born at Lismoney, Cookstown. He was a member of Tamlaghtmore Flute Band and a member of Lissan Company of Ulster Volunteers. He enlisted in Cookstown. James Nelson was at Randalstown with his bothers, Thomas and William, training with their battalion when he fell ill with a severe throat infection. He died from sceptic poisoning. Ballygoney Presbyterian Churchyard, near Drummullan. Cookstown WM, Molesworth Street Presbyterian Church RH

1916
+HUMPHREYS, Denis
Royal Irish Rifles, 8th Bn. Private. 1478. Died 24/03/1916. in No 6 Stationary Hospital, Le Havre. Born 16/07/1896. Son of Duncan Humphreys and Jane nee McLarty or McClarty, farmers of Layde, Cushendall. He was the brother of Canadian soldier Private 413050 John Humphreys, who died on the 12/05/1916.
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1917

+BLACKADDER, T
Royal Irish Rifles, 9th Bn. Rifleman. 17/709. Died 24/03/1917. Son of Mrs. A. Blackadder, of 34, Tobergill St., Belfast. Pond Farm Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium

+HEMPHILL, Richard Patrick
RFC and 6LR. Captain. Accidentally killed at Heliopolis, Egypt on the 24/03/17 age 23. Born in Birr, King’s County. He was the son of the Rev. Samuel and Flora Margaret Hemphill of Drumbeg Rectory, Dunmurry. Cairo War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt, row F, grave 203

+WATT, R
Royal Irish Rifles, 9th Bn. Rifleman. 19/603. Died 24/03/1917. Pond Farm Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium

1918

+ARCHER, William
Canadian Infantry, 87th Bn. Private. 438346. Died 24/03/1918. Son of Edward and Emily Archer. Born 25/07/1881 in Caledon, County Tyrone. William Archer emigrated to Canada and was working as a lumberman before enlisting in March 1915. Sucrerie Cemetery, Ablain-St. Nazaire, Pas de Calais, France. Canadian Virtual WM

+BELL, William McNiece
South African Infantry, 4th Regiment. Private. 11073. Died 24/03/1918. Pozieres Memorial, Somme. Born 13/11/1880 at Ballylesson, Ballyclug, Ballymena. Son of farmers John and Mary Bell. The family were later at 68, Queen Street, Ballymena. Husband to Hanna Grace Bell, of 5 Waring
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Street, Ballymena. William was a farmer. Pozieres Memorial, Somme. Harryville Presbyterian Church RH.

**BEST, John**
Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Bn. Rifleman. 17/1379. Died 24/03/1918. John, from Brussels Street, Belfast followed his elder brother Thomas and enlisted in the Royal Irish Rifles when he was 18 in 1916. Initially posted to the 10th Battalion (South Belfast Volunteers) he was posted to 2nd Battalion early in 1918 when the 10th Battalion was disbanded. Pozieres Memorial to the Missing, Somme, France

**COCHRANE, John Harvey**
Royal Irish Rifles, 12th Bn. Sergeant. 18891. Died 24/03/1918 at St. Quentin. Born at Craigs, Cullybackey. His wife Jeannie lived at 32, Harperstown, Cullybackey. He was the brother of Thomas and Hugh (Canadian Forces). Pozieres Memorial to the Missing, Somme, France

**CROWE, Thomas**
2 RIR. Sergeant. I274. KIA on the Somme on the 24/03/1918. Age 26. Born in Dunmurry, Co. Antrim, he enlisted at Lisburn. Son of Mrs. E. Crowe of 9 Courtrai Street, Belfast. Pozieres Memorial, Somme, France, panels 74 to 76

**GILLESPIE, James**
GRiffin, Albert.

2 RIR. Lewis Gun Section. Rifleman. 5930. Reported missing from the 24/03/1918 and still listed as missing on the 17/05/1918 he was subsequently confirmed as having DoW in Germany on the 24/03/1918. Born in Blaris, he lived and enlisted at Lisburn. His mother, Mary Griffin died on the 29/10/1920, his father, Thomas James, on the 27/03/1942. They had lived at 41 Sloan Street, Lisburn and had another son serving in the RE. On 10 May they had a short notice included in the Lisburn Standard saying that they, “would be glad to receive further news”. Albert was probably the brother of Thomas Griffin, who died four days later. Pozieres Memorial, France, also on the headstone of his parents grave in Blaris Old Cemetery.

HOPPS, Robert

2 RIR. Rifleman. 6469. KIA on the Somme on the 24/03/1918. Age 23. Born in Lower Ballinderg, Co. Derry, he enlisted at Brookshill, Co. Lomdonderry. Son of Edward and Annie Hopps of Ballinderry Lower, Lisburn. Pozieres Memorial, France

JOHNSTON, Thomas

Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Bn. Rifleman. 40881. Formerly 2186 of the North Irish Horse. Died 24/03/1918. Born March 1896 at Ballynamaddy, Dundermot, Glarryford. Son of William James Johnston and his wife Lizzie nee Stewart, both from Ballynamaddy. In 1911 the family were farming at Ballyreagh, Clough and Thomas was woking as a agricultural labourer at Ballybogy, Clough. He was wounded at Third Ypres (Passchendaele) in 1917 and then died in
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action at Cugny. Pozieres Memorial, Somme and at Clough Presbyterian Church.

**+McALEESE, James**
Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Btn. Corporal. 5848. Died 24/03/1918. Born 11/09/1886 at Church Tamlaght, Rasharkin. He was the eldest of three surviving children of stonemason Peter McAleese, Dreen, Rasharkin and Catherine nee McMullen, Ballydonnelly, Rasharkin. His brothers were Patrick and Daniel. The couple had married in Rasharkin RC Church 24/08/1884. Grand Seracourt British Cemetery.

**+McCORMICK, Thomas**
Royal Irish Fusiliers, 1st Btn. Private. 20909. Died 24/03/1918. Born 20/10/1895 at Drummaul, Randalsworn. Son of John McCormick and Sarah nee Campbell. They were living at Railway Street Place, Harryville at the time of their son’s death. Pozieres Memorial, Somme, France

**+NEWELL, Charles**
Royal Engineers. Captain. Died 24/03/1918. Aged 37. Son of Joseph and Mary Newell of Dungannon. Charles was born about 1881 in Stewartstown, Co Tyrone. His father was a victualler (butcher) on Perry Street. The family lived there. Charles was living with the family. He was an architect and surveyor. St Hilaire Cemetery, Frevent, Pas de Calais, France. Dungannon WM, Holdfast LOL 1620 RH, St Anne’s C of I Church RH

**+PARKER, TJ**
Royal Irish Rifles, 12th Btn."C" Coy. Rifleman. 13/18600. Died 24/03/1918. Age 25. Son of John and Annie Parker, of
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Slievenaman, Bryansford, Co. Down. Ham British Cemetery, Mjuille-Villette, France

+ROBINSON, David

2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles. Rifleman. 18/20677. Killed in action 24/03/1918. Aged 26. Son of Hugh and Alice Robinson nee McCullough, of Castle Place, Newtownards. Pozières Memorial, France. 20th October 1918 Northern Whig

1941

+McGURRIN, Michael


1944

+SCOTT, Gerald Eagleson

RAFVR. Flight Sergeant. 1023462. Died 24/03/1944. Age 20. 514 Sqd. Avro Lancaster LL625 went down on 24/03/1944 in one of the last major air raids on Berlin. Gerald Scott was a wireless operator and air gunner on Lancaster Bomber LL625 JI-C. The crew was on their 15th operation over Germany. On the homeward leg near Woerlitz, about 12 km east-north-east of Dessau disaster struck. The crew was returning to Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire. Son of David and Elizabeth Scott, of Belfast. Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery, Germany
The Battle Honour RHINE was awarded to The Royal Ulster Rifles for its actions during the Rhine crossing in Operation Plunder in which Operation Varsity was key, between 23 March and 1 April 1945. The distinction has been carried forward and is emblazoned on The Queen’s Colours of the 1st Battalion and the 2nd Battalion of The Royal Irish Regiment.

OPERATION VARSITY - ROLL OF HONOUR

+AYRES, Richard John
Royal Ulster Rifles, 1st (Airborne) Btn. Sergeant, No. 7012633 Born on the Isle of Anglesey, he resided in County Armagh, Received the C-in-C’s Certificate for his actions in Normandy and was i/c the company snipers. Killed in action on 24/03/1945 on Operation Varsity. Reichswald Forest War Cemetery

+BELL, George William
Rathfriland Street, Banbridge. Reichswald Forest Cemetery, Germany

+BELL,
7022506 No record on CWGC web site

+BOYD, Norman
Royal Ulster Rifles. 1st (Airborne) Btn. Rifleman. 7022506. Died 24/03/1945. Aged 21. He joined the Battalion in May 1943. Son of Francis and Margaret Boyd, 29 Upper Charleville Street, Belfast. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Groesbeek Memorial, Holland

+BRUNTON, James Joseph
Royal Ulster Rifles. 1st (Airborne) Btn. A Coy. Born in Eire, he resided in Belfast prior to enlisting. Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Germany

+BRYANS, Robert Charles

+DONALD, Thomas

+ELKIN, John
Royal Ulster Rifles. 1st (Airborne) Btn. Rifleman. 6983243. Died 25/03/1945. Son of Thomas and Sara Jane Elkin,
Drumquin, Co. Tyrone. Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Germany. No record CWGC

**+HENRY, Hugh**

**+HEWITT, Hugh Robert**
Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, 2nd Btn. Private. 5382034. Died 24/03/1945. He served in 2nd Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry during World War Two. They made up part of 6th Airborne Division on D-Day, defence of the Ardennes, and the crossing of the Rhine during Operation Varsity. He had been in sickbay and discharged himself to take part in the campaign. Hewitt’s glider crashed on landing killing the Co. Down man. Born in 1917, he was the son of William Hewitt and Mary Hewitt of Kilmood, Co. Down. He married Hilda Ellen Heard of Sheldon, Birmingham, England during the war. The wedding took place between July and September 1943 in Lambeth, Surrey, England. Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Kleve, Germany.

**+HYDE, WW**
LENIHAN, John

MOORE, James

McCULLOUGH, Joseph

McCUTCHEON, William James

NOLAN, George

SPENCE, David Topping
Royal Ulster Rifles. 1st (Airborne) Bn. Rifleman. 7018486.
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Died 24/03/1945. From Coniston Street, Belfast. His father served in the First World War. Reichswald Forest War Cemetery

+STOTHERS, David

+THOMPSON, Samuel,

+WALSH, Philip

CWGC web site

+WARING, Samuel
Royal Ulster Rifles. 1st (Airborne) Btn. Rifleman. 7021324. Died 24/03/1945. Aged 22. The son of Samuel and Elizabeth Waring of Downing Street, Belfast. He was reported as missing in action on the Rhine in the Belfast Telegraph of 17/09/1945. Venray War Cemetery

Acknowledgment - “The Rifles are there” by David Orr and David Truesdale. Published 2005 by Pen and Sword. ISBN 1 84415 3495

1945

+GRAY, Robert
RAFVR. Flight Lieutenant. 180030. Died 24/03/1945. Aged
27. attd. 1 Wing, The Glider Pilot Regiment, A.A.C. Son of John and Mary Gray, of Ballymena. Runnymede Memorial, Panel 265. High Kirk Presbyterian Church RH

+McLEAN, James
RAF. Corporal. 647093. Died 24/03/1945. Age 23. Son of John and Jessie Mclean, of Ballyblack, Newtownards. Jakarta War Cemetery, Indonesia

+McWILLIAMS, Francis

VETERANS

McCARTHY - O’LEARY, Heffernan William Denis

A/Lt Col Heffernan William Denis McCarthy-O’Leary, known as Donagh, who commanded 1 RIR (1929 - 1933) was a Royal Irish Fusilier. He was appointed DSO and also earned the MC during WW1 while it is generally believed that his work in the March retreat merited the VC. He commanded the Royal Irish Fusiliers in India in the 1920s and, as a brevet colonel, the Agra garrison.

An extremely popular and caring officer, he never married and lived like a monk. His sisters accompanied him to India and acted as hostesses for functions. The War Office had cut one meal each day for soldiers as an economy measure. Donogh McCarthy-O’Leary reinstated the lost meal for the Faughs, paying for it from regimental funds. Some of those
funds came from fines levied on NCOs and WOs for using bad language!

He also had a sense of humour. One of his officers was home in Ireland on the ‘long leave’ in 1930 where he met his future wife.

However, the CO’s permission was required before marrying and so he sent a cable to Akbar Barracks, Agra, asking for approval from Donogh McCarthy-O’Leary. He received a reply that read, ‘Cannot approve, but will not disapprove.’

He commanded 158th Brigade 1933 - 37 when he retired. He was recalled 20/09/1939 as CO HQ Blackdown and Deepcut.

A devout Roman Catholic, Donogh McCarthy-O’Leary is remembered in St Patrick’s (C of I) Cathedral, Armagh, by a beautiful memorial in the Chapel of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Died 23/03/1948

McVICKER, David  
March 24

Every day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

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houstonmckelvey@mac.com
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 houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com

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