

PRESS RELEASE.

The French Government are presenting, to the Irish Government replicas of colours of Regiments of the Irish Brigade which distinguished itself in the service of France and won undying fame on so many battle-fields of which the most renowned are perhaps, Ramillies, Blenheim, Fontenoy and Landen where Sarsfield died. The colours are those of the regiments of Berwick, Bulkeley, Clare, Dillon and Walsh. The reproductions have been specially made and are very accurate copies of the flags in actual use by those regiments in the eighteenth century. They are in silk and are attached to staffs in the way in which this was done at that time.

The presentation will take place at noon on the 11th May in Dublin Castle (Upper Yard). This date was chosen as it is the anniversary of the battle of Fontenoy which took place on the 11th May, 1745. A general of the French army, General Suard, will come from France to present the flags to the President of Ireland. The presentation will be made with military ceremonial in the presence of the Taoiseach, the Minister for External Affairs, the Minister for Defence and other members of the Government, the French Ambassador and representatives of the Defence Forces, the Universities and Cultural Bodies. The music to be rendered by the No. 1 Army Band will include airs associated with the Irish Brigade.

Department of External Affairs.

6 Bealtaine. 1959.

Address by the President on the occasion
of the presentation of replicas of the
flags of Irish regiments in the French
Service.

(11th May, 1959)

Táimid tagaithe le chéile inniú ar ocaid chumhnithe chath Fontenoy, le cairdeas ár dhá dtír lena chéile a chomóradh. Is stairiúil an cairdeas sin agus is onórach. Cuimhnimid ar ghlóir chine Gael i seiribhís na Fraince, agus ar fháilte mhuintir na Fraince roimh na saighdiúirí seo ó Éirinn, a bhain clú agus cáil amach i mórchuid coimheascar ar fuaid na hEorpa. Ba dhorcha an aois sin in Éirinn ach ba ghlórmhar, nuair a scríobh an file:-

"A Phádraig Sairséal slán go dtí tú
ór chuais don Fhrainc is do champaí scaoilte".

Cé gur fágadh muintir na hÉireann sa bhaile, an uair sin, claoite fé ainriail na nGall, dob árdú meanman dóibh scéala gach catha. Fiú cath Landen ag ~~Brabant~~ i bhFlondras, inar míchadh "lonnradh teasta an tSairséalaigh", — ~~mar~~ a phuaidh na "Géithe Fiáine" an lá sin, do scríobh an file Déibhí Ó Bruadair:-

"Is liachtain leasaithe ar chiach do charad-sa
An sian seo leathas gur bhuaidh tú an lá".

Ba mhar a chéile do mhuintir na hÉireann ar chlos scéala gach chatha dhóibh. Ba bhrón leo ar cailleadh dá gcáirde. Ba gheal leo laochras a gcine á nochtadh ar an mór-roinn; agus b'abhar bhuíochais dóibh muintir na Fraince a chuir fáilte rompu sna laethe dorcha céanna.

I am very happy to accept on behalf of the Irish people these excellent replicas of the flags of the Irish regiments which fought with such distinction in the service of France. It is most fitting that this presentation should be made today on the anniversary of the battle of Fontenoy, of which you, General, have given us such a masterly picture. That battle, described by one of your historians as an almost legendary victory, has long held a special place in the imagination and the memories of our people because of the part played in it by the Irish Brigade and because of the eloquence with which it inspired our patriot poet, Thomas Davis.

The story of the Wild Geese, as the members of the Irish Brigade were called, is a chapter, at once poignant and stirring, in our history.

After Aughrim and Limerick "the homeless troops, the banished men, the exiled sons", found a hope in France and manned those regiments which stood shoulder-to-shoulder with French troops throughout the whole of the 18th Century. Writing a century and a half later, Michelet speaks movingly of the "four hundred thousand Irishmen who, in less than two centuries, fought in our armies". This is impressive testimony to the extent and the depth of the relations between the two countries in those times when, in the words of distinguished Irish writers, "Paris was nearer to the ordinary people of this country than Dublin" and France was "the second home of exiled Irishmen".

The ties between Ireland and France rest on a common Celtic heritage and on common Christian traditions. These ties were well recalled by my friend, M. Vincent Auriol, when I had the honour of being his guest at the Elysée nine years ago. Speaking on that occasion of our two peoples the President of the French Republic said:- "We are of one stock and, if we like to describe ourselves as Latins, we also gladly acknowledge our Celtic origin. Gauls and Gaels exchanged not only material treasures but also the things of the spirit. Down through the centuries we find you associated with us in our triumphs as in our tribulations". The Irish visitor to France can still today find many milestones of our association over those long centuries - Luxeuil recalling St. Columbanus in the sixth Century, the Shrine in Troyes which testifies to the close friendship between the great St. Bernard and our St. Malachy in the twelfth, the church of St. Patrick in Rouen which reminds us of the close commercial intercourse between the two nations in the sixteenth century. But, on this occasion, it is right to stress the mutual attachment manifested in the military domain; that attachment so clearly marked by the Irish Brigade in the service of France; which the Hoche and the Humbert expeditions sanctioned; which is in a manner perpetuated by the presence of several Irish names among the Generals listed on that monument to French military glory, the Arc de Triomphe in Paris; and which finally is recalled to us daily by our national flag of which the design was brought to Dublin from Paris in 1848.

These standards shall have a place of honour among us and will serve as a perpetual reminder of our close historic friendship. The gracious gesture of your Government in presenting them is most warmly appreciated.

Qu'a la veille de quitter mes fonctions de Président d'Irlande
l'un des mes derniers actes officiels soit de recevoir de vos mains
actes officiels soit de recevoir de vos mains

ces enseignes me cause, Général, une joie particulière. Depuis ma prime jeunesse, j'ai toujours ressenti une affection et une admiration spéciales pour votre pays - une affection et une admiration qui n'ont fait que croître en raison des associations suivies qu'il m'a été donné d'avoir avec la France pendant toute ma vie. Pour moi, comme pour tant d'Irlandais, le nom de Fontenoy évoque à la fois la gloire française et l'amitié franco-irlandaise. Je suis donc très touché de recevoir de vos mains en ce jour anniversaire les drapeaux de ces régiments dont les services à la cause française ont symbolisé et scellé l'amitié qui a lié nos deux nations de l'aube de l'histoire.

Address by General Souard on the occasion of
the presentation of replicas of the flags of
Irish regiments in the French Service.

(11th May, 1959)

Monsieur le Président,

Je ne vous cacherai pas combien j'ai été honoré quand j'ai été désigné pour venir vers vous en cette occasion.

Je n'ignorais pas alors, il est vrai, que votre pays dans des temps lointains possédait déjà un état de civilisation avancé et que le Brehon y florissait tandis qu'une bonne partie de l'Europe était encore au stade de "nébuleuse", mais je connaissais seulement quelques détails de notre passé commun à travers l'histoire des siècles plus récents.

Ainsi, il m'a fallu me reporter aux meilleurs auteurs et faire mon profit de leur propre expérience, plus solide que la mienne.

Let us then take a look at this common background of ours - from the time when your country became the champion of liberty and freedom, when Irish genius and courage began to spark into life throughout the world.

United by their ideals and their faith, the Irish and French have always stood together. For a century, the ties which bound them were proved in the military field. Thus they fought together in the Seven Years War which began with the battle of Fontenoy, the anniversary of which we are celebrating today.

Though the Irish and the French do not claim any monopoly of soldierly virtues, it cannot be denied that they do both share to a very high degree the qualities of bravery and honour and a taste for danger.

It is indeed appropriate that your national anthem should be the "Soldier's Song".

As you all probably know, the gallant infantry which fought at the side of the French troops in the Seven Years War was known as the Irish Brigade.

To show you how they acquitted themselves at Fontenoy, I would like to give you, as it were, an aerial view of the battle.

Maurice of Saxony, at the head of 40,000 men and 50 field artillery guns, was awaiting the enemy on the road leading from Mons to Tournay between the village of Antoing and the river Escaut.

The King of France, Louis XV, was there in person to witness the battle.

Prince Maurice had organised a kind of temporary fortified front.

Along the southern part of this line, between Antoing and Fontenoy, villages had been turned into strongholds, with small points of resistance in between; the major part of the artillery had been placed in flanking positions at Anteing and Notre-Dame-des-Bois.

In the northern part of his line, between Fontenoy and Les Bois de Barry, was a gap.

Trees had been felled to make the Barry woods impassable and the line to the west of these woods had been extended further westwards by other field fortifications.

At the rear of the gap, the Prince of Saxony had stationed his army in a most unusual manner - a very shallow weak advance line and some way further back the bulk of his reserves and the entire cavalry.

The whole thing was a trap.

Hearing criticisms of the order of battle, King Louis XV is said to have retorted: "Monsieur le Maréchal, when entrusting you with the command of my army, I intended that every one should obey your orders; I shall be the first to set the example".

The Irish Regiments were placed in a position to play a decisive role in the battle and in the following order: First, the Regiment of Lally belonging to General Thomas Arthur Lally, Earl of Tullan a Daly; second, the Regiment of Clare, led by Viscount de Clare; third, the Regiment of Dillon, then under the command of Colonel Thomas Dillon, whom I would like to mention not only because he was killed while leading his troops to victory, but also because this regiment became the first "Marine Regiment" of the French Expeditionary Corps during the American War of Independence and distinguished itself on many other occasions. Fourth, the Regiment of Walsh, also known as the "Royal Irish". Like the "Dillon", it too was to take part in our overseas campaigns

We must not however omit a fifth Regiment, that of Berwick. This regiment, later formed from the remains of the "Clare", did not take part in the battle of Fontenoy.

The battle began at 5 a.m. between Fontenoy and the river Escaut. By 10 o'clock, the first phase was over.

About this time, the Duke of Cumberland, discovering the gap between Fontenoy and the Bois de Barry (to which I have already alluded), launched into it a huge column of 15,000 men. They naturally pierced the shallow first line and fell headlong into the trap.

Prince Maurice then ordered an attack from all sides, bringing the full force of his artillery to bear upon the column which was wiped out by artillery fire.

Without raising a point of strategy, I would however like to draw your attention to the modern conception of this battle; in it Prince Maurice of Saxony departed completely from the conventional strategy of the 18th century.

Together, the Irish and French suffered 6,000 casualties, most of them young men. They gave their lives for our country as well as for their ideals and I would like to pay tribute here today to their valour and their heroism.

Prince Maurice had a true genius for improvisation. When discussing his campaign and speaking of the mistakes of the enemy before the battle itself, he used to say: "Le tout est de le voir et de savoir en profiter".

On the eve of Fontenoy, he added: "Il ne s'agit pas de vivre mais de partir".

Inspired by such a leader and knowing what was at stake, the Irish Brigade fought magnificently.

This military partnership was only one element of the co-operation which, initiated after the collapse of the Roman Empire, was to persist throughout the centuries between our two countries in almost every activity of life, but particularly in the religious domain where the advantages we had derived from the work of the early Irish missionary monks were later to be in part returned in the form of the educational facilities afforded by our country to young Irish priests.

Time does not allow me to dwell on all these different aspects; some stages in the friendship cannot however be passed over.

Firstly, the coming to Ireland of St. Patrick, fresh from his journeys through Gaul.

And then, as if in exchange, St. Columban's mission to France, transforming as it did the life of the wild Eastern part of our border. The golden statue erected some years ago in the church of Luxeuil-les-Bains to this great monk bears testimony to the gratitude of the French people.

And about the same time, another Irish monk, St. Roin (O'Ryan) was preaching and converting the people of Argonne.

On the military side, there were the long line of Irish swordsmen, to some of whom I have already alluded. Forgive me if I omit many names and if I seem to mention specially the Dillons, it is because it was this family which remained constantly associated with the regiment from the start, the command passing successively from one member of the family to another.

This military picture would not be complete if I were not to say a word about a gallant French General, Maréchal St. Ruth, who came to Ireland to take part in the Jacobite War against William III and was killed at the Battle of Aughrim.

And now to return to the subject and to the purpose of this ceremony.

In the name of the French Army and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I present to you, Mr. President, five flags, the exact replicas of those under which fought the Irish Brigade in France. I would ask you to see in them a token of the friendship between the military traditions of our two countries and of our sense of gratitude towards your brave ancestors.

Throughout these long years with their ever-recurring periods of war, God Almighty has granted that our two countries might never lose hope. May He, in the future, bring us into even closer co-operation!

Mar fhocal scair guím fad-shaol chugat, a Uachtaráin.
Beirim mo bheannacht d'ár dtíortha araon agus guím rath ar Éirinn agus ar an Fhrainc agus an Aontas Francach.