

REMEMBERING THE SOMME

Man who captured the

Cecil Falls, an officer with the 36th (Ulster) Division, later produced a divisional history which was much acclaimed and set him on the path to become a noted historian and journalist. **GORDON LUCY**, of the Ulster Society, recalls his career

THE 36th (Ulster) Division was extremely fortunate in its official historian because Cyril Falls was to become one of the finest British military historians of the 20th century. Sir Michael

Howard, widely considered to be the United Kingdom's foremost military historian, has observed that The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division "contains some of the finest descriptions of conditions on the western front in the literature of the war".

Cyril Falls served with the division. His history is dedicated to the memory of two fellow officers: Harry Gallagher DSO who was killed at the Battle of Messines on June 7, 1917, and George Bruce, Brigade Major of the 109th Brigade, who was killed on October 2, 1918, near Dadizeele.

Falls' family background gave him a full and sensitive appreciation and understanding of the origins of the division and events leading up to its formation.

Explaining why his history did not begin with the British declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914, he wrote: "There are . . . certain local circumstances anterior to that declaration, which have an intimate connection with the particular division that is the subject

of this history, and so could not be omitted without robbing the latter of much of its significance.

"The Ulster Division was not created in a day. The roots from which it sprang went back into the troubled period before the war.

"Its life was a continuance of the life of an early legion, a legion of civilians banded together to protect themselves from the consequences of legislation which they believed would affect adversely their rights and privileges as citizens of the United Kingdom - the Ulster Volunteer Force."

In the following passage Falls betrays his Fermanagh origins: "The old clan-names of the Northumbrian and Scottish Borders were clustered thick together [in the Division]. A platoon would have five Armstrongs or Wilsons or Elliotts, a company half a dozen Irvines or Johnstons, a battalion half a score of Morrours or Hannas."

Falls was aware of that "the Covenant of the 17th century was taken almost as widely in Ulster as in Scotland" and he was conscious of the survival of "the old covenanting spirit."

He went on: "The writer of this book can bear witness from personal observation that it was not uncommon to find a man sitting on the fire-step of a front-line

trench, reading one of the small copies of the New Testament which were issued to the troops by the people at home.

"The explanation was that, on one hand religion was near to them; on the other, that they were simple men. They saw no reason to hide or disguise that which was part of their daily lives."

Cyril Falls was born on March 2, 1888, in Dublin but grew up in Co Fermanagh. He was the elder son of Charles Fausset Falls and Clare Bentham.

His father, an Enniskillen solicitor, was a leading Fermanagh unionist. He organised the selection of the Fermanagh delegates to the Ulster Unionist Convention of 1892, was involved in organising the signing of the Ulster Covenant in the county in 1912 and was the commander of the 3rd battalion of the Fermanagh Regiment of the UVF.

Between 1924 and 1925 Sir Charles Falls was the Unionist MP for Fermanagh and Tyrone at Westminster.

Cyril Falls was educated at Bradfield College, Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, the University of London and abroad.

As a boy he had reputation of being extremely idle but read widely, especially history.

At the outbreak of the Great War Cyril Falls was working as a clerk in the Foreign Office. Both he and his father - then 50 - took commissions in the 11th Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (Donegal and Fermanagh Volunteers).

His younger brother Leslie enlisted in the 10th (Irish) Division "simply because it was the first formed and, having hurried home from Canada, did not wait to join us".



Cyril Falls



ON GUARD: a soldier keeps watch

Cyril Falls served as a General Staff officer with both the 36th and the 62nd Divisions. He also was a liaison officer with the French.

A Francophile, this proved to be an inspired appointment.

He liked the French generals and officers and they liked him. He was mentioned in dispatches twice and awarded the Croix de Guerre with citations.

As a serving soldier, Falls indicated that if he survived the war he would like to write its history and was given the opportunity to do so.

The divisional history, published in 1923, greatly impressed Sir James Edmonds, head of the Historical Section (1st Branch) of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and he offered Falls a permanent staff, first as assistant historian and subsequently as senior historian. Between 1923 and 1939 he authored official histories of the British campaigns in Egypt and Palestine, and Macdonald as well as a volume dealing with The Retreat to the Hindenburg Line and the Battle of Arras.

In December 1939 he succeeded Basil Liddell Hart as the military correspondent of The Times, to which he had been an occasional contributor for years. Throughout the Second World War he wrote a long series of well-informed



CAPTURED: German prisoners being escorted through British lines