

Guillemont Service
Saturday 4th September 2021

Your Excellency, Chief Minister, Connétable, Ladies and Gentlemen

1. This is the first time that I have had the privilege of speaking on this, the anniversary of the battle of Guillemont. Here, at the heart stone, taken from that piece of Jersey granite that is a permanent reminder in Guillemont of the men of Jersey, part of the Jersey Contingent, who lost their lives at that battle and at other times during the First World War.

2. The Contingent was formed in December 1914 from volunteers of the Island's militia. It consisted of 6 officers and 224 NCOs and men and on 7th February 1915 it was attached to the 7th Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles. The men left the Island on 2nd March 1915 processing from this Royal Square where we stand down to the Weighbridge where they took the boat to England and then on to Ireland. Whilst there, the Company was joined by 73 additional men from Jersey bringing the total strength up to just over 300. On 9th September 1915, the Jersey Contingent left Ireland with the Battalion for further training at Aldershot, and was there inspected by Her Majesty Queen Mary.

3. They arrived in France on 20th December 1915 and between 27th December and 26th August 1916, remained on the Loos Hullock

front. They reached the town of Albert on 1st September 1916 and while defending Guillemont on 6 September and attacking the nearby village of Ginchy three days later they suffered heavy casualties, reducing the Contingent to a mere handful.

4. After a short rest, which enabled some of the injured men to re-join their friends in the Contingent, the Company was taken to Belgium on 26th September 1916, where they remained until the Messines battle which began on 7th June 1917. On the morning of 31st July 1917, the Company took part in the Third Battle of Ypres. After four days they were relieved as the Battalion had suffered heavily but went back to the Front on 6th August, relieved again on 10th August, only to return once more on 14th August, to face three attacks in 18 days.
5. In October 1917, it was decided to disband the 7th Battalion and amalgamate it with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles and it was during the time spent with this Battalion that the Contingent took part in the Battle of Cambrai. In December 1917, orders were received for the remaining members of the Jersey Contingent to join the 2nd Hampshire Battalion as many Jersey men were already serving with that Battalion and they have served from then until the Armistice.

6. Of the 300 members of the Jersey Contingent who left the Island in 1915, 77 were never to return, and many of the others returned with serious injuries. Because the major losses had occurred at Guillemont, it is there that a monument to the Jersey Contingent was erected on the 100th anniversary of that battle in September 1916. It is, as I said, a piece of Jersey granite, hewn from a quarry in Jersey and appropriately reflects the tough men from the island who gave their lives, and the pride we have in them. In that town, there are already memorials to others who lost their lives at Guillemont, and in particular those of the Royal Irish Rifles. It is accordingly fitting that there should be a memorial to our Jersey men in the same town. The links between Jersey and Guillemont endure and the Mayor of that town, Didier Samain, will be holding a commemorative ceremony at noon tomorrow.
7. You will all know that what we have here in Jersey, what we call the heart of the Guillemont Stone, was removed from it and brought back here as a symbolic and permanent memorial to the Jersey Contingent and indeed to all the Jerseymen who died abroad in the service of their country in the First World War.
8. In some ways it may seem strange to be attending ceremonies of this kind, returning to the events of 100 years ago and more. Why do we do it?

9. History teaches us of the things that can go wrong and the things against which we should be on our guard. The Second World War is a reminder that we need to stand up against evil regimes. The First World War is a reminder of how countries can reach the point of what seems to be senseless conflict causing huge and unnecessary loss of life. All of us need to remember that, and our children need to have that lesson along with us, because it is the pressure of ordinary people in a true democracy that influences the actions of our leaders. This indeed is one of the significant reasons we have remember all those who fought and lost their lives in those wars, especially today the Great War.
10. But we also remember them for another simpler, reason. They are ours, those men, they are part of our story and our culture. They answered a call that so many islanders have answered in the past and they paid a heavy price for doing so. They are ours, sons of this place, and we own and remember them with pride.
11. I would now like to invite Mr. Ian Ronayne to speak to us about some of those men.