

Luke and Edward Hartigan

- Casualties of

World War One

On the 11th of November 1998, the eightieth anniversary of the armistice, the Island of Ireland Peace Park at Messines, Belgium was officially opened by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, in the company of Queen Elizabeth II and King Albert of Belgium. It is located in the region where the 16th (Irish) and the 36th (Ulster) Divisions fought side by side in June 1917 and is dedicated to the estimated 50,000 soldiers, both Catholic and Protestant, from all parts of Ireland who perished during the First World War. On the 1st of July 2006, the Irish Government marked the 90th anniversary of the commencement of the Battle of the Somme with a moving ceremony held at the Irish National War Memorial Gardens in Islandbridge, Dublin. It is a sad fact that we, in an independent Ireland, have only recently begun to appreciate the contribution the Irish soldiers of the Great War have made to history. The horror, depredation and trauma that the soldiers endured would have been far more than most of us could possibly imagine. My grandmother, Catherine Johnson (nee Hartigan) lost her only two brothers in that war. For many years of her life she would have mourned their passing in silence.

Edward and Luke Hartigan both enlisted with the 8th Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers on the same day, the 9th of August 1915. They were the only sons of Patrick and Johanna Hartigan of Clonagh House, Reens, Ardagh, County Limerick. Luke was aged 21; Eddie was 19. They had three sisters, Sarah (Sadie), Mary and Catherine (Cuts). We can only guess why they both joined up. They lived on a large farm, with all the advantages of the outdoor life, but with little money for any independence. They would both have been experienced at horse riding and shooting, with Eddie particularly being renowned for having an accurate shot. The thought of a regular salary and the excitement of war would have been enticing to the lads. Recruitment to the British Army in the Rathkeale and Ardagh areas had been fairly successful. Four of their cousins from Tarbrook in Croom, brothers Timothy, Patrick, Austin and Martin Hartigan had signed up. Larry Roche of Dromin, a more distant relation, may also have had some influence on their



Edward Hartigan as
Lance Corporal, 1915

by Alan Johnson

decision. He was involved with the Irish Volunteers since their formation in 1913. When that movement split over the question of participation on Britain's side in the First World War, he had sided with Redmond and joined the British Army. He influenced many young men to sign up and he himself rose to the rank of Major. It was his signature, as a Captain in the 8th Munsters, that appears as attesting officer on the papers of Edward and Luke Hartigan on 20th August 1915.

The 8th Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers was raised at Buttevant Barracks in September 1914. It was one of the 'service' battalions created to augment the 'regular' battalions following the 1914 recruitment drive by the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener. It trained successfully at Buttevant, Fermoy, Mitchelstown, Kilworth Camp, Templemore, and Fermoy again before moving to Dettingen Barracks, Blackdown, England, in late August 1915. Luke and Eddie must only have been in Fermoy for a few short weeks before leaving for England. Edward was promoted from Private to Lance



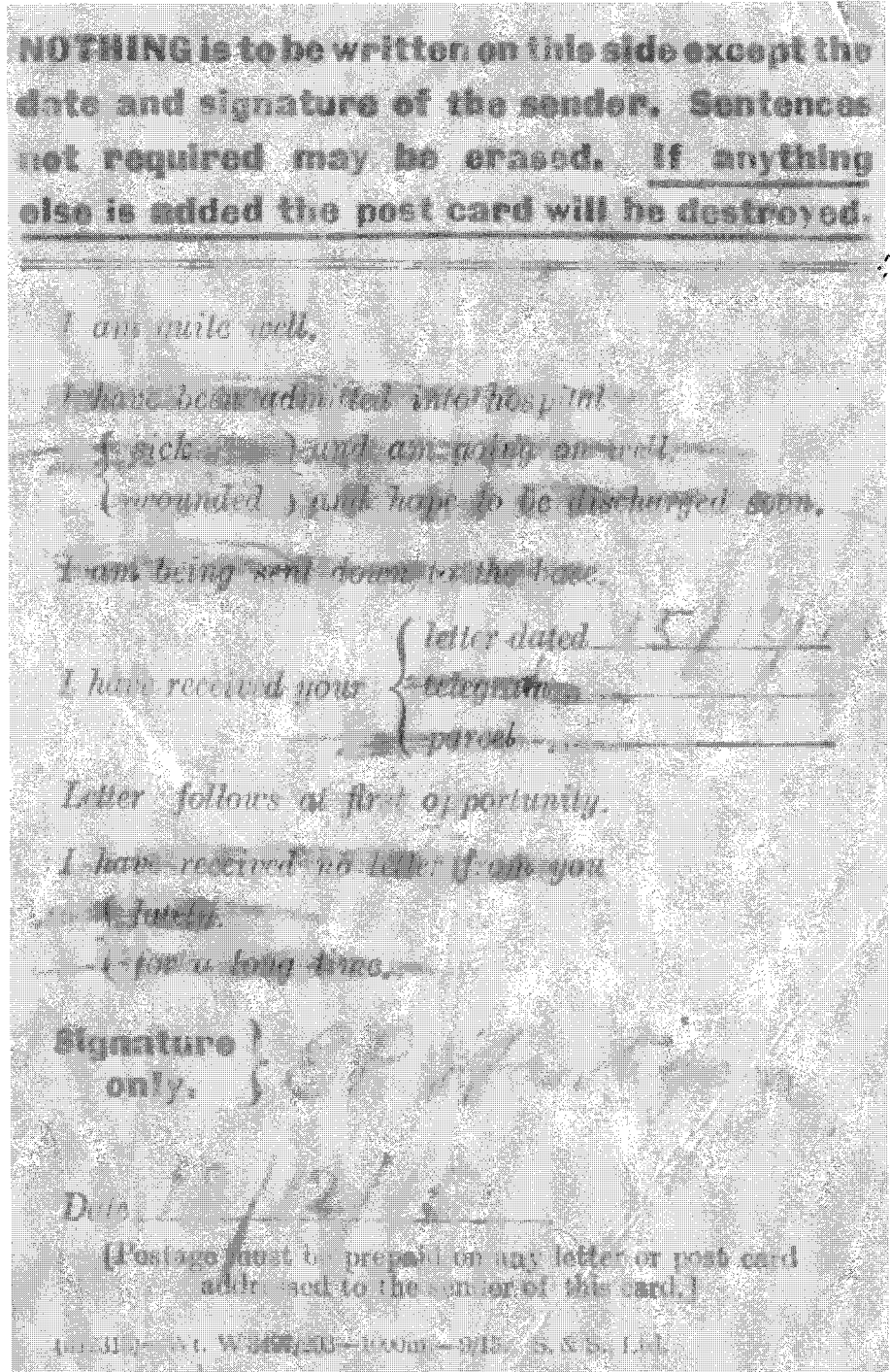
Luke Hartigan, 1915

Corporal on 14th September 1915 and to Corporal on 14th December 1915. Luke was also promoted to the rank of Corporal, but because most of his records were destroyed in London following a Second World War German bombing raid, it is not clear when these promotions took place.

On 17th December 1915, the 8th Battalion sailed from Southampton on the *S.S. Empress Queen*, docking in Le Havre at one o'clock the following morning. Later that same day, Eddie sent a postcard home informing his family of his safe arrival. Letter writing was to become an important part of life at the Front for Luke and Eddie. Letters were received with great excitement, and if parcels arrived, that was a special treat. On 14th February 1916, Eddie wrote a long letter to his mother at home:-

*"My Dear Mother
Many thanks for a very welcome letter, which arrived today. I had one from Father also with a letter of Uncle Dan's enclosed. The parcel arrived last evening and was as you may readily suppose warmly welcomed some of the contents being immediately placed in a safe place, you can guess where. These parcels are very welcome not only*

because they are really useful but because they tell us that our old tastes are not forgotten at home and they remind me of the time when I used to raid the cupboard where Sadie used to keep the cake and biscuits, has she anyone to guard against now? Cuts' tastes never were inclined that way. I think Sadie was her own best customer. Anyway you can thank her in my name for that last cake as it was the business as indeed so were all the cakes we have had from home. As you appeared to like my last long letter I will write this one describing our life since we went into the trenches. Of course I can't give the dates. Late one evening we were ordered to parade in full marching order, that is, with everything we had. At the hour named we fell in just in front of our billets and were marched off to the company stores. Here we were issued with two days rations and some cigarettes, of course we carried no blankets. After some preliminaries had been gone through, and we were fairly sick of standing with the marching-order on, we were marched off. After nearly an hour's marching we reached a certain village. Here we were formed in single rank and having been supplied with a guide (one of Jim O'C's company- they were in before us) we were marched along that open bit of road, which I have described before. As usual we were a bit nervous getting out on the road, but everything seemed quiet and we regained our courage. We had proceeded very nicely for about a half mile when one of our guns, which was concealed somewhere on our left, was fired. Suddenly the air was filled with the whirr, which we knew so well and two or three shrapnel dropped on the road some distance in front of us. The officer in charge of our platoon gave the order to take cover and we dash into a field and drop into a trench. The shelling continues and we proceed along the trench to our destination. We were to have gone by road, but that is out of the question now. An hour later we arrive fairly tired in the support trenches where we are to spend two days. Here our platoon is divided and sections one and two (mine and Corporal Purdys) go on with the guide, while three and four, with the platoon officer turn up another trench. After going on for about a hundred yards, I asked the guide where we are going and he replies that he does not know and that he is afraid he has gone wrong. I halted the party and the combined tongues of Purdy and myself, after abusing him thoroughly, spur him into action, and he leaves us to our fate shouting that he will report us to some officer. We look at one another and laugh, then we sit down to talk the matter over. Five minutes later, having decided to go back, we discover that our sections are missing - they have gone back without us. We retrace our steps and after some time, find them safely fixed in a couple of fairly comfortable



Postcard sent by Edward Hartigan on arrival in France

dug-outs. In we go and, throwing ourselves down, we prepare to enjoy a good rest. But we are feted not to long enjoy it for here is someone at the door telling us to turn out at once on a working party. There is no use in grumbling and off we go drawing ammunition to the front line. In the early hours of the morning we arrive back at our dugouts and we lie down for a sleep. Our rest is short for we are ordered to stand-to after an hour or so. The only redeeming feature being that we are compelled to remain in all day by shell-fire. Two days of this and we go back for two days in reserve. These days we spend in a cellar of a ruined town. I wish I could describe this town - before the war it must have been one of the most beautiful spots in France - now it is a mass of ruins. Our

two days here are soon spent and then we spend two more days in the front line. This is the most dangerous part yet and we are glad when our term is over. Back again for two days to the cellars and then we go back to our billets. Our rest here is short and after one day we are marched back to our present billets where I am welcomed by a large parcel from home. Soon I will write a letter describing this place but in the meantime I must conclude this by telling you that all of us are in the pink. Hoping all at home are the same. Ton of love to all from Eddie.

15-2-1916
 Since writing the enclosed letter I met Paddy Bennett. He desired to be remembered to all at home. He looked

better than I have ever seen him look at home. He was billeted in a village a few miles from us and was in with a message. Jim Connors told me tonight that he is just after receiving from home the startling news that he is killed. Luke and I were with him all the evening. Excuse scribbling. Love to all from Eddie."

The 8th battalion formed part of the 16th (Irish) division. This division suffered major losses in the 1916 Battle of the Somme, where more than half a million Allied lives were lost. For the 8th Munsters, the towns of Guillemont and Ginchy were places where casualty numbers were particularly high. On 9th September 1916, in the Guillemont region, the battalion had a terrible day. At 4.45pm, the soldiers, approximately 200 in number, left their trenches and advanced towards the German lines in the belief that a preceding artillery bombardment would have decimated the German defences. However, it was soon discovered that the artillery had not touched the enemy, and that the battalion was advancing onto strongly held German trenches, supported by machine guns. Almost eighty men were lost during the attack, with survivors having to seek temporary shelter in shell holes or scrambling back to the original trenches. By the time the Battle of the Somme ended on 18th November 1916, the 8th battalion was very weak. On 23rd November it was amalgamated with the 1st Munsters.

On 31st July 1917, the offensive known in history as the 'Third Battle of Ypres', or more commonly, 'Passchendaele,' began. It was intended to be Commander-in-Chief Sir Douglas Haig's Allied forces breakthrough in Flanders, and was meticulously planned. The battle continued until the fall of Passchendaele village on 6th November 1917. Gains for the Allies were achieved, but they came at great cost in terms of human life. Weather conditions that summer were appalling, with more rain than had been seen in forty years. The Flanders lowland soil was turned into a thick muddy swamp as a result of earlier bombardment that had wrecked the natural drainage systems. In addition, the artillery shells that had rained down in the days prior to the attack's launch had peppered the very ground that needed to be traversed by the advancing Allied forces. Luke and the 1st Munsters were heavily involved in the action and were experiencing their toughest period since their arrival in France. Around the 15th of August, when the battalion was at the Frezenberg ridge, between Ypres and Passchendaele, Luke Hartigan fell. The battalion war diary for that day reported four ordinary rank soldiers missing, and eleven wounded. Luke's body, like the bodies of so many other soldiers before and after him, was never recovered.

The names of Luke Hartigan and 54,895 others who died in the Ypres region between October 1914 and mid-August 1917, and who have no known



Part of the inscription on Menin Gate, Ypres

grave, are inscribed on the walls of the Menin Gate memorial in Ypres town. From 11th November 1929 to this day, (except for a period between May 1940 and September 1944), the Last Post has been played under the memorial at 8pm each evening by members of the Ypres Fire Brigade. There are always wreaths laid in memory of those who fought and died in the Great War. Armistice Day each year sees the Gate at the very centre of a substantial remembrance event, attended by thousands.

Eddie must have been shocked to hear that his brother had been killed. Luckily he was not with the 1st Munsters at the

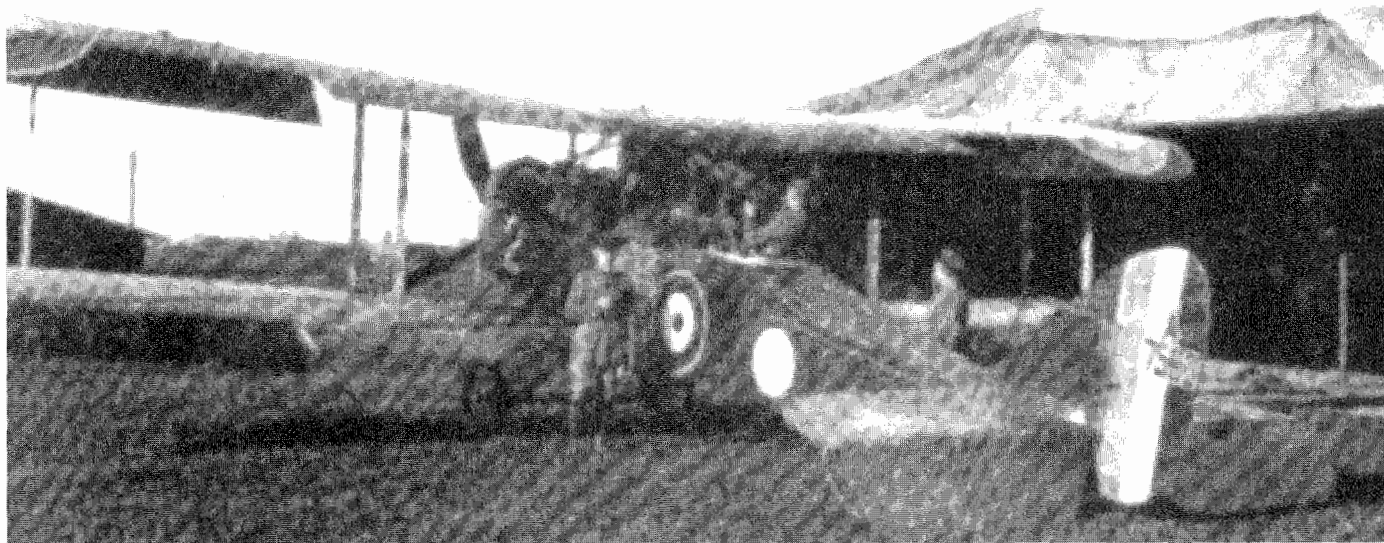


Edward Hartigan as
2nd Lieutenant, 1916

time. He had received a commission as temporary 2nd Lieutenant on 27th September 1916. Sometime around the middle of 1917, he decided to apply for a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). There was a constant appeal for volunteers from the Army, both commissioned and non-commissioned, to join the RFC. He was accepted into the RFC and was sent home for a few weeks before reporting for duty. It was soon after he left the 1st Munsters that Luke was killed. In September 1917, Eddie returned to the RFC and was attached to number 57 Squadron.

57 Squadron had been formed in June 1916 and was working with FE-2d aeroplanes prior to moving to France at the end of the year. By February 1917, the unit was ready for action and began offensive and reconnaissance patrols. In May 1917, the squadron began to convert to Rolls Royce-engined deHavilland DH4s, and in June, on completion of its conversion training, started long-distance bombing and photography. In July, oxygen-breathing apparatus and negative-lens bombsights were fitted to all aircraft, and thereafter both bombing and photography improved. The squadron was based in Boisdingham in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of Northern France between June and November 1917.

The DH4 was a two-seater biplane bomber designed in 1916 by Geoffrey de Havilland. It was armed with a single, forward firing 0.303inch Vickers machine gun for the pilot, and a 0.303inch Lewis machine gun on a ring for the observer. The bomb load was two 230lb or four 112lb bombs, carried in racks under the lower wings and fuselage. Sometimes called the 'Flaming Coffin', its huge fuel tank was dangerously positioned between the pilot and observer, hindering communication. The position of the fuel tank also meant that, if hit by enemy fire, both men were in danger of being burnt to death.



Aircraft of 57 squadron in German hands, 1917

German supremacy in the air in late 1916 and early 1917 had meant that flying had become an extremely hazardous occupation for Allied pilots and observers. Although inferior in aircraft numbers in comparison to the Allies, the Germans had

massed their aircraft (mainly Albatros DIIs and DIIs at that time) into elite fighter units that swept the skies with great success. The fighter units were termed 'Jagdstaffeln', meaning 'hunting units', but were shortened to 'Jastas'. They

adopted defensive tactics more or less throughout the war, waiting for the Allies to attack before striking. In April 1917, or 'Bloody April' as it became known, Allied losses peaked, with the British losing 912 pilots and observers. The life expectancy of a newly arrived British pilot was calculated that month to be a mere seventeen days! The famous 'Red Baron' (Manfred von Richthofen), who became the most successful pilot of the war, flew in a blood red Albatros DIII and scored an incredible 21 of his total of 80 victories during that month alone. It was only after the introduction of new fighter aircraft, such as the Bristol Fighter F2b, SE 5a and Sopwith Camel, that the tide slowly began to turn for the RFC.

Eddie flew as observer, paired with Captain David Sydney Hall, who flew as pilot. It was probably Eddie's first pairing, with most of his training being 'on the job.' Captain Hall, on the other hand, had flown with other observers prior to being paired with Hartigan. On 27th July 1917, Captain Hall was credited with his first victory over an enemy aircraft. His observer on that occasion, 2nd Lieutenant Pizey, was killed during the combat. On 20th August 1917, Hall's observer, Lieutenant Britton, was wounded by stray shots from a French SPAD aircraft while flying in the Ypres region. It would appear that being in an aircraft with Captain Hall was not the safest place to be!

Eddie took part in bombing missions from the 27th September 1917. On that day, Captain Hall and himself carried out two separate bombings in the Flanders region of Belgium, (Moorslede and Waterdamhoek). They flew again on the 28th and 30th of September. Bombs were dropped on all four occasions.

On 2nd October 1917 at 10.45am, five DH4s, led by Captain Hall, set out from Boisdingham aerodrome on a mission to bomb Abeele, a German aerodrome east of Roulers. The mission proceeded well and all bombs were dropped, with some observed success. On the return journey, however, while flying in formation at 16,200 feet over Roulers, the group was attacked from above by about 15 Albatros

PS Give my love to Edwin

57 Squadron
R.F.C.
B-E-F
23-10-17

My Dear Dan

Many thanks for your very welcome letter which arrived a couple of days ago. I was glad to hear that you were having a good time with the birds. My leave will come in late Nov or early Dec. so that there may be a few left for me to shoot when I get back. Bonquet on that night and left. It must have been a tricky job. Tom Slattery hasn't written yet. I have made up my mind not to write to him again until I hear from him first, as I have written 3 times now without an answer. He must be a lazy dog with the pen!!!! Glad to hear C.R. is looking well. I haven't heard from her since I was at Hythe, but I'm not worrying much at present. Got something else to go on with my bloy! My fingers are nearly all right now and I'm at work again. I had a hell of a scrap with a big bunch of Huns the other day. We got down four, two by the pilot and two by this kid. Some show! There was a big account of it in yesterday's Times (not the Irish one). I must conclude, thinking to hear from you soon.

Best wishes from your Eddie



Longuenesse (St. Omer) Souvenir Cemetery

DV scouts from *Jasta 18*. They were seriously outnumbered. A dogfight ensued that rapidly became confused. Captain Hall and 2nd Lieutenant Hartigan had some success, claiming four victories within a very short space of time. The victories were achieved in A7568, aircraft A6 of 57 squadron. The combat report written later that day by Captain Hall describes the victories. The encounter was far from one sided, however. Three of the five DH4s that set out on the bombing mission did not make it back across the lines. Two of the aircraft were hit and crashed, killing all four of the crew. The pilot of the third aircraft (A7583), 2nd Lieutenant Crane, managed to land his damaged aircraft safely, but only in enemy territory, and was captured. His observer, 2nd Lieutenant Inglis, was killed. The photograph shows this aircraft in German hands, the white disk on the fuselage being the unit marking for number 57 squadron. Leading the group of Albatros DV scouts that day was *Oberleutnant Rudolf Berthold*, commander of *Jasta 18*. He claimed victory over one of the stricken DH4s, bringing his total to 28. He went on to become one of Germany's top aces, with a career total of 44 victories.

Eddie suffered from frostbite of the fingers following that flight. This was not uncommon, because of the exposed nature of the observer's position and the altitude of the flights. He was unable to fly for a few weeks. His letter-writing was also affected, as he found it difficult to hold a pen. One of Eddie's closest friends at home, Daniel Johnson (who later married Eddie's sister Catherine), received a letter towards the end of October.

On 28th October 1917, Hall and Hartigan claimed another victory, again in the Roulers region. Having now claimed five decisive victories, Eddie became an air ace, a high honour. The pair's luck did not last, however. On 20th November

1917, the first day of the Cambrai offensive, A7568, with Hall and Hartigan aboard, left the aerodrome at 9.40am on a weather test. The weather conditions for flying were poor, with low clouds and mist. The plane carried two oxygen sets, a negative lens bombsight, two 112 lb bomb racks and a camera. They had no wireless. Nothing more was heard of the pair until a message was received at 5.30pm that the machine had been found wrecked at Les Alleux, with both pilot and observer killed. DH4 A7568, not yet three months old, was

returned to No. 1 repair-park and was officially written off on 26th November 1917. It had a total flying time of 140 hours.

Captain Hall and 2nd Lieutenant Hartigan were buried side by side in Longuenesse (St. Omer) Souvenir Cemetery in France.

On 23rd November 1917, a telegram was received in Rathkeale Post Office for P. Hartigan, Clonagh, Reens, Co., Limerick. It was the second such telegram received by the family within three months. It bore the following message: -

"Deeply regret to inform you 2/Lt. E.P. Hartigan Munster Fusiliers attached RFC 57 Squadron was killed in action November twentieth. The Army Council express their sympathy."

It was not uncommon for a close friend of the deceased to write a letter of sympathy to the bereaved family. 2nd Lieutenant William John Borthistle, of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers and number 25 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, put pen to paper on the 11th December 1917:

"Dear Mrs Hartigan

I really do not know how to write or what to say about poor Edward. I even yet cannot believe it.

You must forgive me for not writing sooner but for the past month I have been laid up with frostbite in both my hands and have been unable to hold a pen. It was just yesterday that I got the last of the bandages off.

I never got such a shock in my life. As



Memorial to Edward Hartigan in Longuenesse (St. Omer) Souvenir Cemetery

you know we were both on the same aerodrome and on the day he was killed I left here at 2.30 PM for a place 'down south' and did not get back until the afternoon of the 23rd.

It was during these three days that my hands really got so bad, and when I returned here on the 23rd, a pal told me that poor old Eddie had crashed. I rang up the recording officer of '57' and asked him about what actually happened. He told me that Eddie and his pilot (Capt Hall) were up on the morning of the 20th to test the air. The clouds were exceptionally low that day, but we had some very special work to do in relation to the 'Cambrai' advance. So we all simply had to do our best. Apparently what happened to them was that their machine got into a spin in the clouds and crashed between Aire and Cassel.

There is one thing at least Mrs. Hartigan we can be thankful for and that is that death must have been instantaneous in both their cases, no long lingering agony.

They were both buried in a lovely little cemetery quite near St. Omer. I can't give you the exact situation as it's rather of tactical importance while this War is on, but will let you know later.

I simply feel now that my best pal in the World has gone. The Munsters lost dear old Luke just after Eddie and I left them, that was a bad enough blow for me, as he was in my own platoon all the time I was with the 1st Battalion, then Eddie and I applied for the RFC together, came home together, and returned out here, but unfortunately could not get to the same squadron. However, after about seven weeks separation, by jolly good luck, we got on to the same aerodrome, and we saw quite a lot of each other until his Squadron was moved. They left here I think on November 22nd.

Now I may survive and get through this War, but I shall never forget both Eddie and Luke.

May I now tender to both you and Mr. Hartigan and family my most heartfelt sympathy to you all.

If there is anything further I could tell you or do for you, please let me know and I shall do my very best.

Please excuse awful writing.

Believe me. Yours very sincerely, W J Borthistle"

In the years immediately following the end of the War, there would have been occasional correspondence between the War Office and the Hartigan family. Both soldiers earned a trio of campaign medals, the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Eddie's pilot, Captain Hall, was posthumously awarded the Military Cross. The medal citation printed in the London Gazette on 6th April 1918 read: -

"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. While leading back his formation of five machines from a bombing raid he was attacked on eight



First World War memorial plaque to Luke Hartigan

different occasions by numerous enemy scouts. He himself shot down one in flames and another out of control, while his observer shot down two in flames. He has at all times, completed the task allotted to him, and set a splendid example."

The Hartigan family paid for a small inscription to be added to the headstone at Eddie Hartigan's grave. The words were simple, perhaps explaining how the family's faith helped them to cope with the double tragedy that had befallen them.

*"God's will be done
R.I.P."*

Luke and Eddie Hartigan would have had a small number of treasured items in their possession when they died. Eddie's possessions were sent home a short time after his death. The package consisted of some photographs, letters, a notebook, a wristwatch (damaged) and strap, two rosaries and a religious medallion. The next-of-kin of all soldiers from within the British Commonwealth, whose deaths were attributable to the War, received a memorial plaque and scroll. The soldiers full name was given without any indication of rank or honour, to show equality of sacrifice of all those who lost their lives. A scroll was designed to accompany the plaque. The last line of the message on the scroll read: -

"Let those who come after see to it that his name is not forgotten."

Catherine Johnson passed away in 1992, aged 93 years. A few years later a small inscription was added to her headstone in St. Mary's cemetery, Rathkeale.

*LUKE HARTIGAN 1893-1917
EDWARD HARTIGAN 1895-1917
KILLED IN ACTION DURING WWI
R.I.P.*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the help of the Charles, Frank, Kyran, Mary, Nell and Richard Johnson. I also wish to thank Patrick McNamara, Roger Nixon, Russell Smith, Gareth Morgan and the members of the Great War Forum on the website www.1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/ for their expertise and help in the research of this story.