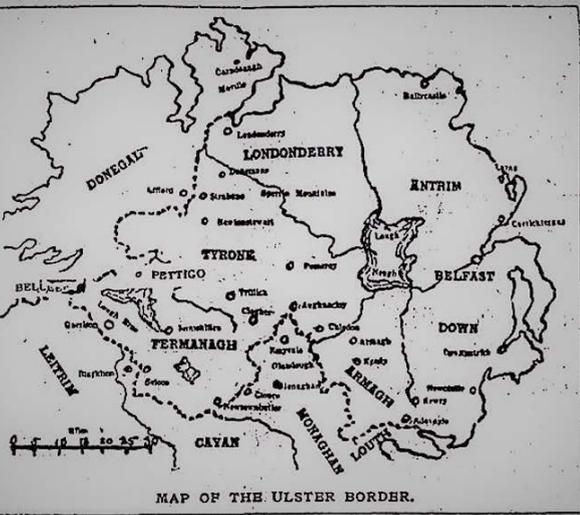


THE BATTLE OF PETTIGO AND BELLEEK - 100 YEARS



During early 1922, press reports often referred to the triangular patch of land between the counties of Donegal and Fermanagh as the “Pettigo and Belleek salient”. In April 1922, its strategic importance was reflected in the decision by the Irish government to place Army garrisons on the Donegal side of the two villages following the withdrawal of the RIC.

Meanwhile, to prevent a permanent split in the IRA after the signing of the Treaty, it was decided to use them in what became known as the ‘Northern Offensive’ against the newly established Belfast government.

IRA volunteers from Cork and Kerry as well as the six counties were relocated to the border counties including Donegal. Between the 27th May and 8th June 1922, the villages of Pettigo and Belleek became the location of the largest military engagement between Pro and Anti Treaty Forces, the Ulster Special Constabulary (known as the B Specials) and the British Army.



Free State and Anti Treaty Forces at Finner Camp, Co Donegal, June 1922

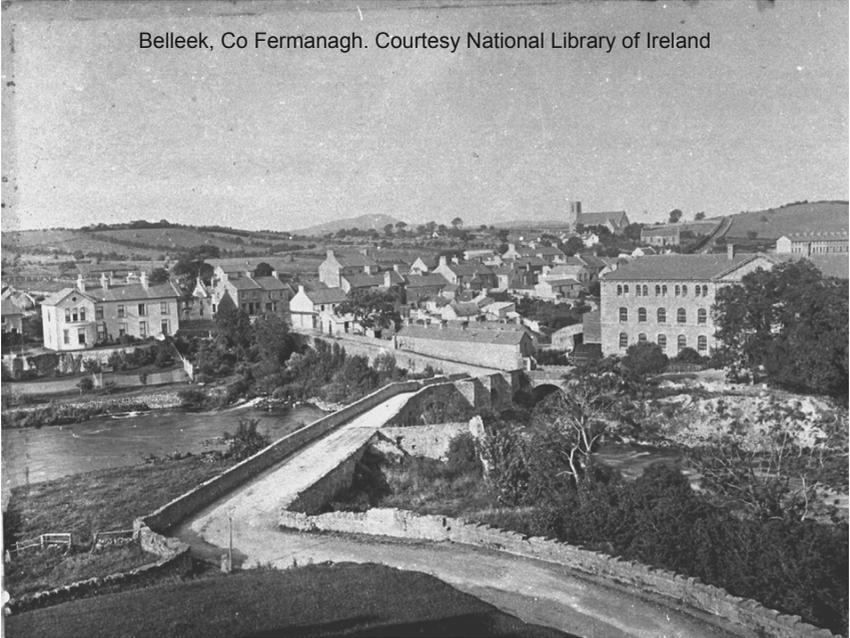
In Pettigo, one street separated from the rest of the village by a river, lay in Fermanagh, while another part of the village with the police barracks and railway station was in Donegal.

Pilgrims for Lough Derg at Railway Station , Pettigo, Co Donegal
Courtesy National Library of Ireland



The majority of Belleek lay in Co Fermanagh with part of it crossing over the River Erne into Co. Donegal where the battery fort overlooked the village. During this period, Belleek was only accessible by road from elsewhere in Fermanagh and Northern Ireland by crossing through Donegal and the Free State.

Belleek, Co Fermanagh. Courtesy National Library of Ireland



On the 27th May, a force of B-Specials arrived by boat and commandeered Magherameenagh Castle outside Belleek. They were forced to retreat following a gun battle.

Mrs Hazel Laverton, owner and pilot of the steam-yacht
The Lady of the Lake (renamed HMS Pandora)
with USC on Lough Erne, 1922



The Pro and Anti-Treaty forces in Pettigo began digging in as they came under fire from the British military on the Fermanagh side of the village. During this early period of fighting, Special Constable Albert Rickerby was killed in an attack on a convoy.

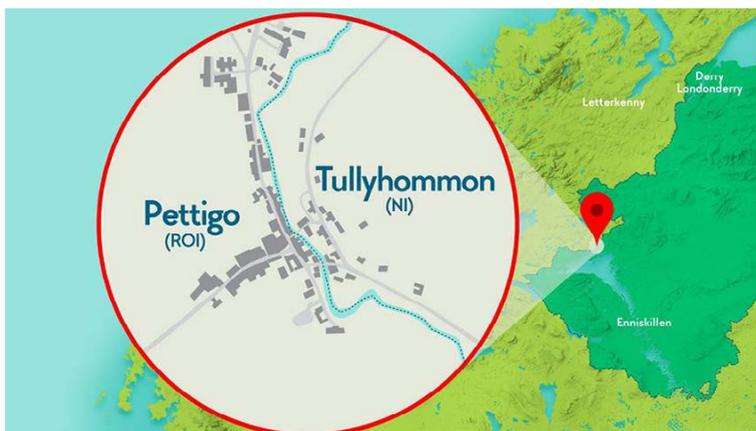
With petitioning from the Northern Ireland government, Winston Churchill sanctioned British troops to organise artillery attacks against the IRA positions. On the 1st of June, a combined force of troops from the 18th Infantry Brigade, supported by the RIC and the B-Specials, approached Pettigo. Air-cover was provided by a RAF squadron. Over the next few days various attacks and forays took place.





The Pettigo memorial was unveiled in 1953 by Minister of Defence, Oscar Traynor, in memory of those who were involved in the Battle of Pettigo

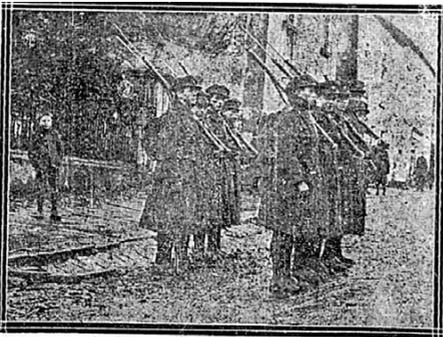
On the 4th June, several armoured cars drove through a barricade and moved up Main Street. Special Constable Thomas Dawson was killed by a sniper. Patrick Flood, Bernard McCanny and William Kearney of the Irish forces were killed during the ensuing battle.



Irish Free State Forces at handover of Belleek Fort 1924



The British took over the village and arrested the remaining men. Many of the inhabitants fled to Lough Derg, County Donegal and County Fermanagh. On 8th June, British forces took over Belleek fort, raising the Union Flag. As the fort was located in Donegal, which was now part of the Free State, its occupation was contrary to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Belleek fort was handed back to the Free State forces in August 1924.



After the British, the Irish soldiers—the Advance Guard of the Free State troops arriving in Pettigo.

Irish Independent, January 1923

Following the beginning of the Civil War, the Free State agreed to the creation of a “neutral zone” in the disputed area, controlled by the regular British Army.

The British army withdrew from the Irish side of Pettigo in January 1923 and Irish officials took over along with An Garda Síochána and the Free State army.

The Battle of Pettigo/Belleek – 100 Years

The Battle of Pettigo/Belleek, took place along the Donegal /Fermanagh Border in late May, early June 1922 in the period between the War of Independence and the Civil War. It was the last time that Pro and Anti Treaty Forces fought side-by-side against British forces. It was part of Michael Collins's Northern Offensive, which was intended to destabilise the Unionist state, and was also a reaction to sectarian violence against nationalists in the North. This was the only location in Ireland where Irish forces engaged with British forces in a stand-up fight with a defined battle line and the first time since the Easter Rising when heavy artillery was used in Ireland.

On Saturday 28th May 2022, working on a cross-border basis with Fermanagh County Museum, Donegal County Museum held a commemorative event in Pettigo and Belleek, which included talks by both national and local speakers, the premiere of a specially commissioned animation, part of the Bordering Realities Project, funded by the Creative Ireland Programme, a History Ireland Hedge School and a walking tour of the area. Speakers included Dr Éamon Phoenix, Dr Edward Burke, Dr Margaret O'Callaghan and local historians, Jimmy Baird, John Cunningham, and Pauline Gilmartin.

This commemorative event was funded under the Community Strand of the 2022 Decade of Centenaries programme by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

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