

Irish battle of Somme stamp is first to mark British military past

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Ireland has publicly acknowledged its British military past by issuing a stamp commemorating, for the first time, those who died during the battle of the Somme in 1916.

Next week the Irish government will break fresh ground by staging a state ceremony at the Islandbridge war memorial in Dublin to remember the thousands of Irish soldiers and those from the Ulster Division who perished in one of the bloodiest engagements of the first world war.

For decades those in the republic who volunteered to serve with British forces during the first and second world wars kept silent about their experiences and received no recognition. Poppies were rarely worn on Remembrance Day.

Public praise was reserved for those who participated in the 'blood sacrifice' of the 1916 Easter uprising and the war of independence which led to the withdrawal of British troops and the foundation of the Irish state.

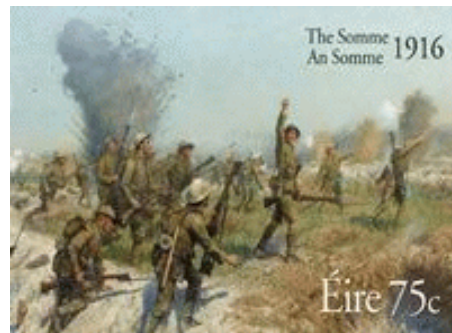
Earlier this spring the Irish government held the first state parade in Dublin for more than 35 years commemorating the uprising.

The ending of Northern Ireland's Troubles, however, has initiated a period of cross-border

reconciliation and renewed interest in those Irish men and women whose military service was sidelined by republican versions of history.

The 75 cent Irish stamp shows a painting, entitled *The Battle of the Somme - Attack of the Ulster Division*.

Both the 36th (Ulster) Division and the 16th



The 75 cent Irish stamp shows a painting entitled *The Battle of the Somme - Attack of the Ulster Division*

(Irish) Division took part in the battle. Politicians hoped the common experience of unionists and nationalists fighting alongside one another would heal rifts at home. Many volunteered for service in the belief that it would force the London government to grant home rule.

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