

My Kingdom



Etreux British Military Cemetery, France.

Lest we forget

Introduction

My Kingdom is an eight-hour historical fiction epic adapted from the novel of the same name.

Set during the period leading up to and including World War One, My Kingdom's prewar years test our sense of the exotic, the British Raj of India's North-West Frontier. The London suburb of Chiswick grounds our home front throughout the war. France, Belgium, and a circuitous route home from Germany pivot our experience into something truly compelling, the latter convincing us that hope remains our greatest ally.

My Kingdom draws on the historical record and real characters, as did other war movie classics. From the comradeship discovered in *The Bridge on the River Quai*, to the real-life dramas of *Lawrence of Arabia* and *A Bridge Too Far*, My Kingdom places the larger cinematic story within a more personal context, that of an individual soldier and his family, as they struggle to endure one of humanity's most tragic events.

In the same way Harry Faversham of *The Four Feathers* is defined not by cowardice, but by a loyalty to things greater than himself: his home, his land, and the love he nurtures in his heart, so too is our protagonist assailed by his own inner battles, courage never being one of them. Having taken the King's Shilling before meeting his wife, getting married, and having children, our protagonist is a soldier from every era, including today. He must divide the indivisible: his loyalty. He has taken an oath to serve his country, but he is also a husband and father. More than his own life is on the line. Will he survive? Will he come home?

My Kingdom

An eight-episode movie

Most people have a connection to World War One. Their great grandfather may have served, a relative may have fought and died on a foreign land. Yet even for those willing to remember the events of a century ago, scenes of trench warfare come to mind more than anything else. My Kingdom will broaden that perspective by exploring three separate storylines: the home front, the battlefield, and what a soldier endures while a prisoner of war.

In the spring of 1914, as depicted during our second episode of act one, few Londoners are concerned with what lay ahead. The shooting of the Archduke, the ultimatums that brought the world to a precipice, they all occurred during one fateful summer. That summer altered many lives, including a family with whom we will become intimately involved. When war was declared, Britain's professional soldiers were the first to land in France. Our protagonist, Private Daniel Donoghue, my grandfather, was among them. After returning from India, and transferring into the Army Reserves, Daniel is called upon again. He and his regiment land at Le Havre, France, within a fortnight of Britain declaring war.

Act two begins only ten days after Daniel lands in France. It was August 23rd before the British engaged the enemy, the advancing German Army. And with British Cavalry opening the war in typical chivalrous style, only a handful of officers knew what they were up against, Lord Kitchener being one of them. After accepting the position of War Minister, Kitchener told his war council: "We must be prepared to put armies of millions in the field and maintain them for several years." Unaware of how prophetic those words were, Britain's war began in Mons, Belgium. Eighty thousand British Soldiers, alongside the left flank of the French Fifth Army, were about to be overrun by 700,000 German troops.



The retreat from Mons frames a major turning point in our story. On the 27th of August, Daniel and his Irish regiment, The Royal Munster Fusiliers, are called upon to cover the 1st Division's retreat. During a daylong rear-guard battle, many Munsters are killed and wounded. Scores are caught behind enemy lines. Daniel is among those taken prisoner. My grandfather spent the next four years in a prisoner of war camp.

It's not until October that Daniel's wife Mary, and his two sons, Steven and David, learn of their loved one's fate. In the Times newspaper, Daniel's name is among the columns of those listed as

'Missing.' A letter home from the Sennelager P.o.W camp finally confirms that Daniel lives. Irish prisoners are soon moved to Limburg, the P.o.W camp where a significant subplot develops.

R. Munster Fus. ; Doherty, 69310 Gunner N., R.F.A. ; Donnelly, 6405 Pte. J., Donnelly, 7205 Pte. J., Donoghue, 7883 Pte. D., Donoghue, 6589 Pte. J., Donoghue, 8929 Pte. J., R. Munster Fus. ; Donoghue 33387 Driver N., R.F.A. ; Donoghue, 8675 Pte. T., Donoghue, 6004 Pte. D., Donoghue, 6779 Pte. J., Donoghue, 6111 Pte. J.

Prisoners are recruited by Roger Casement, an Irish nationalist intent on freeing his nation from Britain's

grip. With rifles and ammunition provided by the Germans, Casement has arranged to land his newly formed Irish Brigade on Ireland's west coast. They intend to evict the British from Irish soil.

Surviving in a prisoner of war camp supports the middle of our story. The home front is just as important though. Until parcels, including food, clothing, and other day-to-day necessities arrived from home, living conditions for prisoners were intolerable. Starvation was the norm. Things improved over time, however, especially at Limburg. Letters and parcels from home become Daniel's lifeline to his loved ones. Mary does her own part by volunteering at her local hospital. She cares for returning war wounded, and every recovering soldier projects onto her his vision of what a perfect nurse, his saviour, represents. This sets up three; act two concludes with a tragedy that sets Daniel in motion.



Mary unfortunately succumbs to an emerging influenza epidemic, and Steven and David are sent to an orphanage in the English countryside for safety. The word 'orphanage' elicits dreadful memories for Daniel, having grown up in one himself. During a desperate escape from Limburg, we are carried through the final part of our adventure: Daniel's epic journey home.

Throughout our story, Daniel's best mate, Sully, is at his side. From India to Limburg, even during their escape, the pair remains inseparable. But when Daniel is shot evading recapture, and Sully is returned to Limburg, each are left unaware of the other's fate ... until war's end. When Sully is repatriated from Germany and returns to London, he discovers that Daniel has in fact survived. When they meet in the cemetery where Mary is buried, we are treated to a reunion worthy of great cinema.

My Kingdom will represent many things to many people. It is a buddy story, a war epic, it embodies love in its many forms. I wanted it to be a survival story most of all. If my grandfather had not been captured at Etreux, I am certain he would not have survived Ypres, let alone the entire war, and this story would never have been written. I am proud to have done my small part for remembrance. I think my grandfather would agree, it is the noblest of our duties.

Our eight-episode movie*

Episode One. The Pilot:

Episode One's Teaser sequence opens with a ferocious battle, which took place just weeks into WW1. The full real-life battle unfolds in Episode Three. From there, we are transported into the past. Our protagonist is posted to India's North-West Frontier. As a young man, Daniel once coveted this posting, the exotic Raj. By now, however, he is a husband and father. This familiar duality of roles becomes the source of empathy and internal conflict. Daniel goes on to fulfill his duty with honour, even exemplify himself during a Punitive Expedition, until our first story comes full circle, and Daniel returns home.

Episode Two:

In the spring of 1914, Daniel completes his Regular Army service, and he transfers into the Army Reserves. Whether we are familiar with the period's historical record or not, viewers will become immersed in one family's experience. How they deal with the events leading to war will broaden our appeal and secure loyal followers. My kingdom will accurately connect to historical events and timelines. When Britain declares war, Daniel is recalled to active duty. He must leave his family once again.

Episode Three:

Daniel and his regiment land in France on August 13th. In less than two weeks, the British Expeditionary Force will encounter the enemy. Until then, General Murray, the BEF's Chief of the General staff, takes us inside British high command. Patrick Curtain, Daniel's father-in-law, is an avid reader of war news, and his home-front perspective compliments General Murray's. We begin to understand what awaits the BEF. During the ensuing retreat from Mons, Daniel's battalion, The Royal Munster Fusiliers, is ordered into action. Though heroically executed, the Irish regiment is vastly outnumbered during a daylong rear-guard action. The day will forever be remembered as a disaster for the Munsters. Daniel helps to bury the fallen. Our Pilot Teaser is drawn from this real-life event.

Episode Four:

In the wake of battle, Daniel has been taken prisoner. He has suffered a minor flesh wound, but that doesn't stop him from treating his fellow wounded soldiers. Our story expands as rapidly as does the war. Real characters, such as Sir John French and General Joffre, are respectfully brought to life again. When the Battle of the Marne ensures the war will go on, Daniel is transported to Sennelager, a P.O.W. camp in



Germany. It's late October when Mary finally learns of Daniel's fate. Completing Episode Four, all Irish prisoners are then moved to a new P.o.W. camp in Limburg.

Episode Five:

In early 1915, Daniel learns by letter that he is a father again. Roger Casement, an Irish nationalist, arrives at Limburg in order to recruit prisoners to his newly formed Irish Brigade. With German assistance, Casement intends to force England to fight on another front. Camp life is made worse by Casement's recruitment tactics: psychological coercion, food deprivation. Throughout this ordeal, a new kind of prisoner begins to arrive at Limburg. Volunteer soldiers are being captured all along the front. They bring with them a variety of pre-war career talents. A large package from home arrives at Daniel's barrack, and a music teacher turned soldier soon lifts everyone's spirits with his newly acquired violin. On the Homefront, Mary volunteers at her local hospital. She also convinces her mother to purchase a piano and play for convalescing soldiers on the wards where she works. Another letter from home brings us full circle again, however. Daniel learns his newborn son has died. The above photo of a French orchestra at Limburg serves as an example of how still sepia images can be brought to life in video throughout our series.



Episode Six:

A montage of familiar battles carries us forward through time to the summer of 1918. A still image of the Munsters at Rue de Bois, which F. Montania captured in a painting, comes to life. As the soldiers march toward the front, relevant text about casualties is superimposed. Scenes from The Somme, 1916, and Passchendaele, 1917, do the same. Daniel has recovered from the loss of his son, but he



receives word that Mary has fallen ill. Wounded soldiers returning from the front bring with them the birth of the next worldwide tragedy, the Spanish Flu. Music has become a big part of camp life, and a concert has been planned for September 2nd, a German holiday. When Daniel learns

during the concert that Mary has died, moreover that his two sons have been sent to an orphanage for safety, Daniel reacts impulsively; he takes advantage of an opportunity to escape. Sully joins Daniel and three others outside the camp's fences, as they divide into two groups and begin their harrowing journey home.

Episode Seven:

Steven and David are transported a world away to the Marist Orphanage in the Cotswold Hills. Here, our story divides along two lines; the boys' new life at the orphanage and Daniel's and Sully's ongoing odyssey through Germany and Belgium. The escape is a work of fiction, although it draws extensively from real-life escapes, which were written and published after the war. The orphanage experience is based on accounts from my father and uncle. A turning point in the escape happens when Daniel and Sully are almost caught by their pursuers. However, when Sully sacrifices himself in order to allow Daniel to get away, Daniel is shot while trying to cross the Meuse River, near Liege, Belgium. With blood seeping from his neck, Daniel floats down the Meuse, face up. Sully is taken into custody and returned to Limburg, fearing his friend has died.

Episode Eight:

Daniel wakes up violently at river's edge. Soon found by a local woman, Daniel convalesces just long enough to bring us close to war's end. A touching account of how a Belgian family endured the war is the result. At the same time, Steve and Dave adapt to their new surroundings. They make real-life friends that will last a lifetime. Schooled by Priests and Nuns, the boys find themselves involved in an annual sermon-writing contest, the winner of which will deliver his or her sermon to the St. Joseph's congregation on Sunday, November the 10th, 1918.

When Daniel finally makes his way up through the Netherlands, and boards a ship home, he manages to arrive at the church where the winning sermon will be given. Steve has won the contest, and Daniel and his boys experience a reunion like no other. After returning home to Chiswick, London, we also learn Sully has been 'Repatriated from Germany.' Sully has settled into his sister's home in the north of London, having long thought he had witnessed Daniel's death. When he learns Daniel is alive, he meets up with Daniel and his boys in the cemetery where Mary is buried. One of cinema's greatest reunions will represent a fitting conclusion to our epic story.

- It should be noted that this series is entirely expandable. Act Two represents an opportunity to expand storylines into additional episodes, possibly a second, third, or even fourth season. While some aspects of this series might be costly to produce, the home setting and Limburg P.o.W. barrack sets could be used extensively during additional episodes in order to balance the higher value aspects of this series.

A few notes about what inspired My Kingdom

In the teaser sequence of episode one, the 'on black' text reads: "Inspired by real events and real people." While every effort was made to follow the historical record, I feel compelled to set the record straight; fiction played a significant role in this story.

In my novel's forward, I wrote: "If a picture is worth a thousand words, is it not possible for a thousand pictures to be worthy of just one word ... an answer, perhaps?"

The question pertains to a conversation I had with my Uncle David, the young David in this story. I had been interviewing him as part of my research for my novel, when I asked him: "if I were to write a story about your early life, would you prefer it come to a different conclusion, an alternate ending, so to speak, than the one you and my father actually experienced?" My Uncle David never read my completed manuscript. The tank driver, and World War Two veteran, died before it came before his eyes. Nonetheless, I think you can imagine his answer. It set in motion my desire to tell his and my father's unique story, while at the same time relating the incredible events of my grandfather's life. In so doing, I conflated two stories, which in real-life took place in series. In short, I overlapped them and told them in parallel.

As a professional soldier, my grandfather spent over four years in India's North-West Frontier. However, having never met him, I had to construct a fictional account of what he and his regiment may well have done while in India. He returned to London and joined the Army Reserves only to find himself drawn into the First World War. Captured at Etreux, France, he spent the next four years, one hundred and twelve days a prisoner of war. His military record reflects these and other facts. He was repatriated from Germany on November 17th, 1918, and went on to marry and have four sons, only two of which survived.

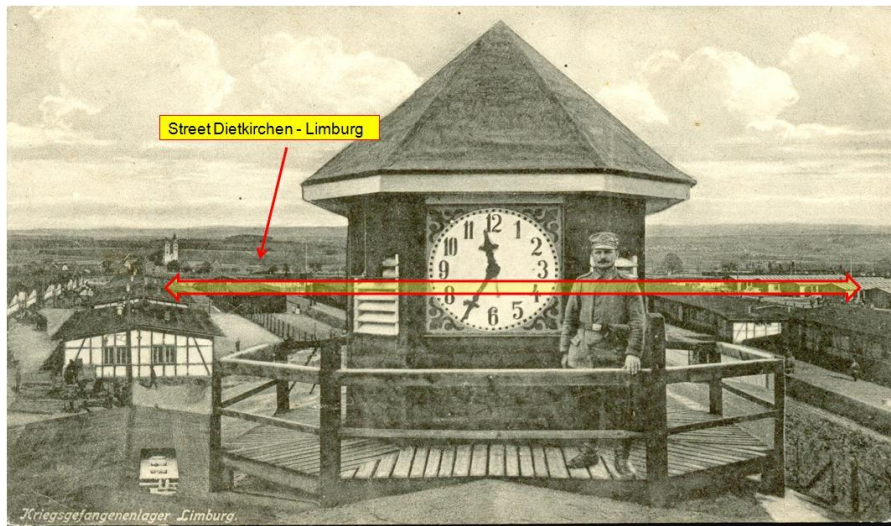
The second parallel storyline evolved when Daniel, his wife Mary, as well as their six-month-old baby died within eighteen months of each other. This tragedy caused my father and uncle to be sent to an orphanage in the English countryside. I remember my dad speaking fondly of the life-long friends he made there. For decades, he stayed in touch with one special nun, Sister Claudia. Having said that, I think the two young boys would have preferred a different upbringing. When my uncle answered, 'yes,' to the question I asked him, I suggested I could have his father return to the orphanage and take his two sons home. This never happened in real-life, of course, but in My Kingdom, it does. I think my uncle would have liked his fictional ending. It was a pleasure for me to write. I hope you like it too.



Present day photo of where the Limburg P.o.W. Camp actually stood.



Limburg PoW Camp, Limburg, Germany.



Our Series Cast:

7883, Pte. D, Donoghue

Our fictional Daniel Donoghue is twenty-eight years old in 1912 and thirty-four by the time our story concludes in 1918. The attached photo is the only one I have of my grandfather. My best guess is it was taken sometime before he died in 1929. Having never met my grandfather, the man I created in my story represents an extension of the older boy in the photo, my father. In other words, if Daniel was anything like my father, he would have been an ordinary man capable of surviving extraordinary circumstances.

The only real-life account of Daniel was offered by my Uncle David. An aunt once told him, 'you'll never be as tough as your father was.' And this she said to a Tank Driver who landed in Normandy and survived the Second World War.

If our fictional Daniel is plagued by one fault, it would be self-doubt. Is he a good soldier, a good husband and father? Will he execute his duty when called upon? Daniel's character growth culminates during his daring escape. If anything, he is a survivor. He manages to retrieve his boys from the orphanage and bring them home.



James Sullivan, Sully:

James Sullivan is 26 in 1912. His character is completely fictional. He also represents the perfect alter ego to Daniel's personality. Where Daniel is reserved, Sully is animated. While Daniel prefers to think things through, and invoke reason whenever possible, Sully is impulsive and often comical. If this project is looked at through a 'buddy story' lens, the viewer will be left with the impression that Sully represents the best soldiering qualities a friend could ever have.

Mary Donoghue, nee Curtin:

Mary Curtin married my grandfather after the war, in the spring of 1919. I imagine many people were eager to get on with their lives in the wake of the War to End all Wars. I don't have any photos of my paternal grandmother, so my depiction of her is entirely fictional. The only recollection my father had of his mother is that she had long dark hair. Mary died in 1928, as did her fourth son of six months. Daniel died the following year. Both were buried in London's North Sheen cemetery, where their graves remained unmarked until the fall of 2019. Thank



you to my brother, Tom, for arranging the marker you see here. My wife and I managed to attend its placing during our twenty-fifth anniversary trip to the UK and Ireland.

Steve and David Donoghue age a full six years throughout this series, from four and six years of age to ten and twelve. The photo below depicts my father and uncle at the Marist Orphanage, Nympsfield, in the Cotswold Hills. Steve is lower center, holding the football. Dave is on his right. My father left the orphanage aged fourteen, at which point he began his adult career as a factory worker in Gloucestershire. He and Dave, as well as two other boys in the photo, immigrated to Canada in 1947.



The above photo is of the Boys' Home and School House in Nympsfield.

One final note: Because of the fictional events depicted in My Kingdom, namely those I wrote to satisfy my uncle's alternate ending, a few name changes could be considered. Those related to the historical record should remain, of course, however, changing the names of my family members might better serve the 'Inspired by real people and real events,' caveat.

