



“NO GREATER
LOVE THAN THIS”



“No Greater Love than This”

The words which you have just read, though originally the words of Jesus Christ, became the key text for a memorial service in Newtownbreda on the outskirts of Belfast on Sunday 1st July 1917. Let me tell you the very moving and interesting story which lay behind that occasion.

Being remembered with great affection and admiration was the valour of a young Ulsterman, Private William McFadzean, who exactly one year earlier had heroically given his life for others on the first day of the battle of the Somme. That single day, July 1st 1916, has become distinguished as one of the worst in modern military history, registering over 19,000 fatalities and 57,000 casualties with William McFadzean one of the first to die just before 7 o'clock that morning.

Billy, as he was known to his friends, was born on October 9th 1895 in the town of Lurgan where a plaque to his memory can still be seen on the external wall of the Old Town Hall in Union Street. In early life the family moved to the Cregagh area of Belfast and young Billy became an employee of Spence Bryson in Great Victoria Street, Belfast. On September 22nd 1914 he joined the

14th Btn. Royal Irish Rifles and a year later, with the famous 36th Ulster Division, he sailed for France in October 1915.

Billy was a grenadier, one of a group specially trained in the handling of grenades, and it was in the discharge of this very duty that he gave his life for his comrades. In a narrow concentration trench in Thiepval

Wood, Billy and his comrades were making final preparations for the day's assault. As German shells were falling around them and as the bright morning sun shone above them, suddenly a box of grenades accidentally toppled, spilling grenades over the floor of the trench and dislodging two of the pins. Knowing that within seconds an explosion would follow, Billy McFadzean pushed himself forward and threw himself over the grenades. When the live bombs exploded Billy was killed instantly and his colleagues in the crowded trench were totally saved almost without injury. He died to save them. He gave his life to preserve theirs.

Private William McFadzean became the first of fifty one winners of the Victoria Cross at the battle of the Somme. At the presentation ceremony in London on February 28th 1917, the King said to Billy's father, who had gone to receive his eldest son's medal, "Nothing finer has been done in this war than the act performed by your son in giving his life so heroically to save the lives of his comrades". Again the words were true

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15v13).

These famous words had first been spoken on the eve of an even greater battle than the Somme. The night before He went to the cross the Lord Jesus spoke these words. On the next day He knew that He would give His life as a sacrifice, not for friends, but for sinners, for us. We were in great danger. Not this time from a box of man-made grenades, but the deserved and eternal judgment of God because we had broken His law and sinned against Him. To save us the Lord Jesus voluntarily gave Himself, and there is 'no greater love in all the world than this'. In His



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sacrificial death He took the judgment we deserved that we might escape. Not by works of merit, nor by payment of money, nor by prayers of religion but through faith in Him alone we can receive life, salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. The Bible affirms *“through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10v43).

We cannot forget the generous love and noble sacrifice of men like William McFadzean but let us not forget the even greater love and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for us. Have you remembered Him? Have you appreciated how much you owe to His death for you? Have you ever repented of your sins and trusted Him as your Saviour. There is no time to lose. Trust in Him and you will be able to say,

*“I seek no other argument
I want no other plea
It is enough that Jesus died
And rose again for me”*

David Gilliland

