

ON THE BRINK

The Politics of Conflict 1914-1916 Project

ACTIVE SERVICE

JAMES DONNELLY

James Donnelly, a father of two, from Ballintoy was working in Belfast before war broke out. His brother Frank, had previously fought in the Boer War; this perhaps inspired James to enlist. He had a strong sense of duty and, despite being 40 years old, was able to join the 59th Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. The squadron was a reconnaissance unit based on the Western Front, where it lost several planes to the legendary Red Baron. The 59th was celebrated, with considerable inaccuracy, in the film "Dawn Patrol" starring Errol Flynn.

James Donnelly was one of the last casualties of the Royal Flying Corps, dying on the 31st of March 1918. The following day the organisation was reformed as the Royal Air Force.



James Donnelly in uniform. Courtesy of Miriam Thompson.