

# Pardon for Irish troops who fought Nazis

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## Ireland

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Ireland was due last night to forgive 5,000 men who were treated as traitors for joining the British Forces in the war against Nazi Germany and Japan.

A Bill tabled in the Dáil will pardon and grant an amnesty to the soldiers, who were stripped of many rights on their return to neutral Ireland in 1945.

"The Bill is being enacted in recognition of the courage and bravery of those individuals court-martialled or dismissed from the Defence Forces who fought on the Allied side to protect decency and democracy during World War Two," said Alan Shatter, the Defence Minister. This would efface "any tarnish from their name or reputation".

The act of forgiveness and apology is a victory for campaigners who have fought for years to expunge the shame and hardship that was inflicted on the servicemen, who were among 60,000 Irish citizens who fought with the



Irish members of the British Army, who were treated as traitors, receive training

Allies from 1939 to 1945. Several thousand were killed in action.

Those returning were scorned for fleeing the country during the Emergency, as the war was known in Ireland, under Éamon de Valera. They

were found collectively guilty by a military tribunal for going absent without leave.

In 1945, special powers, known as the starvation order, were used to bar the deserters from state jobs and military

pensions and cause them to suffer discrimination in other fields.

Mr Shatter said that the pardon would make an important difference to thousands of families. "Unfortunately, many of the individuals whose situation is addressed in this Bill did not live to see the day that this State finally acknowledged the important role that they played in seeking to ensure a free and safe Europe," he said.

Only a few dozen of the men are still alive, but campaigners said that it was important that the troops' wartime service be recognised properly. Peter Mulvany, co-ordinator of the Irish Soldiers Pardons Campaign, said: "It might be an historical issue for the politicians, but not for the families."

Mr Shatter depicted the amnesty and apology as "an important additional brick in the wall of reconciliation" between Northern Ireland and the Republic and an acknowledgement of the two nations' shared history. "For too long their story has been airbrushed out of our history and it is time

we acknowledged it and we paid respect to them for the contribution they made," he said.

The Irish deserters who helped to stop the Nazi advance had helped to save their country. "There can be very little doubt that had Germany successfully invaded Great Britain ... Ireland was next on the list," Mr Shatter said.

That view was a far cry from that of the de Valera Government, whose hostility towards the former British rulers spurred it to keep the conflict between the Allies and the Axis powers at arm's length, although Dublin tacitly helped Britain in some fields, such as recovering downed air crew and providing Atlantic weather reports. In 1945, Churchill said that Britain had shown forbearance in not invading Ireland in order to bolster its security.

Official attitudes began to change in the 1990s with the fading of the Northern Ireland conflict. In April 1995, John Bruton, the Irish Prime Minister, paid tribute to those who "volunteered to fight against Nazi tyranny in Europe".