

My great - grandfather and his role in the IRB



Young Historian



By Abby Halstead

Introduction - How I came up with this topic

When I heard about this young historian project I thought it was a perfect time to tell all the interesting stories that I know about my great grandfather while he was in the IRB. I have also decided that I am going to tell the story of my great grandfather as if I am him recalling the events from my past.

My great grandfather's name was Peter Fee. He was born in 1888 and he passed away in 1982. While the war of independence was going on he would have been in his 20s and this would have been when all of the events that I will be talking about occurred. In this project I will also explain how my great grandfather and great grandmother met as this ties in with what my project is about and I find the story behind this to also be very interesting.

The war of independence

The war of Independence began on 21 January 1919 the very same day that the first Dail met. The IRA used guerilla warfare tactics against the British forces. Guerilla warfare is a tactic involving ambushes and hit and run methods. RIC barracks were attacked and raided for their arms ammunition. Local units called flying columns were set up as numbers in the IRA increased. They took part in large scale ambushes, raided local police stations for arms and helped organise the IRA in rural areas. Terrible reprisals were carried out by the black and tans and the Auxiliaries. A reprisal was an act of retaliation against local people in revenge for attacks on British organisations.

The war was costing Britain 20 million pound a year, and the Irish were running out of arms and ammunition. The British government was also being criticised at home and abroad for the actions of the black and tans and the Auxiliaries against civilians. When De Valera returned from America he agreed to a truce with Lloyd George. The truce began on 11 July 1921.

Me and my early life

Hello my name is Peter Fee and today I will be recalling some of the events and stories that I lived through while I was in the IRB but before I do that I wanted to give you some background information about my life when I was a young boy and what it was like to grow up in my town before the wars broke out. First of all I will tell you about me and my family. My name is Peter Fee and I am the oldest child in my house. I have one younger sister and her name is Ellen Fee. I also have a mother and a father and their names are Margaret and Thomas Fee. I have lived in the town of Aghacashel for my whole life and my school used to be just down the road from where I lived. I didn't mind walking to school because It gave me a chance to take in all the beautiful sights around me. I remember one time when I was in school they told us that we were going to be writing stories and I knew this was the perfect chance to showcase my creativity and my brilliant handwriting. You can now find the stories that I wrote when I was a young boy on a website called duchas.ie.

My time in the IRB

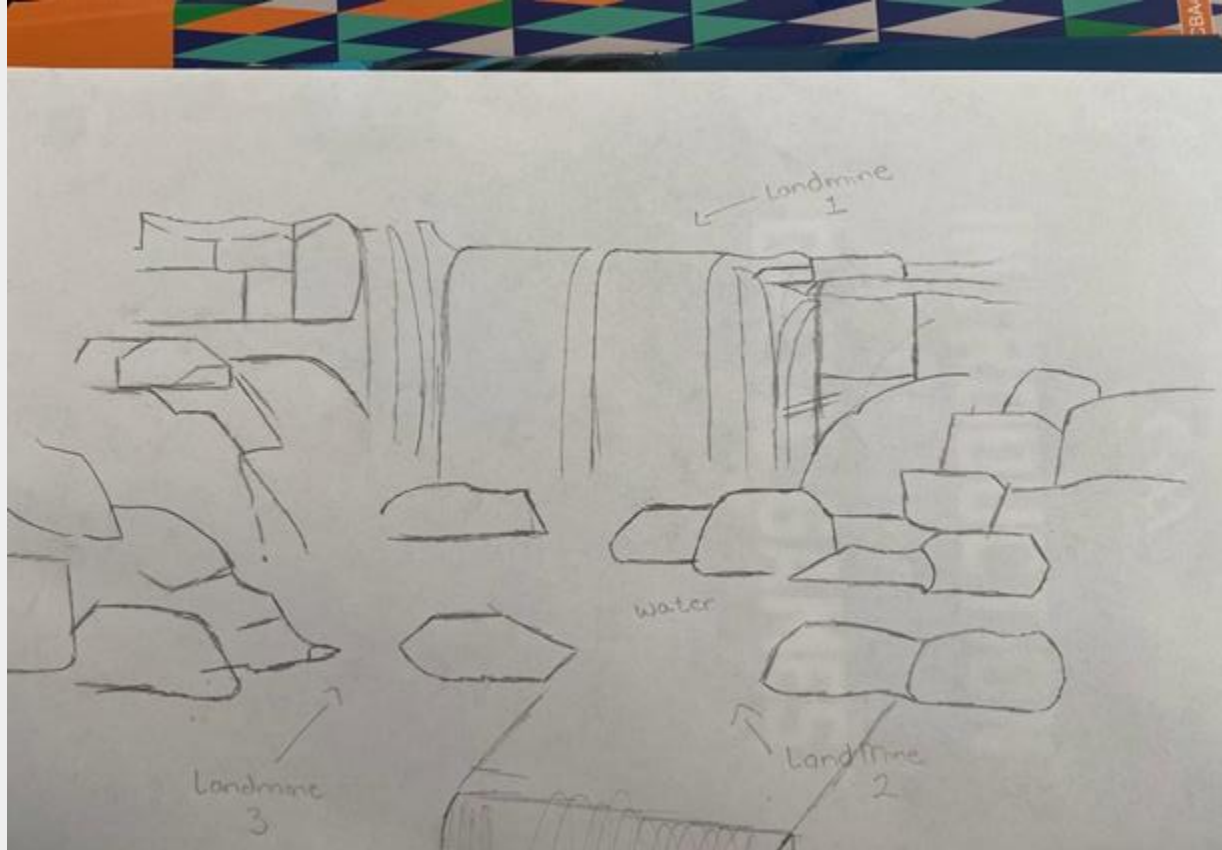
In these next couple of slides I will be describing the most significant, liberating and frightening time of my life, my time in the IRB. Before I talk about my time in the war I would also like to mention that later on after the war I was in the military pensions which was money that was given to me for being a part of a military team. The amount that I was given for my time in the military was 6 pound 13 shillings and 4 pence. That is now the equivalent of around 466.15 pounds. I know that that doesn't sound like a lot of money but this was more than enough money that I needed at the time. The war started in 1919 and I was already interested in bringing back an independent Ireland so I did not even hesitate to help when the word of the war came to Leitrim. I will not be recalling all the events from my past just the ones that I think are interesting and important to the story that I am telling. The first story I would like to tell is a battle that I had against the black and tans. I was with two other men who were also in the IRB and we were all setting up our guns for when the black and tans would inevitably come for us. Before we could even look up and take in what was going on ahead of us we seen the black and tans coming directly towards us. We shot a few times but we missed and they were coming too fast as they were on horseback so we started to run as fast as we possibly could. My heart was pumping so fast and I could feel my knees starting to buckle out of fear and also weirdly exhilaration. As we were running we seen trenches ahead of us and it was our perfect escape. Luckily we had run fast enough so we were out of the black and tans eyeline. We jumped feet first into the trenches and crouched down as fast as we could, adrenaline pumping through our bodies. Next thing we knew the horses were jumping over the trench we were in. I can honestly say that that was probably one of the most exhilarating and terrifying times of my life. I could feel my heart pumping out of my chest with fear as they jumped over us. I can still feel the feeling of fear and relief today that I felt when I realized that we were safe and had not been caught by the black and tans.

My time in the IRB continued

The next story that I am going to share is about what I did to help in the war even more. When I was young my family home was right beside a waterfall called Pol an eas. Me and my siblings would always go down there to mess about and play in the water. From doing this I knew every inch of that water and forestry like the back of my hand. This was the perfect place to properly execute my plan.

The plan that I had conjured up was that I was going to plant landmines throughout the waterfall of Pol an eas so that I could stop the black and tans from getting across and hurting more people and families. It took me about 2 days to set this all up properly and along the way I made a map of all the different places that I had planted these landmines so that I would not accidentally fall or step on one. After I had executed my plan the black and tans were angry and they found out my name and what I looked like so from that point on I was officially on the run and was the most wanted man in Leitrim.

Map of where he put the landmines



How I met my wife

I knew that I couldn't stay at my own house being wanted by all the black and tans so I had to find somewhere to stay where I would be safe and no one would be able to find me. In the next few days I went around asking some friends and allies if they knew a place where I could stay and be safe. Finally someone told me about a local safehouse in Aghacashel called Dan Harveys. I was overjoyed that I finally found a place to stay and I set on my way. When I arrived I met Dan Harvey and he knew who I was straight away. He was extremely welcoming to me and he let me stay at his safehouse with no hesitation. As Dan was showing me to where I was staying he also introduced me to a woman called Mary Dolan.

After I was shown to where I was staying Mary came down to bring me some food and water and we got to talking. She told me that she moved to Leitrim a few years ago from London and was staying with Dan Harvey because he was a friend of the family. She also told me that she came here to work and was soon stopped because of the war. After we were talking for a while I felt comfortable to tell her about my time with the IRB. I was terrified that she would judge me for what I did but to my surprise she completely understood why I did all the stuff I did and from that point on I knew that I could talk to this woman for hours and I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. A few months after this we had gotten even closer and before I knew it I was asking her to be my girlfriend and soon enough we were getting married. We had to wait until after the war was over to get married but that didn't matter much to her or me. And that is the full story on how I met the love of my life

What the safehouse was used for

Safehouses were secret locations which had many different uses that I will explain in this slide.

1. Hiding rebels and IRA members

Safehouses were used to hide IRA members or those involved in the Irish independence movement. These safehouses helped to protect IRA members from being captured and killed by the British army forces.

1. Storage of weapons and supplies

Safehouses were also used to store weapons and other supplies needed for the members of the IRA. This was also very important as they needed to stash weapons somewhere where the British forces could not find them.

1. To hold meetings

These houses were also used to hold meetings in the parish for the IRA as it was a way to come up with plans and ambushes without the British forces knowing where they were.

It was very risky to own a safehouse as if you got caught it could result in you getting executed or your property burnt down but they were vital to the impact the IRA had on the war.

Pictures of my great grandad that depict what his life was like

My great
grandad



My great
grandmother
holding my
dad and my
uncle



Image of my military pension

Statement showing the names of persons residing in County Lebanon to whom Pensions have been awarded under the Military Service Pension Act, 1924, together with the Annual Amount of Pension in each case.

[illegible]

Statement showing the names of persons resident in County Leitrim to whom Pensions have been awarded under the Military Service Pensions Act, 1934, together with the Annual Amount of Pension in each case.

[illegible]

Military Service (U.S.A.) Postcode (U.K.)

A Military Service Pensioners Act was passed in 1924 which gave a pension to certain categories of people for service during the War of Independence and 1916. Eligibility was broadened in a further Act in 1934. This is a list of people in Leitrim who received pensions. Some others were in receipt of pensions and are not on this list. Interestingly, there are many on this list who do not appear to have contributed much to the war effort, although it is possible they may have wrongly decided. It is also true that some who contributed greatly to the War of Independence refused to apply for, or accept, a pension from the Free State.

Reflection

1. How I got my information

When I heard about this young historian project I immediately started asking both my dad and my uncle questions about their grandad and stories that they had told them. I found that this was a very good way to get my information because I knew that the stories that they were telling me were ones that had come directly from my great grandfathers mouth. I also feel that this was a good way to get my information as it gave me more of an understanding on what the war was like for someone in the IIRB to live through so it made it a lot easier to write my piece as a story from his reflection of this time.

1. How did this project make me feel while I was writing about it

This project made me feel both sad and more understanding to what all these people had to live through during the time of the war. The reason that this project made me sad was that it made me feel empathy especially towards the people in my family that were directly affected by the war. An example of this would be my great grandfather having to be on the run for so long. That was at least a year and a half of his life wasted all because of the war that was happening around him. I know that he probably could have done some things differently to avoid getting into this position but I also admire that he was so brave in standing for what he believed in and that he didn't let anything get in his way.

Reflection

3. What I found easy and difficult about this project.

Before I began this project I thought that the hardest part would be finding the information But the part I actually found most difficult was trying to tell the story as if I was my great grandad. I found this part particularly difficult as I didn't want to get any of the information wrong but I also wanted to do it in a way where would drag the audience in and make it feel more like you were reading from a book rather than reading off information from a slide. I think that in the end I did a good job at telling the story and really dragging people in but I feel like I could have done a better job on adding more pictures to my slides as I think pictures break up the text a bit and can give a reader a little bit more of a visually pleasing experience instead of always reading off the slides with little to no breaks. I think that the thing that I found to be the least challenging and also interesting was gathering the information from my dad and my uncle. As well as me getting to learn more about my family heritage and how the whole war experience was like back then I feel that it also gave my dad and my uncle a chance to talk about all the stories that he had told them over the years and it really gave them a reason to talk and explain about some of the stories that he had told them. I also feel that they did a really good job at recalling all the stories he had told them as they would have only been 9 and 10 when my great grandfather passed away.

Reflection

4. What would I do differently if I were to do this again

I think that if I was to do this young historian again that I would definitely add more pictures to the project because as I have previously mentioned it would make my project look a lot more visually pleasing and would also break up some of the reading. I also think that if I were to do this again I could add a timeline of my great granddads life right from his early life all the way to when he got married. I feel like this would also be both visually pleasing and it might help more visual learners to get the gist of the main events that happened in his life.

Conclusion

I think that in conclusion I did a good job on getting my great grandfathers story across and in explaining all the events through his life. I also am very proud that I did it in a story as I feel like I have done it in a way where it draws you in and makes you feel like you are actually seeing what it was like to live in his shoes. Overall I think that I did a good job on this project and I also feel like it gave me a chance to learn a lot more about my family history which I am very grateful for and which I feel was one of the aims of this whole young historian project

Interview questions

1. Can you tell me some interesting stories about him?
2. What was his early life/childhood like?
3. Was he involved in any major events e.g. Selton Hill ambush?
4. How did him and my great grandmother meet?