

Togher N.S.

My name is Daniel Noonan, I am 12 years old & the story I write about was told to me by my Granddad also called Daniel Noonan, he is 85 years of age.

The extraordinary events that I tell of occurred approximately mid November 1920 in an area known as Pol na barrai bridge which is located just 250 metres from where I live today.

This story was passed down to my Granddad from his own father who has long since died.

In and around 1920 the people of West Cork were terrorised by the English who were also known as Black and Tans because of the colour of their uniform.

It would have been a regular occurrence for the Black and Tans to drive along the West Cork Country-side & if they came across local Men or Women along their travels they would stop their cars & interrogate them, seeking information about local ~~men~~ men, plots of rebellions or plans of ambush against the English Soldiers.

If locals were working in the fields & tried to run from the Black and Tans, they would be shot at, sometimes injuring and even killing these innocent men.

But the West Cork Men decided enough was enough & they set up the Irish Republican Army (IRA) they had little or no training in fighting or use of guns but in their hearts they felt years

of hurt & suffering at the hands of the English & together they planned to stand together & take on these brutes who had no respect for Irish Men or Women.

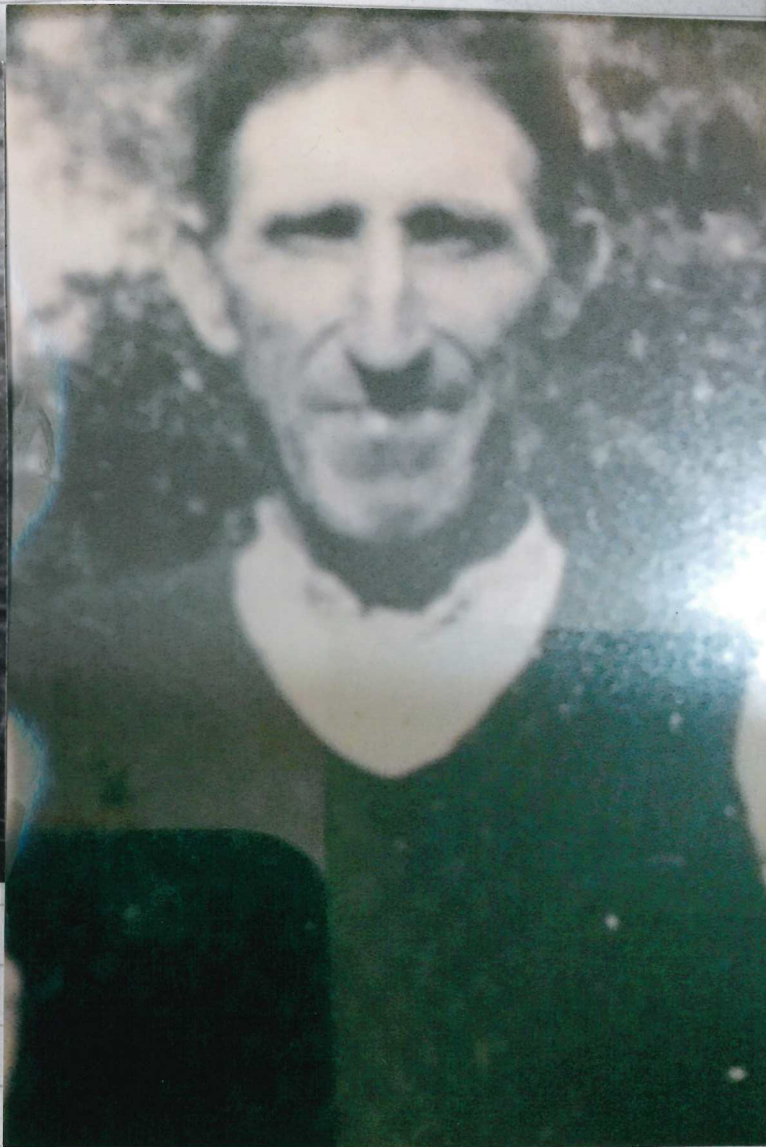
Locally to where I now live a group of Men from townlands of Droumlough, Droundeega & Farnahineera formed a plan to knock some bridges which would restrict the movement of the English as they drove through the Countryside and in one November night they came together & knocked the bridge at Pol na berrai which then seperated the lands & those who lived North of the river from the English who were at that time based in the barracks in Dummerway. For the first time in years the people North of the river felt safe.

It only took a few days before the English came travelling this road on their rampage & were stopped short in their tracks by the knocked bridge. they werent happy & set about calling to local houses looking for information & the whereabouts of the culprits of who had knocked the bridge. but the IRA men had long since moved out of their homes & had spent some cold nights sleeping rough as they knew the English would be looking for reverage.

The Black and Tans eventually rounded up some men from Goring & Moneyreague & ordered them to begin rebuilding the bridge but word soon drifted back to the IRA of the orders to rebuild the bridge & they could not allow this rebuild to go ahead as it would undo their work of keeping north of the river safe.

Later that evening the IRA took up position in the nearby hills close enough to oversee the progress of the rebuild but far enough not to be seen. They watched their neighbours being mocked & jeered by the English as they were forced against their will to rebuild the bridge. These men would have been well known to the IRA men, they would have socialised together, prayed together in the local church & there are possibilities of these men ever being related to each other.

The IRA men waited for the right moment, they had to stop the rebuild from progressing so when the time was right they began firing shots wildly over the heads of the English soldiers & their own neighbours, careful not to shoot anyone but instead give the impression to the English that an ambush was taking place. Men ran for their lives and the bridge rebuild was abandoned.



~~Connie~~ Noonan
Jack Mc Sweeney

Connie Noonan

The bridge remained in ruins for a number of weeks as local men refused to take part in any attempt of rebuilding the bridge, just in case they might get shot next time.

Some weeks later on 28th Nov 1920 some of the same local IRA men undertook a more daring rebellion against the Black and Tans when they carried out an ambush on 2 lorry loads of English soldiers at Kilmichael killing 17 Black and Tans + also losing 3 of their own men. There is no doubt but this was one of the main turning points in Irish history where the local IRA stood up to the English forces, they showed they would not tolerate their treatment of Irish Men + Women never again.

Over the next few years normal life resumed + the bridge at Pol na barrai was once again rebuilt.

My Grandad told me that both my ^{great} Grandads would have been part of the local IRA ~~who~~ ^{who may have} knocked the bridge that night back in November 1920 + he told me that it is a distinct possibility that ^{great} Grandads of some of my classmates may have been some of the men who had shots fired at them but all those men who have now gone to their graves holding onto the secrets of who fired those shots that day.



Medal ① is a general service medal also known as the Black & Tan medal. They were awarded for service in the Irish War of Independence this was given to my Great Grandad Connie Noonan.

Medal ② was known as the Survivor medal, To mark the 50th Anniversary of the signing of Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 the Irish Government issued this medal to surviving veterans of the War of Independence. this medal was given to my Great Grandad Jack Mc Sweeney.

Medal ③ was known as the Emergency Service Medal given to local security forces, this medal was given to my Great Grandad

Today Pol na Barraí bridge stands strong spanning over the Caha river with the busy Bentry line carrying traffic over it. There are no plaques or signage indicating the times long passed but by writing this story down brings the extraordinary events of those November days of 1920 back to life once more.



Pol na barraí bridge as it stands today.

My Grandad Daniel Noonan telling me the story
of Pol na barrai bridge.

