

JEREMIAH

O

NEILL



Jeremiah O'Neill

The person I was talking to was my teacher about Jeremiah O'Neill, her grandfather. My teacher's name is Mairéad Twohig, "Gleann Fia", Currabeha, Co. Cork.

Jeremiah o Neill was the oldest of six children. Jeremiah had two brothers and three sisters. His mother was called Mary and his father was called Jeremiah. Jeremiah o Nell lived near Knoppoge which is near Killbrittain Co. Cork.

Jeremiah

O'Neill (b. 1866)

Mary

O'Neill (b. 1874)

Cornelius

O'Neill

b. 1893

Jeremiah

O'Neill

b. 1901

Ellen

O'Neill

b. 1902

Nora

O'Neill

b. 1905

M

Mary

O'Neill

1906

Thomas

O'Neill

1909

Margaret O Shea

nee Russell

John O Shea

Breda Buttimer

nee O Shea

Diarmuid O Shea

Eileen O Shea

Mairéad Twohig

nee O Shea

Jeremiah O'Neill

On the 16th of February Jeremiah and his men were digging trenches and bridges to slow down the British soldiers in order to ambush them.

On the 16th the men were woken and told that there was three people firing near Crois Na Leanbh. Crois Na Leanbh is located midway between the villages of Bandon and Kilbrittain.

Tuisreannar bas ar son Soblaíe na hÉireann.
Gaois Ó Conaite Saon 23 Iúil 24 bliana.
Conchobhar MacCarthaigh Saon 23 Iúil 29 bliana.
Seán Mac Craic Saon 23 Iúil 24 bliana.
Dáiríne Ó Neill Seánsean 19 bliana.
Da leis an 5 ceannairchie Treas Dúisiam Conaite I.R.A.
Dú marbúisead 100 san tróim ar an 16 2 21.
An beis de go raib a h-anamanna.

Here at Crois Na Leanbh, on the 16th February 1921,
four Volunteers of the Third West Cork Brigade, I.R.A.
were killed in action by British Crown Forces.

Tuisreannar bas ar son saoirse na hÉireann
In Memory Of

Vol. Timothy Connolly, Farranagark,	24 years
Vol. John O'Connell, McCarthy, Kilanetig,	29 years
Vol. John McGraw, Rathclarrin,	24 years
Sgt. Jeremiah O'Neill, Knockpoque,	19 years

Marked on the 75th anniversary by Queen Nuala O'Leary, AD 2016

This is an account of an engagement with British Troops at Crios na Leanbh Cross, Kilbrittain on the 16th February, 1921.

In that fight, four men of the I.R.A. of Kilbrittain Co., were killed. They were Co. Q/Master, Jeremiah O' Neill, Vols. John McGrath, Tim Connolly and Con McCarthy. During the whole of the night of the 15th and also the day of the 16th February, 1921, our unit were engaged at road-trenching, and knocking bridges in the Kilbrittain and Bandon area. During the day of the 16th February, we took up a position to fire on Black and Tans convoy at Purcell's Cross. The Tans did not arrive, so we made no contact. In addition, to the names who died other members of our Unit were, John Cunningham, John Barrett, John Cronin, Jerh. Hayes, and myself, all who escaped from Crios na Leanbh.

Miah O' Neill was an old and tested veteran in flying Column as well as in local engagements with R.I.C. and other British forces. His bravery and courage was commented on by higher officers in the I.R.A. at the time. He was good humoured, a loyal and faithful comrade. He was in charge of our Unit and I will refer to him in the rest of this writing as O/C. On the evening of the 15th inst., as we were in position at Purcell's Cross, the O/C was brought a dispatch to the effect that we go to billets to rest until further order. We then went to Clonbogue to the houses of O' Brien's, Barrett's and Crowley. Other volunteers of the company were called on to stand guard.

Some hours later, we were alerted that there was firing to the East about three miles away. The Western Bridge at Kinsale was destroyed on the night of the 15th inst., but the British with the help of civilians repaired it, so that the patrol passed over it. That patrol was fired on by the I.R.A. sentries, who were guarding trench-digging at Kilgobbin. An exchange of shots took place, as we stood on the road outside Barrett's of Clonbogue.

Tom Murphy was sent on as a scout to find out if the Military were coming in our direction. After he had gone we moved on to Crios na Leanbh Cross. As this scout, Tom Murphy, was moving along the grass margin of the road, about a quarter of a mile from Crios na Leanbh Cross, he was halted by the Military Patrol, but to his credit he jumped over the fence and escaped uncaptured. He then ran as a crowfly to Clonbogue to where he left us, it was then he was told we had gone to the Cross. As he ran in panic towards the Cross to warn us, the firing started, the British patrol and our little Unit had made contact. The cunning British did not fire on him as he was escaping. They wanted to move as a silent patrol. If they did we would know where they were, and the tragic events would not have happened, at least we would be prepared for them. When we arrived at the Cross, to wait for some account, we heard footsteps coming from the East. We jumped in over the nearest fence. As they came in front of us on the road, we saw they were Jim Mahony, Tadgh Sullivan, and Don Donaghue, our O/C and them

had some whispering conversation. As they left they heard someone of them say, "watch out for your lives lads."

They then moved north, the road towards Ballinadee Cross. When the O/C recognised us inside the fence, he said, "we will move from this across the road, into Batty's field inside the fence." The nine of us were extended for 25 yards. The O/C went along to every man to whisper about crossing over to a position to fire on the enemy if they came and to walk silently. As he walked back to lead the way, someone said "hush" and then there was a slight noise outside on the road. When we looked out, we saw the helmets of the British soldiers, they were standing still I presume they were listening to the faint footsteps of the three that walked north the road. To say that we were surprised would be putting mildly and laughable.

However everyone was silently pressing bullets up the breaches of the rifles which shows how unprepared we were. Then there was the hard click of a rifle bolt inside the fence. The silence was broken, the British dived for cover, the I.R.A. fired a volley over the fence and started to reload. The British did not reply so quickly. It was after the second volley from inside the fence that it looked as if all hell had broken loose. The British firing line extended the most of 200 yards along the fence of the road. The height of the fence inside was about three feet, with some bushes as a cover from view. The height outside was about six feet giving advantage of cover to the British. After the second volley from inside the fence, the O/C gave orders to move East and down by the fences and keep firing. That order was carried out by all except three who went down by the western fence and got safely away. Between crawling and sometimes running, a few yards, I bent down and got to the far corner of the field. I knew then there were three of our men either dying or dead.

As I came to the corner, I saw the O/C leaning down low against the fence. As I crept closer to them I saw he was loading his revolver. There was heavy firing coming in over our heads from the road, I said "there are three of the lads knocked out." He said "Run, Run down by the ditch." He started to fire from his revolver out on the road. I ran or flew would be a better word, bullets were hitting stones, grass and everything except myself. I rolled over the fence and got safely over. As I was about half-ways down that last run, I fell to the ground and found it hard to rise. The cap I was wearing was found next to me scorched by a bullet. When I got to safety, Cunningham was there, he said "Driscoll, all our men are killed." I told him about the three and that the O/C was firing when he ordered me down by the fence. The British were still firing, some of the bullets passed close to me. As the O/C, was not coming, we came up with the idea that he may have gone over the fence into the next field and escaped that way. But after covering my retreat and it is reasonable to presume, he saved my life and got hit when making a final dash for cover. Of the nine of us that were there, it was the four bravest who died.

John O' Driscoll

