

Joe Coleman 4th Class

Knockskeagh N.S.

Clonakilty

This is a short story about my maternal grandfather's aunt. Hannah Murphy (or Aunty Jo as we knew her) was born in Rosscarbery in 1911. When she was 11 years old, on the 22nd August 1922, her mother had sent her up to the bakers to buy some bread. On her way there she saw (these were her words) a tall, striking handsome man in uniform like a giant coming towards her. He patted her on the head and said hello to her and walked on. When she got home, she told her father about the man she had just met wondering who he might be and her father told her it was the great Michael Collins.

Aunty Jo was very proud of this moment and loved to tell the story whenever she had a chance. A proud moment also for her was when she was interviewed by RTE radio and got to tell this story.

Here is a link to a local newspaper and a short article when she died. She was an amazing 104 when she died !

<https://www.southernstar.ie/news/roundup/articles/2016/01/09/4112278-death-of-rossscarberys-hannah-murphy/>

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My paternal Great-Grandfather, Laurance Coleman, was born in Belgooly, Co. Cork in 1898. He was the oldest of 6 children, born to parents who owned a pub in the village of Belgooly.

He left school at an early age, which was normal in those days, and began to work as a 'carter' for Cork county council. (a carter was a person who transported goods led by horse and cart)

In 1918, he joined the Irish Volunteers because he wanted to help Ireland become a free state. From 1918 to 1920 his activities consisted mostly of attending meetings, parades, intelligence work and putting up the national flag in conspicuous places during Easter week in 1916 (his exact words taken from hand written letters which his daughter (my gran-aunt) still has today and showed me them.

From 1st April 1920 to 31st March 1921 his unit was formed into a company (I Company 9 Batt. Cork No 1 brigade... (It is hard to read the faded writing on Laurence's letters but we think this is right). Laurence was made Section Commander.

During his time as section commander, he took part in the burning of Ballyfeard R.I.C. barracks. He was trained in the use of firearms and was part of raiding teams that went raiding for guns and ammunition in the area. He also attended meetings and parades. In January 1921 he was made 2nd Lieutenant of 9th Batt. He took part in the 'holding up of the mails cart near Belgooly' where they got some useful information to help the volunteers.

From April 1921 to July 1921, Laurence was a member of the A.S.U (active service unit) doing scouting and intelligence work for the unit. He was an armed guard during the destruction of the bridge and helped cut off enemy guards. He was made responsible for the guarding of arms and ammunition and for carrying messages, which would have been a great risk to him.

My Gran Aunt has many letters, hand written and typed from my great gran father mentioning a lot of things that happened during this time.

These are a few things that are in the letters

Ballyfeard R.I.C. Barracks burning April 1920

I company formed in July 1920

Raided for arms in August, September, November 1920

Raided mail cart February 1921

Destruction of bridge May 1921

Ambush near Kinsale May --June 1921

He was involved in hosting secret illegal meetings, storage of illegal items like guns ect and provided safe house for those in need throughout these years.

He also met his future wife Bridget during this time. Bridgets family would have been in the Irish volunteers also and their home would have been one of the main safe houses in the area where guns and ammunition would have been stored.

In February 1923, Laurence was arrested, along with other men, while they were attending a wedding of a colleague in Fountainstown. Laurance was sent to Maryborough Gaol (in Portlaoise) and served a few months there before being sent back down to Cork Gaol. He spent a total of 9 months in prison.

Laurence still continued with his volunteer work in secret when he came home. In 1925, he immigrated to the US where he fundraised for 'the cause' and sent money home to help. He came home a few years later, got married to Bridget and had 4 children. My gran aunt says when she was growing up, she remembers lots of meeting between her father and his friends where they would talk of old times...she said if they were found listening to any of what was being said they would be in big trouble !!!