

The Gun Oiler



By Michael Kearney , 4th class Derrinacaharagh School Dunmanway

The gun oiler, and how digging the garden told a story about the war of independence, by Michael Kearney.

it all started when i found a brass tube in a box at home, the box was my daddys and i asked him what was it for, he told me the brass tube was a gun oiler and that it belonged to my great grandfather from borrisokane in north Tipperary, and that it was used for oiling his gun from around the war of independence.

He told me how he had got the gun oiler.

It was found by a man who lived in my daddys old house where my great grandfather (and grandfather) lived when he was a young man.

The man was digging the garden one day and he found the brass tube and gave it to my grandfather as he knew it was something special.

My grandfather gave it to my daddy and he found out what it was and from when.

The gun oiler was made for the lee enfield mk3 rifle during world war 1 ,



it fits into the butt of the rifle and is used to oil the gun to make sure that it works properly.



The name of the gun oiler is actually a mark 4 oil bottle.

There were upto twenty makers of the oil bottle, mostly in Birmingham England which is famous for its brass works.

My oil bottle is stamped underneath with The letters W.H.B, which stands for WH Briscoe & co. LTD. 51



park street Birmingham and was made between 1914 and 1918.

This means my great grandfather had this around the middle of the war of independence and when he joined the free state army.

My great grandfathers name is John (jack) Kearney, the same as my daddys name!

When he was a young man he joined the Irish Republican Army to fight against the british army and the Black and Tans in Tipperary where he was from.

He got into a lot of fights with the black and tans with his friends and roamed all over the countryside fighting them.

My grandfather told me about a couple of these fights. Thats my great grandfather on the right at the back with the big ears! Bob Phelan is the uncle of American actor Martin Sheen .

THE BOYS OF THE OLD BRIGADE



Borrisokane IRA 1922 A Company, 4th Battalion, 1st North Tipperary Brigade. Standing L to R: Captain Dan Costelloe, Garryard; Bob Phelan, Mill Street; Danny O'Brien, Cloughjordan; Jack Kearney, St. Brigid's Avenue. Seated L to R: Martin Hough, Carrigahorig; Mick Joe O'Meara, Main Street; Bill Kennedy, Bawnmore (The Tightener).

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One story was from June the 26th 1920

Borrisokane had an RIC barracks in the middle of the town (used by the Garda Síochána today) the plan was to rob the rifles and ammunition from the barracks at midnight by climbing onto the roof and setting fire to the building with petrol and sods of turf soaked in petrol. This petrol was acquired from Nenagh train station by the Nenagh Battalion and transported to the Moneygall 2nd Battalion who brought the petrol to Borrisokane a couple of weeks before the attack, it was hidden in a pile of sand and the police could not find it.

The IRA brigade marched down through the town and happened upon three British soldiers who were up to no good, they were trying to rob a shop, these men were arrested and put under armed guard, and the IRA continued with their plan.

The barracks was surrounded by members of the Borrisokane IRA, a company 4th Battalion of the 1st North Tipperary Brigade, commanded by Frank McGrath O/C and Felix Cronin O/C (Felix Cronin eventually married Kitty Kiernan from Longford, Michael Collins fiancé), they were across the street in houses and around the back in some sheds and outhouses.

In complete darkness some of the men climbed onto the roof of the barracks and removed some slates to make a hole in the roof as planned and the petrol and turf was put in on fire. Whistles were then blown and all the IRA started firing at the barracks from all sides.

The RIC returned fire and refused to surrender when asked, they then continued to fire at each other for over three hours.

It was very frightening for the people living in the town as bullets were hitting their houses up and down the street.

During the fire fight, the police sent up flares called Verrey lights, as the telegraph wires were cut, these were seen by the police in Birr in Co. Offaly and they sent more police to help them as they knew this meant trouble.

These reinforcements didn't arrive until after the IRA had disappeared, all roads from Portumna, Birr, Clough Jordan and Nenagh were blocked with trees and trenches by the Ned O'Leary 1st Battalion from Nenagh.

The RIC barracks in the Silvermines and Templederry near Nenagh were attacked also on the same night to draw the military out from Nenagh and away from Borrisokane so the IRA could take the guns and ammunition without having to fight British soldiers also.

All through the night and into the morning the fight continued, they were firing at each other and the IRA were throwing bottles of petrol at the barracks, unfortunately one of the IRA on the roof was injured in the leg by a bullet, his name was Michael O'Kennedy (an uncle to Michael O'Kennedy TD) he was

carried away to safety and a doctor was called to help him (dr. quigley) he was replaced by a man called jimmy o'meara and he too was wounded in the arm, but he was ok.

Later that day sean gaynor o/c was told to withdraw as the barracks was on fire and there was no hoping of getting the guns and ammunition in there, he was very disappointed as was all the IRA men (and my great grandfather!), but orders had to be followed.

The men later learned that when they had left borrisokane, the guns and ammunition exploded in the barracks and this is when the RIC left the building. In the week after the attack the RIC took the girls school across the street to use as a barracks.

The three british soldiers they arrested came in useful as they told them where to get a lorry to escape with and take their petrol . they made one soldier drive the lorry and they put the two wounded men in the lorry and drove them all to safety. Michael o'kennedy was driven to barringtons hospital in limerick but unfortunatley he died from his wounds.

The IRA battalion left empty handed that night, but went on to fight again another day.

A plaque to remember Michael o'kennedy and the attack that night is now on the Garda barracks today and it says " in memory of volunteer Michael o'kennedy nenagh who was fatally wounded in the attack on this barricks on the night of 20/06/1920 , who died on 23/07/1920 aged 27 years " the grace of god on him" erected by his comrades of the first Tipperary brigade"

A couple of years later my great grandfather joined the free state army, and then the national army where he retired as a sergeant.



Present Arms – A group of 'Free State' soldiers in the yard of the RIC Barracks on Main Street in 1923. The 'Free Staters' moved in when the RIC and Tans evacuated the building after the truce. The building is now the Griffin Arms Hotel. Paddy O'Meara in Officers Uniform on the extreme left and Jack Kearney – St Brigids Avenue kneeling on the right of the photo. The identification of the rest of the group is not known. *Photo: Rev. P. Cleary*



even though the IRA and the free state army fought each other in the civil war, he remained good friends for the rest of his life with all his comrades from the IRA.

And that is my family story from the war of independence.