

Gunner Patrick Meleady – Service Number- 656798

An idealistic young man, who is still in his teens, has dreams of a self-determined Ireland
Whilst others join the volunteers, he is enraptured by Redmond's promise of Home Rule
His Mammy, Ellen, at 32c Great Clarence Street, is baking bread, for his home coming
Not knowing he's ingested the recruitment call, busy, she lays the table to Angelus bells
Wanting more for her youngest child, than him digging out coal boats on the Dublin docks
Her sacrifices wasted, no college education for him, in despair, she hears, his, 'good news'

He is handed his khaki uniform, together with button-stick, holdall. spurs and burnisher,
Now in the Royal Field Artillery, vaccinated, marched to cavalry barracks, gun drills begin
Horses are more important than men at 6 am reveille, the horses have to be tended first
Three months to train an infantryman, twelve months to train a gunner, training cut short
This young Dubliner, assigned to France, is waved off by his crying mother, father, siblings

Arriving at the Front, the adventure turns to constant calls for action, enemy fire and gas
Working around the clock, a 'shift ' system, 24 hrs on/24 hrs off, or longer, becomes his life
18-pounders, red-hot barrels, beech blocks jamming, that he forcibly opens with a pickaxe
Firing two to four shells, twenty-two pounds per round, fuses he sets with his shaking hand
Gas mask blocking his vision, smoke from the guns, bombardments, a suffocating living hell
His face, stained ebony with oil, staring sore-eyed, whilst mechanically slamming out shells

Rotten dirty and crawling with lice, has trench foot and clothing stinking of cordite, gas and mud
Desperately tired, haggard with fear, wizened from seeing things no young lad should ever see
His shaking is increasing from being under incessant shell fire, amongst rats he fretfully sleeps
Back on duty, ground hog day, with pals dying in droves, he prays to return home to his Dublin
While sending letters, filled with jokes and hope, a boy saving his mother and father from reality
Fighting, inch by inch, his wage of 1s. 2½d. a day, means nothing, for his fight is for Home Rule

Once schoolboy hands, now grip and manipulate, machine guns, inflicting appalling casualties
Expert in the British Vicker, Hotchkiss and Lewis gun, able to fire around 450 rounds per minute
Killing other mother's sons, whilst he himself is in one of the suicide squads, death is on his shoulder
A once altar boy, is tasked with taking life, a terrible torture of the soul, driven by political promises
Whilst his family pray the Rosary every night, that God's grace, forgiveness and safety be upon him
This Gunner, is razored down by an opposing German death dealer, wounded, he is taken as a POW

Travelling, in agony, to Magdeburg Camp, he is thankful to be away from horrors on the battlefields
Grateful he's wounded and maimed, so he, no longer wounds and maims, frightened of what's ahead
A harsh regime awaits him, as he is 'patched up' and allocated meagre rations, in freezing conditions
Just getting by, his wounds get infested, others talk of liberation, the 'Great War' is coming to its end
The Pandemic hits when the Amnesty is announced, and in camps, the sick and frail drop like flies
Then, repatriation, what's left is shifted out, with his frail health, vastly failing, he, crosses land and sea

Not in Dublin, he's taken by ambulance, and registered with hundreds, in St George's Military Hospital
In pain, spirit ebbing away, a life of 20 summers, hoping, he's done enough for a self-determined Ireland

He is amongst others like him, diseased, broken, praying to go home, whilst cared for by English voices

His father Bernard, leaving the North Wall, to bring his boy home, is promising Ellen, that all will be well

Arriving, 15th Jan 1919, too late to hold his boy one last time, he breaks down amongst kind strangers
Gunner Patrick Meleady, in a coffin, is buried, by his poor mother, in Glasnevin, St Patricks JL 266.5

Molly Meleady-Hanley aged 16

Great- Great Niece of Gunner Patrick Meleady

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