

## **REBEL GRANDFATHER**

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By James Collins

**For over 800 years, England ruled Ireland with an iron fist. They were not gentle, they were brutal and they practiced genocide. Initially they took over all the lands of the Irish and drove them to the Far West where there was little or no arable land. Then they turned Irish property over to English landlords. The arable area was denied to the Irish. The hated English law referred to this area as the pale hence, the restriction applied to the Irish was that they must live ‘beyond the pale’.**

**In the 1500s, Cromwell arrived and murdered over one million Irish. He burned every church in the south of Ireland, and to this day, you can see these magnificent buildings with no roofs. Now they are ruins only for tourists to view. The Irish do not forget.**

**In 1845, the famine arrived. The Irish have been forced to exist off potatoes, as their only supply of food, by the resident English. As tenant farmers, they had no income because of the famine and they were forced out of their homes out onto the roads by the English landlords who then burned their meager hovels. It is not that there was not enough food, Ireland was a land of plenty, but the food belonged to the English landlords and they packed it up and shipped it to England. The Irish peasants died by the thousands every week. Dispossessed, they were forced to walk the roads and, looking like skeletons; they begged for food and were buried in unmarked graves. Over one million died because of the famine and another million left the country forever. Most went to America. To this day, 50 million Americans trace their ancestry back to Ireland; an ethnic group only surpassed by the Germans. Around the ring of Kerry you can see hundreds of ruined homes known as the famine houses. No one will touch these houses as it is considered unlucky. In each one the entire family died. Again these are but only ruins to be viewed by tourists. The Irish do not forget.**

**Besides the killings and the repressions, the English decided that the Irish were not allowed to have any schools. Ireland, known for centuries as the land of saints and scholars desires education and it is hungered for by the Irish. Since they were not allowed to have any schools, dedicated Irish scholars acted as teachers and took the children out to the fields hidden behind the hedges and taught them to read and write. If the British found one of the hedge schools, they hanged the teacher. The Irish do not forget.**

**In fact, there is a saying about the relationship between the English and the Irish.**

**The English never learn from history,**

**The Irish never forget.**

**Over the 800 years, there have been dozens of Irish rebellions, which were put down violently by the British. The Irish do not forget.**

**The last big uprising started in 1916 with the Easter Sunday rebellion. This was put down but simmered for a few years until World War I. Suddenly the English needed conscription of the Irish as cannon fodder for their Army in Europe. The Irish were not about to go to Europe to fight Germans when they could stay in Ireland and fight the English. So guerrilla warfare was undertaken by the IRA. The English responded by forming a group consisting of all of the criminals release from the jails (they did not want them in their Army). The Army would not give them their khaki uniform and the police would not give them their black uniform. Instead, they were given a mixed uniform consisting of tan jacket, black pants, and gained the name 'black and tans.' They were brutal despised and hated.**

**During *the troubles* the IRA were destroying bridges at night by manually knocking them down. The bridges in Ireland typically consisted of stone. First, they built a wooden arch across the area requiring the bridge. Then stone was laid over the arch from each side and at that juncture, the Mason installed the Keystone. Then the wooden framing was slowly and carefully removed and the two sides of the bridge supported each other. Removal of the Keystone would cause a bridge to collapse.**

**The British needed help from the local contractors to rebuild the bridges. My grandfather Jim Collins was a local contractor in the West of Limerick. The British asked him to examine destroyed bridges, come up with an estimate, and then he was often contracted to rebuild the bridge. To allow him to pursue this duty he was given a pass to move around freely day or night within the counties of of Limerick and Kerry. Thus, he became a courier for the IRA as he could walk around freely delivering messages to the various squads throughout the area. Now he needed to hire local people to help re-build the bridges.**

**My grandfather investigated the damage done to the bridges and delivered an estimate to the British of what would cost to rebuild the bridge. He then hired local IRA men to supply the labor to rebuild the bridge. At the same time, he ran the school for the same IRA men showing them how to take a bridge apart. Effectively, Jim was generating his own work and undermining the British ability to travel freely through the countryside. Simultaneously he acted as a courier for the IRA as he was the only one authorized to travel around at night. He was undermining the occupiers and making their lives miserable. The Irish never forget**

**THE END**