

THE BRITISH GRENADE.

By James Collins.

In 1920, the IRA had taken on the British Empire. 800 years of subjugation had again caused rebellion. In Cork, the IRA had a brigade; the North Cork Flying Column that was running hit and run tactics against the British throughout the entire county. After three months absence, my two uncles with some compatriots had come in out of the wild. They came home to see their mother and father; visit with the people in town; gather some provisions; come in out of the rain; get warm and get a little relaxation. It lasted about six hours. A runner arrived to notify them that Black and Tan searching parties were on their way. They quickly gathered all their stuff together; rushed out the back into the fields and disappeared in the darkness. They were no sooner out of sight when my grandmother spotted two overlooked British hand grenades in the corner. She was terrified. Not only with the lethality of the devices but if, had the Black and Tans found them they would probably shoot everybody in the house. The only ones in the house were my grandmother, my mother age 14 and my aunt Julia, who was 11. My grandmother gathered up the two grenades and took the girls with her up the street to the local church (which was quite small holding about 100 people). They went to the back of the church and pried up one of the floorboards. She gingerly reached down and placed the two hand grenades on the dirt floor underneath the church. Then she replaced the floorboards; went back to the house; and endured the Black and Tan search of the domicile. They found no contraband.

A month or so later, another IRA squad came into the village. My grandmother went up to the leader whom she knew and told him the tale of the grenades. He congratulated her on her quick thinking and said they could really use those munitions. My grandmother came back to the church and indicated the floorboards. He opened them up; reached down and extracted one grenade. The other was nowhere to be seen. The 'Boys' brought in flashlights and looked as far as they could under the floorboards but to no avail. They could not wait any longer so they thanked everybody and left. The lost grenade was veritably forgotten.

40 years later, the Irish emigrants to America had taken up collections to replace the rundown altar in the little church at home. To everyone's amazement, when workers lifted the old altar, a British hand grenade was found right underneath the center of the altar. It was quite rusty and the bomb squad had to be called to disarm this lethal package. No one knew where this could have come from, but knew it had to be from the time of the trouble. This was discussed for weeks and people marveled that the priest had said mass over this altar every day for the last 40 years without being blown up.

It took about two months for the story to reach America. Many of the people who had experienced the time of 'the Troubles' had passed on. The few that remained passed the story onto the other survivors. Eventually it reached my mother's ears. She immediately called my aunt Julia and told her the story. They discussed whether they should pass this information on because of fear there might be some liability. Everyone assured them there was no harm done; there could be no liability; and it became a fine Irish tale from the time of 'the Troubles'.

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