

Private Patrick Feeney

Regimental Number – 5547

1st Battalion Connaught Rangers

Aged 34

Killed in Action, Thursday 22nd July 1915

Cemetery – Royal Irish Rifles graveyard Laventie, Pas de Calais France

Grave Ref V.B.2

The cold statistics about my grandfather, Patrick Feeney are listed here. He was a very experienced soldier having served 14 years in the army, prior to being called up again in 1914. His picture hung proudly on the wall of our family home. It appeared to us as children that he was always looking down at us. He was a young man, yet there was a type of sadness or seriousness in his eyes. With the knowledge we now have, maybe this was because he was mobilised again and departing for World War One. As a very experienced and travelled soldier he would have understood the danger and reality of war, better than most. He was a happily married man with a loving wife and six children. I am sure he thought his army career was over as he settled back into normal civilian life in 1911.

Patrick was the son of Michael Feeney and Catherine Feeney (nee Heraty from Islandeady) from Gallowshill Castlebar Co. Mayo. He was born on the 5th of February 1881. To say the least Patrick had a short and eventful life. He met and married Maria Quill who came from Eskara Crossmolina (The Quills originally came from Fermoy, Co. Cork). The Quill's were a family with a long military tradition in their own right.

Patrick joined the army at 16 years of age and served with the 3rd Battalion of the Connaught Rangers as a militiaman. He served 10 years and he attained the rank of corporal and his regimental number was 1492. He was discharged on the 2nd April 1907 and his discharge certificate showed his conduct as "exemplary". He was 5ft 6 in. in height, blue eyes and had fresh complexion. He was out of the service for one year and then rejoined the army to serve with the 4th Battalion Special Reserve. He enlisted on the 23rd May 1908, regimental number 4075. He served four years with the regiment, much of it in the Orange Free State and the Natal Cape Colony. He was decorated with the Queen's South African medals and clasp. He served the full term of his engagement and was discharged on 23rd April 1911 at Boyle Barracks. Patrick remained out of the army for the next three years and no doubt spent well-earned time with his wife and young family.

After the outbreak of war in 1914 he was mobilised for service and posted to Cross Haven in Cork. He was sent to France as part of the 1st Battalion of the Connaught Rangers on the 24th March 1915. He was killed in action on the 22nd July 1915 near Rue-Tilleroy on the day the Connaught Rangers were finally relieved after spending 16 days at the front line. He was buried in the Royal Irish Rifles graveyard in Laventie, which is on the St. Omar Road 3 miles from Fleurbaix. He was

posthumously awarded the British War Service Medal, the 1914-18 Star and the Victory Medal.

Maria Quill now residing at 26 Thomas Street received an official notification of his death from the 12th District Office Cork on the 6th August 1915. Notes of sympathy arrived shortly afterwards on behalf of King George and Lord Kitchener. She was awarded a war widows pension of 26 shillings and 6 pence. Maria died on the 16th October 1940. Patrick's Feeney's picture now hangs proudly in my home, I always thought he was telling us about the futility of war.

Before my own mother died in 1997 she handed me all his war medals and records which she had kept safely for almost 60 years. The records included details of his military career, discharge certificates of his initial engagements, the actual notice of his death including the faded telegram envelope, and messages of sympathy. I also hold an original copy of the history and traditions of the Connaught Rangers up to 1914. In telling the story of my own grandfather in this way I am fulfilling a long held tradition to honour him and all those who laid down their lives for world peace in their time. In researching his life I discovered references about Patrick Feeney's brother Martin who also served in WW1. He survived the war and returned to Castlebar, where he settled down and reared a family in Castlebar..

In August of this year 2007, I brought my wife and two young children over to Laventie, in Northern France to visit his grave, this was a very emotional occasion and one I will remember and treasure all my life. It was a dream fulfilled and I hope to return there again over the coming years. I really think that every one should take the time out, to visit the battlefields of Europe at least once in their lifetime, to appreciate the scale of the loss of life and the horrors that war inflicts on mankind.

By Michael Feeney