

The mysterious death of Shoeing Smith Charles O’Gorman

by Tom Donovan

Charles O’Gorman was born in 1894, in Merchant’s Quay, Limerick, the son of Patrick and Annie O’Gorman. Following the death of her husband, Annie moved in with her newly married daughter Julia Sheedy, who lived in Pennywell. Charles and his two brothers Manus and Arthur also moved with their widowed mother. Their brother-in-law Matthew Sheedy worked as an engine driver and may have been instrumental in getting positions as a locomotive brake fitter for Charles and engine cleaner for his older brother Manus.

Charles left Limerick before the Great War and emigrated to England. He was living in London when the war commenced, where he enlisted for service.¹ Charles may have acquired some metal working skills while fitting brakes on trains, which could have influenced his assignment as a shoeing smith, (farrier) with the 10th Reserve Regiment of Cavalry. This regiment was formed at the Curragh in August 1914 after the outbreak of war. Men who enlisted into the cavalry reserve were not usually posted to a cavalry regiment overseas, unless they were converted into infantry or other corps before being sent there.² Unlike many other recruits sent to the front, Charles must have felt relatively safe in his role with the cavalry.

When the Easter Rebellion commenced on Easter Monday the military authorities were quick to summon cavalry regiments from the Curragh and barracks nearest to Dublin city centre. There is a military record that states that the Reserve Cavalry was sent from Marlborough Barracks (now McKee Barracks) on Blackhorse Avenue, to face the rebels in Sackville (O’Connell) Street. The rebels opened fire as the troops advanced down Sackville Street. As they passed Nelson’s Pillar, outside the GPO, the rebels opened fire again from the GPO and surrounding buildings, killing three cavalymen and injuring another. Limerick man Charles O’Gorman was one of them and he and

two of his colleagues Private Herbert Cordwell and Sergeant Henry Shepherd lay dead on the Sackville street when the gunfire ceased. Another man, Lance Corporal Austin Walton was fatally wounded during the battle. As a result of the heavy losses suffered the patrol of cavalymen withdrew and returned to their barracks.³

There is another account of how Charles O’Gorman met his death in the excellent book *According to their Lights* by Neil Richardson.⁴ This account states that the Reserve Cavalry arrived, from the Curragh, in two trains on Easter Monday. They were dismounted and ready for combat. One train was sent, via a loop line, to the North Wall to guard the dock area. The remaining men were marched along the quays to City Hall, near Dublin Castle where they took part in the attack on the building. There was utter chaos as some of the soldiers fired on each other mistakenly thinking they were rebels. The attack was eventually suspended until the morning due to darkness descending and confusion over the strength of the rebel garrison. The building was easily taken next morning and the remaining members of the garrison arrested. There were several casualties on both sides and one of them was Charles O’Gorman. He was wounded either in the street outside or the dark interior of City Hall the previous evening.

While he may have contemplated his death when he joined the war effort, it is doubtful that Shoeing Smith Charles O’Gorman expected to die on the streets of Dublin. He was aged 24 and is buried in Grangegorman Military Cemetery.

References:

1. Neil Richardson, *According to their Lights; Stories of Irishmen in the British Army, Easter 1916* (Cork, 2015).
2. The Reserve Regiments of Cavalry at: <http://www.1914-1918.net/cavreserve.htm>
3. Commonwealth War Graves website: http://www.cwgc.org/media/190859/btm_april16-easter_rising.pdf
4. Neil Richardson, *According to their Lights* (op.cit.).



Headstone marking the grave of Shoeing Smith Charles O’Gorman