

Codford St. Mary's Churchyard Graves



Lest we Forget

NEAL McCOURT

LOUTH RIFLES

14TH JULY, 1876 Age 25

Neal McCourt

Neal McCourt was baptised on 12th April, 1849 at Seatown, Dundalk, Ireland to parents Peter & Catherine McCourt (nee O'Neil/O'Neill). He was baptised Roman Catholic & his sponsor/godparent was Judith McCourt.

Parents Peter McCourt had married Catherine O'Neil on 5th June, 1845. Witnesses for the marriage were Alice O'Neil & Joseph Connelly. Peter & Catherine McCourt had the following children – Mary (baptised 21st August, 1846), then Neal, Bridget (baptised 19th August, 1851), Patrick (baptised 18th March, 1854), Alice (baptised 10th June, 1856), Catherine (Baptised 11th October, 1859) & Felix (baptised 25th April, 1863).

Neal McCourt, from Seatown, Dundalk, Ireland, enrolled with the Louth Rifles at Dundalk on 24th December, 1872. His occupation was listed as "Railway Cleaner", his age as 21 & he was five feet six inches tall. He was given the number of 3297.

As a new recruit in a militia regiment, Neal McCourt was required to undertake three months initial training. The training commenced on Monday 3rd May, 1873 at Dundalk (Ref: Dundalk Herald 3rd May, 1873). The Louth Militia recruited its members from neighbouring counties as well as County Louth. After undergoing one month's training, the men were allowed weekend leave. Training continued for the further two months, when the trainees were joined by the part-time soldiers of the Louth Rifles for a further month's training at Drogheda before being dismissed.

In Mid July, 1874, the full regiment was assembled at Drogheda for annual training. The final inspection of the regiment, which consisted of approximately 600 men, took place on 10th August, 1874. Despite the heavy rain, the final inspection attracted crowds of locals, however afterwards, numerous brawls involving the soldiers, brought on by alcohol & two Court Martials occurred. (Ref: Dundalk Herald 15th August, 1874).

Twenty eight days annual training again occurred in Drogheda from Monday 26th July, 1875.

In 1876, for the first time in British Military history, a tentative scheme of mobilisation occurred. The intention was that the whole available military force of the United Kingdom, including the Regular Army and Militia should be formed into eight army corps. Two of these Corps, the 2nd & 5th, which included the Louth Rifles, were mobilised in the summer of 1876. (Ref: Brendan Hall & Donal Hall, The Louth Rifles 1877-1908). The Regiment, under the command of Colonel Sir John Robinson, departed Dundalk for England on 10th July, 1876, by train. From Kingstown, the Regiment travelled on board HMS *Crocodile*, an iron screw troopship, along with the Wexford & Longford Militias, to Portsmouth. The Regimental Digest reports that despite the weather being fair, there was much sea-sickness on board. They arrived at Portsmouth on 12th July, disembarked the following day and travelled by rail to Wylde, ten miles from Salisbury where the main military exercises were to take place. The men arrived at their camp at 2 p.m. but there was such disarray surrounding the cooking arrangements that they did not get fed until 9 p.m. that night, after only having had one cup of coffee all day.

On the 14th July, 1876, the men were paraded at 6.30 a.m. but training later in the day was abandoned because of the heat. Unusually the Regimental Digest makes several references on the conditions & referring to the high heat. For one soldier the conditions proved fatal. Rifleman Neal McCourt died at Steeple Langford, about three miles from Codford, on the 14th July, 1876 from sunstroke. A local sexton looked after the arrangements for his burial in the churchyard of the Parish Church of Saint Mary, Codford. One Dundalk paper noted the death in passing, but said he had been ill prior to departure to England, although there is no note of this on his Death Certificate. The fact that a headstone was erected to mark his passing is unusual for this time.

A death was registered for Neal McCourt, aged 25, in the September quarter 1876, in the district of Wilton, Wiltshire.

With special thanks to Brendan Hall for information provided "1855 The Louth Rifles by Brendan Hall" & Alan Hand – Reference Library – Louth County Library.

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Photo of Rifleman Neal McCourt's Headstone located in St. Mary's Churchyard, Codford, Wiltshire. Rifleman Neal McCourt is buried next to Private William Cooper who died 27th September, 1914 after an epileptic fit while on parade. Both soldiers have headstones that were erected by the men of their Battalions.



St. Mary's Churchyard, Codford, Wiltshire



(Photos by Andrea Charlesworth)