

EASTER SPECIAL

Limerick's night of murderous terror

WHAT WAS, perhaps, the most stunning tragedy in Limerick's history, took place shortly after midnight on March 6th, 1921, when the Mayor, Alderman George Clancy, and the ex-Mayor, Councillor Michael O'Callaghan, were shot to death in their homes by Crown Forces and in the presence of their wives. To add to the general consternation and horror produced by the double atrocity, it was learned later that a third murder had been perpetrated in another part of the city, the victim being a young man named Joseph O'Donoghue, Manager of the British and Argentine Fresh Meat Co., William Street.

It was a day of gloom and depression which no one who has lived through can ever forget. The news of the tragedies was not generally known until 8 a.m., when the announcement was made at all the early Masses in the city.

The feeling of horror created among the congregations was overpowering, and when the news of the dreadful happenings became known generally, it caused stupefaction among the citizens. Only the previous week the Lord Chief Justice, in his address to the Grand Jury, had referred to the Christian forces at work for the preservation of the peace in the city.

The victims

The murdered Mayor and his predecessor in office were exemplary citizens. They were both young men in the prime of life. They were adherents of Sinn Fein principles, but were men of moderate views and tolerant towards those who differed from them politically, while as Corporators they stood for the efficient administration of civic affairs. During 1920, Councillor O'Callaghan held the high office of Mayor, which he relinquished on January 30, 1921. He was a diligent and zealous Chief Magistrate and his chief concern was for the welfare of the community. As a chairman he was impartial, able and painstaking, and he conducted the debates in the Council with marked intelligence and courtesy. A member



Slain Mayors Clancy and O'Callaghan.

By RICHARD NAUGHTON

noghue, under similar circumstances, was another chapter in the deep tragedy. He was a young man, about 28 years of age, and had come to Limerick some two years before as manager of the British and Argentine Fresh Meat Co.

O'Callaghan

Councillor Michael O'Callaghan, who lived at St. Margaret's, O'Callaghan (then called North) Strand, retired to bed at 11.30 o'clock on the night of Sunday, March 6. Two hours later he and his wife were awakened by loud knocking at the front door. Mrs. O'Callaghan got up and went to the window and asked who was there. She received the reply: "Police and military". She asked if they were accompanied by an officer and the reply was: "Yes, and two". One of the party told her to throw down the keys of the gate in order to admit others of their party. This was the request made in previous raids on the house. Mrs. O'Callaghan went downstairs, followed by her husband. Upon opening the door, two men confronted her with the collars of their coats turned up and caps drawn down over their eyes. Both wore motor goggles with tortoise rims, and were also wearing what looked like false moustaches.

They called on Mr. O'Callaghan to come out, adding: "We want you". Mrs. O'Callaghan, who was standing with extended arms in front of the assailants, exclaimed: "No, no". One of the men then rushed into the hall with revolver in hand and fired over Mrs. O'Callaghan's shoulder at her husband, who fell at the foot of the stair case. Mrs. O'Callaghan, a frail woman, grappled with one of the men and in the struggle

we want". His room was then searched and he was taken out and shot dead. When found, about 7.30 in the morning, his body was practically riddled with bullets. He was well known in G.A.A. and Gaelic League circles, and was a member of E Company, Second Battalion, I.R.A. He was a native of Ballinacarrig, Co. Westmeath. The Bishop of Limerick, Most Rev. Dr. Hallinan, and Very Rev. Canon O'Driscoll, P.P., St. Munchin's, visited the houses of the dead and prayed for the repose of their souls. At the house of Mayor Clancy, his Lordship recited the Rosary in Irish.

A Military Court of Inquiry sat at the County Courthouse to investigate the circumstance of the tragedies. In connection with the Court, Mrs. K. O'Callaghan issued the following letter to the Press—"I have received a request from the military to attend a military court of inquiry with reference to the murder of my husband, Michael O'Callaghan. I am quite willing to appear before a jury of my countrymen and to give evidence and every assistance. I shall not attend any military court of inquiry, as I believe that these courts are but a farce and a travesty of justice. I have several times conveyed my decision on this point to those concerned".

O'Donoghue

The next-of-kin of any of the victims did not attend at the inquiry. Some further information, however, was given on the circumstances leading to Volunteer O'Donoghue's murder. A witness said: "Two men entered the house; one was tall, about 28 years, and wore black goggles, a black overcoat and a fawn slouched hat. The other was low-sized, wearing similar goggles

borne to the bier by his own friends, who journeyed from Westmeath to the funeral. The three coffins were covered by the Tricolour.

All along the route there were vast crowds on the side-walk, and women wept bitterly as the funeral procession passed. The cortege was headed by children of the city schools and colleges. Then came the clergy, over 100 from Limerick and the various parts of the country. The general public were preceded by the Corporation of Limerick. The Deputy Mayor, Ald. J. Casey, who wore his insignia of office, was accompanied by the Town Clerk, Mr. W. M. Nolan, and attended by his Sergeants with draped maces, while close up were the City Fire Brigade, wearing their burnished helmets. Then came the Lord Mayors and Mayors of many Irish cities. Cumann na mBan acted as wreath bearers.

Oration

When the grave in the Republican Plot at Mount St. Laurence was closed in, Alderman Casey delivered a short oration. He said in that unforgettable and solemn moment when they had laid the mortal remains of their illustrious fellow-citizens in their last resting place, it was difficult, indeed, to give voice to their sentiments. They were men of whom any nation might be proud; men of blameless lives and unimpeachable honour; animated with the highest ideals, for which they lived and had died. "Limerick", he said, "will remember them with loving sorrow and pride. They are martyrs to the cause of Ireland's freedom. In this spot", he declared, "there would be erected a monument befitting the dignity and worth of Limerick's martyred three. These men would preach and proclaim from their pulpits of clay and stone that to live and die for either Faith or Fatherland was the noblest and grandest ideal for mortal man to attain. Let us look up", he concluded, "and beg that all those whose blood has been shed in ages past for Faith and Fatherland will look down on us in this time of trial and lead us from the present agony of our Gethsemane to the glorious Easter dawn of our country. And may the voice of Ireland's martyred dead join with ours this day in our nation's heart cry, 'God Save Ireland'."

This article by the late Richard Naughton originally appeared in the Féile Pádraig brochure of 1964 and is reprinted by kind permission of Richard Quin.