

The secrets Volunteer Patrick took to his grave

■ Fascinating insight daring raid to destroy gun shells in Foynes

EUGENE PHELAN

PATRICK O'Connell worked for Irish Shell BP all his life, but never told his family of his earlier involvement with the Irish volunteers and his role in trying to get a ship load of guns into Foynes in 1914, and how he was involved in a daring raid to destroying gun shells destined for a British gunboat.

"We never knew a thing, our father never spoke about his involvement, we only found out after he was dead, when we found some documents he left behind," said well known Limerick athletics official Paddy O'Connell. His dad, of Corrigg, Foynes, was a member of Fianna Eireann and the Irish Volunteers and made an official statement to the Bureau of Military History about his knowledge of incidents in County Limerick. He was born in 1898 and died in May 1982.

"My brothers John and Robin always thought he was a very quiet man, with his two main interests collecting stamps and coins and writing poetry. We never knew of his involvement, until after his death and found some documents. He was the adjutant of the E Company in west Limerick," Paddy told the Leader this week.

In his witness statement Patrick recalled the visit of Constance Countess Markievicz, one of the founders of Na Fianna Eireann to Newcastle West in 1916, when she addressed the crowd from the second floor window of Michael Dore's house, the local chemist.

He recalled one evening in 1914, the local volunteers had assembled on the pier head in Foynes for their usual parade and drill, when a parade was dismissed after a messenger arrived on a bicycle with new orders. They were marched back the road to the home of the Honourable Mary Spring, at Mount Trenchard. They remained on duty until early morning.

"During the night there was much volunteer activity, and a large number of volunteers had arrived in the village from Askeaton and Aughanish and other points along the shore. These had take up position allotted to them. The post office was under the control of the volunteers," he explained.

Telephone communication was cut off and the village isolated from outside.



Patrick O'Connell worked for BP and secretly acted as Irish Volunteer. He was involved in a number of high profile incidents in west Limerick during the revolutionary decade. His family only learned of his involvement after his death

"Rumour had now pierced the air of secrecy and whispers of an expected arrival of rifles gladdened our hearts. It was said that the guns were to be landed in Foynes Island. The local volunteer boatmen, the Walshes, Finucanes, Michael Buckley, Joe Carroll and Edward Barron were read to man their boats when required. Morning came but the rifles never arrived. Disappointed we marched home."

Some time previous to the events related above, Conor O'Brien, his sister, and George Cahill and Tom Fitzsimons, as members of his crew, sailed from Foynes in his yacht "Kelpie". He added: "Of the

subsequent landing of the rifles by O'Brien at Kilcoole, County Wicklow we are now familiar."

He revealed that from 1920 to 1921 Foynes was one of the most strongly garrisoned villages of its size in the county, with big forces of military, R.I.C. and Black and Tans along with a gunboat and naval crew, anchored off the piers.

Mr O'Connell also revealed his involvement in destroying 60 wooden boxes of .16-lb gun shells which arrived at Foynes railway station consigned to the commander of a gun boat which was permanently stationed at Foynes.

He got some revolvers from Cap-

tain Fitzgerald, who lived near Askeaton and that night forced an entrance to the Railway Goods Store with his colleagues, and removed the boxes which they piled on the pier and burned. "Search lights were immediately turned on the scene from the gunboat, and naval and police patrols turned out, but we got home safely," he revealed.

In those times the volunteers held lots of parades. He recalled a historic one in Newcastle West on St Patrick's Day 1916 which was addressed by Seam MacDermott, later shot for his part in the rebellion in Dublin.

'The Chairman' Ryan will read proclamation

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THE village of Hospital will mark the events of 1916 with a special commemoration this Easter Monday.

At 12 noon a parade will leave the church car park to the sound of a lone piper and a junior choir who will sing songs on the way up the street.

The proclamation will be read outside the local hall by Michael Ryan 'The Chairman'.

His father - also Michael - read the proclamation in 1916 and got four years in Crumlin Road jail in Belfast as a result.

"It will be a proud moment for everybody involved," said Michael.

"My father read the full proclamation and he was jailed then straight afterwards in Crumlin Road jail in Belfast. He was there about four years."

The exact spot where Michael Ryan read the proclamation is unclear as there are no local records.

"We are reading it in front of the hall because there is space there," said Michael.

His father, a native of Hospital, was born in 1880.

"We were farmers but he was creamery manager in Knockainey creamery at that time. When he came out of prison and came back home he took up farming again.

"My father was also a district judge in the Sinn Fein courts. The courthouse was in Brennan's House below



Michael Ryan 'The Chairman'

in Lough Gur." "He was chairman of the Board of Health. There were a good few Ryans around, we were known as the Chairman Ryans."

His father never spoke about his time in jail - "never. I was listening to a programme on television recently and they said that a lot of people at that time didn't speak about their experiences because after the Civil War there were relations pitched against relations and, I suppose, they didn't want to be opening up wounds or that."

"There was another Duggan man from Doon, he was in Belfast as well with him. My father was to be sent to Dartmoor but he got Black Flu and was too ill to go so he was spared that much. I had four uncles in the de la Salle Brothers. There was one of them on the Falls Road in Belfast who founded St Galls GAA Club over 100 years ago, Brother Albeus Thomas Ryan.

"He was transferred to Ballyandreen in the month of April but they couldn't figure out why he was transferred because usually the

Brothers were transferred during the summer holidays. I was telling them about my father being in Crumlin Road jail and it was then, after 100 years, they put the piece of the jigsaw together - for his safety they got him out of Belfast, in case there were any repercussions."

Michael, 74, will be accompanied by his wife Mary at the commemoration. The couple have four children, Susan, Michael, Patrick and Ann-Marie.

There are also nephews and nieces coming from Dublin and England for the occasion. "We are the 10th generation of the Ryans here on this farm. I have a family tree that my father did going back to 1780."

The monument to Patrick Lynch has been renovated and a plaque will also be unveiled there on the day.

According to former councillor Eddie Creighton, who is involved in organising the event, it should go on for an hour and a half.

■ **The West Limerick Old IRA 1916 centenary commemoration service will take place in Newcastle West, this Easter Sunday. At 12.30pm, the O'Riada Mass will be celebrated by Canon Frank Duhig, and will include choirs from Newcastle West and Monagea. Following the reading of the Proclamation, an oration will be delivered by historian and lecturer Dr William Murphy, of DCU, who hails from Monagea.**

Reclaiming the tricolour

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FINE Gael TD Patrick O'Donovan has called on all citizens to "reclaim" the tricolour.

And he paid tribute to the tens of thousands of school children all around the country who have led the way in honouring our national flag as part of the centenary celebrations.

"We have a long tradition

here of hanging out club and county colours with great pride in the run up to our local and national sporting occasions to show our allegiance and support and I believe we should all now use that tradition in this very special period in our history as we prepare this week to commemorate the 1916 Rising." Deputy O'Donovan said calling on homes, businesses and organisations to fly the flag with pride.

In Ireland, he added, we haven't embraced our national flag in the same way as they do in the US and elsewhere. "This may be due to the fact that for parts of our recent history, our flag was abused by a small minority of people who, with no mandate, turned a symbol of unity and hope into a symbol of sectarianism and division," he said. But, he argued, the flag is for all the people in the country,