

Remembering Lt. Michael O'Shea



Volunteers of H. Company. Granagh 4th Battalion, West Limerick Brigade

In mid March 1921 H Company (Granagh) accompanied by other volunteer groups from West Limerick were ordered to help the east Limerick Brigade. They were engaged in six weeks strenuous activity and they rested and slept in the Galtee Mountains. At the beginning of May a fierce battle took place at Lackelly near Knocklong. The Black & Tans suffered heavy losses and unfortunately the East Limerick brigade lost four of its volunteers.

Following the engagement Granagh H company were recalled to West Limerick as the situation was changing rapidly. Marching from the Galtees to Athea, they had no transport and were depending on the local people's generosity for food and water. They travelled mostly by night, as the British had an extensive spy network amongst the civilians.

Because of spies and informers many of the volunteers lost their lives.

When Granagh company reached Ballinleena Lt Michael O'Shea was given the task of escorting a spy (an ex British Soldier) who had been captured in West Limerick. He selected five men William O'Brien, Paddy Benson, John Dunworth, John Fox and Paddy O' Carroll to assist with the mission.

They decided to move the prisoner around midnight. They started their journey down the breen from Mary O'Briens house at Coolrus, near Ballinleena. William O'Brien led the way with his pony and trap. The volunteers followed behind with their prisoner.

Unknown to them, a raiding party of Black & Tans under the command of Colonel Hope, a regular army officer from Ballyvonaire Garrison, near Buttevant had setup an ambush.

The enemy parked their lorry in Kingsland and moved into position well in advance of the ambush. They were clearly acting on information they had received from their spying network. The volunteers were unaware of what lie in store about a mile ahead.

They followed the trap which was pulled by a Connemara pony owned by the O' Brien family. About a hundred yards from the main road the volunteers were met with a fusillade of gunshot.

Michael O'Shea and Paddy Benson fell seriously wounded. Confusion and disorder ensued. The pony bolted which created further pandemonium. This gave the other volunteers vital seconds in which to escape. Amidst the chaos their prisoner also escaped. The two men lay motionless on the ground, O'Shea barely clinging on to life. Benson was shot in the neck and had his right shoulder shattered. In situations like this the Black & Tans would show no mercy but Colonel Hope ordered the two men be taken prisoner.

A local man, David Hartigan, was ordered at gunpoint to use his horse and cart to take the two men to a British army truck parked half a mile away. Mr Hartigan confirmed that Lt O'Shea was still alive when placed on the truck. But, without any medical assistance, he died from his injuries on the way to the Charleville.

Michael O'Shea's Father and sister identified and reclaimed his body the following day. Following his funeral Mass in Granagh Church he was laid to rest in Seanabhotha Graveyard where his coffin was shouldered by comrades from Granagh and West Limerick Volunteers.

The British forces kept watch on the funeral proceedings from the field overlooking the graveyard.

Paddy Benson, hovered between life and death for a few days, but with the help of fellow prisoners he recovered. He was held in Spike Island prison until the Treaty was signed on July 11th 1921. On his release he returned to his native Banogue on the banks of the Maigue.

H Company disbanded after the Treaty was signed, but peace was short lived and history recalls that a most tragic and viscous period for the new state was about to unfold

In 1966, as part of the 1916 commemoration, the people of Granagh decided to honour Michael O'Shea and erected a headstone in his memory.

Local historian Jim Houlihan recalls the events that took place.

The recent 2021 ceremonies at Shanavoha graveyard commemorating the murder of Lieutenant Michael O'Shea by Crown Forces on 10th of May 1921, evokes memories of a splendid ceremony at the same location in 1966. The event was, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Easter Rising, 1916.

It had been organised by a local committee headed up by Paddy Power and Sean Shine. Lieutenant O'Shea was killed and Volunteer Patrick Benson was seriously wounded in an engagement consequent to the Granagh Volunteer Company intercepting an ex-British soldier named Ryan who was on a spying mission in the area. By coincidence, another ex-British soldier, William Hennessy, (grandfather to, Ann Moran) Killatal, was training the Granagh Volunteers



We had a military Mass at Granagh Church during which, a group of soldiers including a trumpeter marched to the Altar to pay Homage at the Consecration. After Mass, the Army led a march to Shanavoha. It may be more correct to say they led a procession because, not surprisingly, the march broke down on the way.

The great Mannix Joyce delivered a powerful oration at the graveside of Michael O'Shea. Part of that oration has been referenced in, Thomas Toomey's Book, "The War of Independence in Limerick, 1912-1921".

It was followed by the rosary. The volley was fired over the grave and Michael O'Shea was accorded full Military Honours. Sean Shine thanked all who had contributed in making the event the great occasion it proved to be.

An Army Bugler sounded The Last Post and brought proceedings to a close. Just as the large crowd began to disperse, the organisers looked at each other, it was just then it occurred to them that no one had arranged for a photo.

Centenary Commemoration

A wreath laying commemoration ceremony was held at the grave of Lieutenant Michéal O'Shea in Shanabhatha, to mark the centenary of his shooting by the British, during the war of Independence. The people of Granagh erected the headstone in 1966 in memory of Mick Sé, as he was known locally. MC, Jim Chawke welcomed a fine crowd for the event and the rain held off fortunately.

Tommy O'Riordan, one of the committee members working on this project, laid a wreath on behalf of the Volunteers. Johnny Sheehan, whose father played on the hurling team



with Mick, laid a wreath on behalf of the GAA, as Mick was captain of Granagh when they won the County title in 1914 and 1916. Seamus Twomey did some research though the GAA



and discovered Mick's medal is on display in the military museum in London. John Cregan, Chairman was also in attendance and spoke on behalf of the GAA. The last wreath was laid by Michael O'Brien (son of Paddy) as Mick was his great grand-uncle and he





insisted on paying for the cleaning of the headstone. Also in attendance and similarly related was Padraig and Hugh Hogan, Bruree. Present also, Richard O'Donoghue TD, who is working with the committee to erect a plaque at the community centre, naming all the local volunteers. Kay Sheehy produced an excellent piece, on the above, for the History Show, which was aired on RTE Radio1, Sunday 9th, which can be found on the RTE player.



Military Medal awarded to Michael O'Shea