

A.8.

LOK 11307

MR. THOMAS J. MARTIN,

"BANBA",

KILLYBEGS,

CO. DONEGAL.

(FORMERLY OF ARDBOE, COUNTY TYRONE.)

18th JULY, 1967.

My parents came from the Parish of Ardboe, Co. Tyrone, but soon after their marriage my father and mother went to Scotland. My father worked in the coal mines in Kirkintilloch. My father's name was Gerry Martin, and my mother's maiden name was Rose Ann Coyle. My grandmother's name was Mullan, and my mother often told me how my grandmother and her sister, Rose, had been evicted by the Landlord during the period of land trouble in Ireland. Their goods and chattels were ~~their own~~ thrown out in front of the house, and they found shelter with other friends, but not wishing that the Landlord would put another tenant in their place, the two sisters returned that night and burned their former home.

I was born in Kirkintilloch on the 16th October, 1898. When I was about six years of age my father and mother and other children born in Scotland, returned to Ireland and settled in a small farm in the townland of Sessiagh, near the Old Cross of Ardboe. My father's wages as a coal miner was five shillings a day, but he and other miners were agitating for "eight hours work, eight hours play, and eight bob a day".

My father commenced fishing on Lough Neagh with other relatives, and worked his small farm. During the winter months he returned to the coal mines in Scotland. Just as today, the Lough Neagh fishermen were harried by bailiffs who were often accompanied by armed R.I.C., and just as today, the fishermen retaliated by throwing stones on these disturbers.

I asked Mr. Martin was there any pro-Irish activity in Scotland at the period, and he said he was only a child and could not remember, though there was Sinn Fein activity post 1916. He himself returned in the winter months, as did his father, to work in the mines, but during the summer months he worked for farmers and fishing on Lough Neagh. He said there was a Sinn Fein club established in Kirkintilloch by a priest called Fr. Green - a native of Co. Donegal - and that this club met in a hall near the church, not the Parochial Hall. This he said, was called the "Hall of the League of the Cross".

He went to Mooretown National School whose principal was a Mr. Kelly, and later a Mr. Thomas Fagan, who came from Warrenpoint. A Miss O'Neill was the assistant teacher. He remained at school until he was fourteen years of age, because his father had been denied any education as a boy. He had never been at school, but was employed herding cattle when he was seven years of age. He said, he, (Thomas) remembered when he was hired to a local farmer called Hugh Devlin (Harry). His father confessed to him that when he himself was hired, his father (Thomas's grandfather) came one day and wondered why he wasn't writing home, and Gerry said he couldn't write as he could neither read nor write, so the grandfather brought his son a primer which he studied, and taught himself how to read and write. Thomas said that Hugh Devlin, who lived with his brother and sister, paid him 3/6d. a week and boarded him while he worked with the Devlins.

When going to work in Scotland, Thomas always walked from Ardboe to the nearest railway station, Moneymore; then went to Belfast and crossed to Scotland by the Belfast Ardrossan boat. He lodged for a few nights with relatives in Pollockshaw Road, Glasgow, before going to Kirkintilloch. His aunt lived at this address, and was married to a man called Tom Berry, a convert. Her maiden name was Rose Mullan, and there was one daughter called Rose Berry. Tom Berry was crippled with arthritis and was confined to a wheelchair.

He was sworn into the I.R.B. in the late Autumn of 1916 or early in 1917. Seamus Dobbyn was organising in the Ardboe area at the time. He remembers there was snow on the ground. He and about ten others were sworn in on that occasion, in a vacant house on Carr's Hill. He thinks it was one of the McConville's who arranged for Seamus Dobbyn to meet the men sworn in.

He could only remember the names of a few sworn in on the occasion. He thought there was a man called Pat Devlin or Quinn, whose nickname was "Grainne". A man called Wee Charlie Doris; another called James Doris (Charlie), and Tommy O'Neill of Killycolply. Only Tommy and himself were later in the I.R.A. As far as he remembered there were only thirteen I.R.A. volunteers in 'H' Company, Second Brigade, Third Northern pre-Truce, though post-Truce there were 110 in the Company. Pre-Truce members were: Alex, James, Pat and Frank McConville, and a man called McGuckin; John and Eddie Doris; Arthur O'Neill and himself. Though it might appear with this enormous increase, that the post-Truce volunteers were not of such a high calibre as the pre-Truce ones, yet many of them proved their worth as soldiers. Of course many of the A.O.H. joined post-Truce. They even gave us some of the arms, they had hidden, up to the Truce. These arms would have been much more welcome had they given them to us before the Truce.

Some of the names of those post-Truce are: Mark Crozier, W.J. Patrick and Wm. J. McElroy; J.J. McConville, Wm. McTague, Upper Buck, Hugh Corr, Killycolply. He said he forgot to mention that the Tommy O'Neill was the Tommy who lived at the head of the lane in Killycolply, because there are two Tommy O'Neill's in the district. He thinks he now lives in Cookstown. He was a very useful man as he had a motor car which was very necessary on occasions. Another useful member was Patrick J. Devlin, brother of the late Father John Devlin, and son of Felix 'Mor' Devlin. He was Intelligence Officer for the Battalion and was very efficient. Felix 'Mor's' home was always a home from home for any volunteer on the "run". The door was always on the latch and a large pot of porridge ready for any who needed it. While Felix himself was not enthusiastic for I.R.A. yet he was quietly sympathetic, and many a time both he and his wife only knew that some men on the "run" availed themselves of the hospitality when they came down in the morning and found the porridge pot empty.

I asked Mr. Martin how did they get arms in the early days of the I.R.A. and he said they raided for arms, and on one occasion he himself went to Scotland and bought arms and ammunition there. He had gone to Coalisland and asked Barney Donnelly, the Coalisland Company Q.M. if they could buy some arms and ammunition from that Company. Regretfully he couldn't do anything for him, so with the £30 that had been collected he decided to go to Glasgow to buy some there. He went to his relatives, the Berry family, and in Alexander's Store, Main Street, Pollockshaw Road, near Berry's, he saw shot-gun cartridges for sale. He was accompanied in a search by a young Scot called Green. He went into the shop and asked the assistant if he could buy some shot-gun cartridges and he said of course he could. He asked if they could be bought without a permit, and was told they could, so he bought six boxes of cartridges and had them made up into two parcels, and he and the young man Green brought them back to the Berry household where they ~~extracted~~ extracted the smaller bore shot from the cartridges and melted this lead in an old kettle, into small lumps. Mr. Martin said he wanted the cartridge cases in Ireland to make them into buckshot cartridges, and as he was sending the empty cartridge cases back by post they would be lighter and less suspicious. He melted the lead in the old kettle as there was no use in wasting the small shot they took out of the cartridges.

Tom Berry who was, as he said before, a convert, was very sympathetic to the I.R.A. and the work they were doing in Ireland, and though incapacitated in his wheel-chair he did all the extracting and melting of the lead.

Mr. Martin bought from an ex-British soldier a small automatic revolver, called a "Savage" automatic. When all was ready he set off for the return trip for Ireland and at Central Station, Glasgow, he suddenly remembered that the lumps of lead had been put into the empty cartridge boxes - for convenience of carriage.. These in two parcels he had already in the railway carriage - the empty cartridge cases had already been posted to the Q.M. of the 'H' Company in Ardboe.

Between Glasgow and Ardrossan he was able to open the parcels, take out the lumps of lead and throw the empty cartridge boxes out of the train window. When he arrived at Ardrossan he found that there was a strict search by officials and police at the quay side. He was asked what he was doing with the lumps of lead which he had tied together without paper, and he said that they were sinkers which were used for sinking fishing nets, and that he was a fisherman from Lough Neagh area. He had on a heavy over-coat and in the inside pocket was his "Savage" automatic, and sewed into the lining were another 150 rounds of size 16 shot, and a mould for making size 16 bullets. These he had got in Glasgow, as they would suit a shot-gun which would fire such size bullets. The officials and police accepted the story and he was not personally searched before he got on the boat.

It was with difficulty he was able to keep awake during the crossing to Belfast, and early in the morning, as the boat approached Belfast Lough, he went up on deck and was leaning on the ship's rail, when a prosperous looking Scotsman came up and leant on the rail beside him. They talked generally and the man said to him "I wonder what they were searching for at Ardrossan?" and he replied, "I don't know, but they were very thorough in their search." The Scotsman dryly remarked, "There is men on this boat and if the search had been as thorough as you say, they would be in jail last night". He was a Scotsman and told me he was a Building Contractor, and when we got to Belfast the quay there was surrounded by police and military searching passengers as they disembarked. I was in trouble now even if I had escaped trouble at Ardrossan! I pondered the possibility of shooting my way out of the difficulty, but I was lucky I didn't have to as the revolver was defective. (I found this out when I tested it later in Ardboe), but my Scotch friend, seeing my dilemma and probably knowing the cause of it, told me to follow him. This I did, and he took me into a public house avoiding the cordon of military - took me out through a rear door and showed me a safe way out of my difficulty, saying with his strong Scottish accent, "You can thank an Orangeman for your freedom". He did not tell me his name and I asked it, but I owe my life to a nameless Orangeman.

I got the train to Cookstown and thought that my troubles were at an end. Judge my horror when I looked out of the carriage window at Cookstown Station to find military and police again searching passengers! I got out of the carriage and went into the station toilets - stayed there a considerable time, and was relieved when I came out to find a young Cookstown volunteer who had been sent to meet me. He told me that Tommy O'Neill was waiting outside the station to drive me to Ardboe, but I said "I can't get out of the station with the Crown Forces at the exit". I told him to go back to Tommy O'Neill and have him drive to the Goods Yard of the station, and I entered the railway carriage again and got out on the other side of it and walked down the railway track to the Goods Yard where I got into Tommy's car and arrived after a hazardous trip at Ardboe, having lost none of my "stores" en route. I had arranged that the Q.M. of the Ardboe Company would send me a wire in a code acquainting me of the arrival of the parcels of empty cartridge cases, but before my leaving, no such wire had come. I was worried that they might have been lost or seized in the mail, and I immediately went to his home to find out if they had come. His mother said he was working for a local farmer, and I found him working in a field near the road. I was hardly speaking to him five minutes when the postman arrived and gave him the missing parcels. I then went to Duff's of the Crab Tree who had the local Post Office there, and sent the coded wire back to Rose Berry. The coded wire which should have been sent to me in care of Berry's, had the innocuous words, "Got home safely; forgot my umbrella". These seemingly innocent words assured Rose Berry and her father that all their work had not been in vain.

In our workshop in the empty house on Carr's Hill, where the local I.R.B. had been formed, we prepared many buckshot cartridges

from the material I had got in Glasgow. We also made their mines from lengths of cast iron piping, about one foot long with two square plates at the end of each length, and an iron rod going through from one end to the other, held firmly in place by two bullets. The detonator was in the middle of these pipe lengths and the insides were filled with explosives. We tested a small quantity of this explosive - Irish Cheddar, and found it effective. We filled a small castor oil bottle with the explosive and detonated it. This small quantity of explosive was sufficient to blow a very heavy stone that was put on top of it, a considerable distance into Lough Neagh, at a place called the "Battery" where we carried out our test.

The explosives that were used came I think, from Dublin. We certainly did not manufacture any explosives ourselves. Mines and explosives and grenades, which came in the post-Truce period, were kept in a dump in Killycolply. I remember on one occasion I was walking on the road when Fr. Sheridan, the Curate, came by on a bicycle. He was on his way to do Sunday devotions in Mulnahoe Church.

He got off his bicycle and we walked together in the direction of the church. A lorry load of Specials overtook us, and fearing we would be held up and searched, I got rid of some ammunition that I had on me by carefully throwing it over the hedge behind me. The lorry did not stop but headed in the direction of Killycolply. Fearing that they might be going to search for our dump and wishing to alert the volunteers, I got the load of Fr. Sheridan's bicycle and cycled to that area. Word was soon sent to other volunteers, and in a short space of time our active service men arrived, if not to guard the dump, to attack the Specials if that was their objective. I also sent a dispatch to Mick Quinn in another Company area, to bring his Thompson gun. Each Brigade Area had a Thompson gun in the post-Truce period, and Mick who was in Ballinderry Company and lived at Trickvullan, had possession of the machine gun. The police did not stay long in the area and did not stop any place. I think it was just a show of force, but had they given us the opportunity, a very excellent ambush was planned for them, and in a very short time. The wonderful thing about Ardboe area was the speed with which men could be mobilised. We raided for arms in the lower Coagh area, but in the raid for arms at Carnan, we were repulsed.

The night following the arrest of Tom Morris, Barney and Mick Mallon and Paddy Crawford, it was decided that raids for arms should take place in the area.

With the arrest of these men the Crown Forces thought that they had captured the quay men of the organisation, so we decided to show them how very wrong they were. The Ballinderry Company, headed by Tom Larkin, came to Ardboe area and under the command of Tom we raided several Unionist houses for their arms. At three of the houses searched quietly but effectively, we managed well. At a fourth house some fool of a volunteer let off a shot which not only alerted the residents in this house, to danger, but also alerted the fifth house in Carnan which was our next objective.

Tom Larkin, Joe McMahon and myself, were the only three in a party of nine who had arms. None of us were masked. I had my shotgun, which some years ago I had bought for 21/-, and Tom Larkin and Joe McMahon had two automatic revolvers. We went to the fifth house, the owner's name I forget, and knocked at the door. The reply was a shot through the door. We attempted to break open the door and Joe McMahon, with a small crow-bar, tried to lever the door off its hinges by putting the crow-bar at the bottom of the door. The crow-bar however kept slipping on the cement, and I tried to steady it with my foot. Another shot came through the door and narrowly missed the both of us, followed by several other bullets. We all jumped to the side of the door and I commenced firing my shotgun through a bottom story window.

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The other two tried to do the same but they found to their horror that both automatics had stuck, so mine was the only weapon left. I fired through all the windows on the ground floor but this had no effect on the defenders.

Since there was no use in remaining with only one shotgun against at least four rifles inside, we retreated. I think I fired about thirty rounds in fifteen minutes - the barrel of the gun was almost white hot when we broke off the action. We retreated in good order and all returned safely, even if disappointed.

Before the Truce I had gone with Barney Mallon to take part in an attack on Donaghmore R.I.C. barrack. This raid did not take place. I think it was the Coalisland and Donaghmore volunteers who were on this job. Barney Mallon and I were engaged in felling trees on the road between Dungannon and Donaghmore. I did not take part in the Draperstown barrack raid; in fact I never actually took part in a raid on any barrack. The Draperstown barrack raid was ineffective, and it was said that Frank Strong, who was Divisional Adjutant, was at Draperstown barrack raid even if he had received the G.H.Q. order before this and other raids calling on the Northern Divisions to "Cease Fire". I asked him were there any raiding of the mails in the Ardboe area, and he said there was but that no information was gathered from these raids.

Regarding raids against poteen makers, he said that on one occasion he and a man called Hugh Bannigan were coming home from a Battalion Meeting that had been in Coalisland, and they met Frank Devlin (Glory), at Carnan. He told them that poteen was being made that night in the Big Moss and that he would show us where. As a pioneer all my life, I was against poteen makers. I told Frank to stay with Hugh Bannigan while I rounded up a few of our active men. Eventually about fifteen of us headed towards the illicit distillery. As we got near the place appointed out by Frank, I disposed my men quietly. When they were in position I blew a whistle to call my men into action and immediately shots were fired at us from the direction of the still. I was going across the bog and I fired from my revolver (a short Webley), and when I did arrive at the still there was only one man standing with his hands up, but the still was spouting out poteen from several bullet punctured holes in the apparatus. The man refused to give the names of his confederates who had escaped, and I said that I was coming from a volunteer meeting in Coalisland where more drastic measures were discussed against "stillers". I said that the penalty for this nefarious work was death - this was a little bit of a lie, but I wished him to disclose the names under threat. Actually in Coalisland, they had discussed poteen making and said we would have to step up our war against the trade. He still refused to give the names, and I called upon six volunteers to come forward to be the firing party at his execution. One of them said "Surely you're not going to kill him?" and I said "Of course I'm not; I am only going to scare him". The ruse worked and he disclosed the names. We released him and destroyed the still.

A few days following this, Fr. Rogers, the Curate, came to me and showed me a letter that one of the stillers had received, saying that his death sentence would be carried out and it was signed "I.R.A.". I told Fr. Rogers that as far as I knew, it was a hoax, and to show that no such threat was ever made by an I.R.A. letter or that we had any intention of carrying out such a threat, we would send men to guard his house. This we did, and two volunteers went each night for a week to do this guard duty. This relieved the man and his wife of their worry.

Another occasion Fr. Rogers came to me and asked was it the intention of the I.R.A. to burn Ned Quinn's (Neddie) house at the Diamond. I said it was as we feared it being a large house, would become endeared by the Specials to convert into a barrack.

I said that I had received orders from Tom Morris to burn this house and had in fact gone up to do just that on the night before, but found that with the prevailing wind, not only would the house be burnt, but several corn stacks belonging to an innocent neighbour would also suffer, and I therefore had postponed the burning to a more favourable occasion. Fr. Rogers said it would be a great pity to burn the house, and could I not do anything to stop it. I said the only one who could stop it was Tom Morris, who as my superior, had given me the order. I said I would try and get in touch with Tom Morris before he went to Dublin. He was going to Dublin the following day. I did get in touch with him before he boarded the train at Coalisland, but he told me to carry out my orders. Regretfully, I told Fr. Rogers of my failure, and he again appealed to me to try and stop the work. Tom Morris was now gone and the only superior officer left in the area was Sean Larkin. I went and saw Sean, and he told me not to burn the house. I obeyed his order, and when I explained the matter to Morris on his return, he said under the circumstances, I did right to obey Larkin's order.

I was with Sean Larkin at Mallon's when there was a bon fire to celebrate the release of the Mallons from prison. While we were gathered around the bon fire singing, many shots were fired in our direction by 'R' men. I had a revolver and Sean Larkin asked had anybody else any arms other than himself and myself. There were no other arms amongst those present, so Sean and I ran off in the direction of the shooting. Barney Mallon was already away ahead of us with his rifle. We ran for about three-quarters of a mile in the direction of the 'R' men, and suddenly Sean Larkin said "How many rounds have you?" I said "Two". He said "I have only one, so what the devil are we running against a crowd of 'R' men with rifles", and having thus wisely decided how futile it would be, we came back. It was orders that usually volunteers were given very few rounds of ammunition, even when going on operation.

I asked Tom if he had been to the Sperrin Camp post-Truce, and he said no, he had gone to the Brough Derg Camp. He said that as far as he remembers, Frank Curran was Brigadier in Charge of the Camp, and that there was a man called Tim Sullivan there who worked on an estate in Killymoon, Cookstown. He could not remember many others in Brough Derg Camp.

I asked him had he ever been present at a Sinn Fein court, and he said he had been, but only as an on-looker. He said there was one such court held in Mulnahoe hall. His cousin, Malachy Campbell, was one of the volunteer police, and with him he went to the hall.

The Magistrates in the court were on the stage; one of the Magistrates being Charlie Doris (Jimmy), and the Court Clerk was Tommy O'Neill. The hall was crowded and probably the case was one of dispute about land. There were two other Magistrates on the bench, but he cannot remember their names. One of them was not J. Devlin, who was still one of his Magistrates J.P.'s who had not resigned his commission though this did not matter, because he was still very friendly to the I.R.A. and supplied them with goods and clothing from a shop. (After the Truce however, he was fully paid for these from Dublin). Tom said that he was in the rear of the hall and while the court was in progress, the local Sergeant of the R.I.C. and one of his constables - Donnelly, came into the court. They were merely there as spectators and did not stay long, and did not interfere in any way. From the nature of the proceedings taking place, on the stage, and the crowded hall, they might even have thought it was just a play was being staged! At any rate, they left. This was the only Sinn Fein court that ever Mr. Martin had attended, though on occasions they received prisoners in the area sent from other I.R.A. Companies. One such was a volunteer from Moneymore who was sentenced to three weeks hard labour in insubordination to Tom Morris. He was kept in the derelict building on Carr's Hill, and during the day he was put to work helping Mr. Martin to stub

out bushes. During the night he was guarded by two volunteers. Another prisoner, though only kept for a short time, was a game-keeper who had been arrested in Coalisland and was being detained until a case that he was a witness in one of the Crown Forces, was disposed of.

On occasions people who refused to pay the Levy for Arms were threatened by volunteers, but none were ever arrested. The volunteers themselves, were not engaged in collecting the Levy. This was done by agents appointed by Dail Eireann. He thinks it was Henry McKeown was engaged in this work in his district. He met Henry later in the Curragh Camp.

Mulnahoe Ambush.

In connection with the proposed attack by Collins's men, on the border, we in Ardboe were told to mine the roads in the vicinity of Mulnahoe chapel. This was to prevent the passage of British Military towards the border area, in the event of such an attack taking place. All 'H' Company were alerted and had been billeted in a barn at the rear of the Parochial House, Mulnahoe. We had been there about three days (we had entered the barn without the permission of the Parish Priest or Curate, though both priests were friendly disposed towards the I.R.A. at the time), and I gave permission to a majority of the men to return to their homes for a short rest. It was evident by this time that the ~~proposed~~ proposed attack on the North was not going to take place. There were just about six of us left in the barn on the night that many Specials came from the direction of Tamlaghtmore. They had come on foot from there, which was about two miles from Mulnahoe. We do not know if an informer had let them know that we were in the barn, though there is that possibility. I heard years afterwards, from a man who was talking to an ex-R.U.C. Sergeant who had been stationed in Dungannon, that there were thirteen known informers in the Ardboe area. Whether the Specials were told about us, or whether because we had stolen a lot of electrical wiring from a flax mill near Mulnahoe, (we had stolen this to use in connection with the laying of mines in the area), they came, as I have said, in great numbers. The flax mill was near Elder's corner. At any rate, they came. We only knew of their coming when we heard a shot about two hundred yards from the barn. This shot had come from a revolver fired at the 'B' men by Arthur O'Neill. We had sent Arthur O'Neill and Mark Crozier to ~~Devlin's~~ ^{Devlin's} shop to get a can of tea made, and buy some bread, and when they came out of Devlin's house with the tea and some loaves, a quiet, but firm voice, out of the darkness, called to Arthur: "Hands up!" He thought that it was me playing a trick on him and did not comply with this order. It was a very dark night. Immediately, a similar but more urgent order was given, and Arthur, to his amazement, found it was one of a crowd of Specials who had ordered him. He immediately fired in the general direction of the mass of Specials and they then replied by firing an enormous volley in his direction, but he succeeded in escaping over a hedge at the rear of ~~Devlin's~~ ^{Devlin's}. He thinks he wounded several with his revolver. Meanwhile, Crozier was standing petrified, with his loaves in a basket, and with great presence of mind he hit the nearest Special with the basket and knocked him down, and he succeeded in escaping over the opposite hedge. By this time we had heard the great amount of firing, and had come out from the barn and proceeded to fire in the direction from which it came. We were in a dilemma because we knew that somewhere in the valley, to the Southwest of Mulnahoe chapel, were our friends O'Neill and Crozier. Luckily for them, and for us, the Specials withdrew and we all were able to get to safety, but unluckily for the success of an ambush that had been prepared for another eventuality, most of the volunteers who had been given leave to return home, had not returned. Had they, the Specials would not have got back so unscathed. Our mines were already laid in position in depots of roadwork stone on the road that they had come and on the road they returned to Tamlaghtmore. Had those mines which had been laid carefully by Ned McElroy, been exploded, they would have inflicted very many casualties.

As far as I remembered, the only volunteers who were in the region of Mulnahoe on that night, were John Cassidy, Tommy and Arthur O'Neill, Mark Crozier and myself.

I have to confess to doing a very idiotic thing myself, on the occasion. When I came out of the barn I had my rifle and ammunition, and kept firing from it, and while shooting, my revolver dropped out of my hip pocket. Foolishly, I lit a match to search for it, thereby exposing myself to enemy fire. I found the revolver but I was guilty of doing something, that on occasions I had lectured others for doing. *I went in the room after this episode and*

(This is out of context but it covers a mistake I made. L.O'Kane) One time when Barney Young, now residing in Ballinderry came to Dublin with me regarding Pension Claims (I was there at the Referee's Court to vouch for him and others) he asked me if I could help him get the release of his son who was imprisoned in Belfast without trial in the 1956 I.R.A. trouble in the North.

He said his son was an American citizen having been born in U.S.A. I said I would try and we went to Dail Eireann and there I met a Donegal T.D. Micael og MacFadden. He gave me a letter of introduction to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Barney & I went to Iveagh House. The Minister was not available but his Secretary said he'd get in touch with the American Embassy in Dublin. I do not know if anything came of the matter or if young Barney was released, but at least I tried to help Barney son.

I was in mufti and did not disclose to the Secty. of Foreign Affairs that I was a Supt. of the Gardai in Donegal. It might not have been politic to do so.

This I've added out of context.

*Louis O'Kane
August 1967*

I remained on the 'run' until the end of May 1922, when I received word from Tom Morris telling me to go to Dundalk. I remained here for three weeks, and from there was sent to Portobello Barracks, Dublin. It was while here that along with others I was on convoy duty, bringing arms from Beggar's Bush Barrack to Donegal. These arms were supplied from Dublin to the Second Northern Division, and were all eventually brought into Co. Tyrone and Derry. As far as I can remember, the arms that I dealt with were handed over by South of Ireland I.R.A. and were not taken from Quartermaster's stores in Beggar's Bush. The lorries bringing the arms were covered with dust and the men handing them over to us were similarly covered with dust. There is a certain amount of dispute as regards the origin of the arms that were given to the Northerners, but my recollection is that these were handed over by Southern I.R.A. from lorries which seemed to have come from the South of Ireland and not from army barracks stores. These arms eventually all went to the Six Counties.

After some time in Portobello I was given a list of names by Tom Morris and told to take the men whose names were on the list, to Keane Barracks, Curragh, Co. Kildare. I collected the men and we went by rail to our destination. When I arrived at the Curragh I handed over my list to the Commanding Officer, Colonel Cusack. He checked over the list but found that my own name was not on it. Probably the list had been prepared by Tom Morris to be given to some other person, whose name was on the list, and that as I came along he had forgotten to add my name. At any rate, Colonel Cusack said I would not be allowed into the Keane Barracks with my men, nor would I be allowed to leave the Camp, and it was only some days afterwards, when Tom Morris came to the Curragh, that he

vouched for me, and I joined the four hundred odd men from the North, who were stationed in the Curragh. It was while I was in the Curragh that the Specials raided my parents' home and told my father that they had received a letter from me suggesting that as I was now safe, and as the war against the Six Counties was ended, I could disclose the whereabouts of our dump of ammunition, etc. which was near our home. My father was on the point of acceding to their request when my mother said "Has that boy of our's not caused enough trouble?" and said it in such a manner that my father understood that the Specials were only trying to discover the dump and had no letter from me whatever. My mother was able to see through their trick, and they didn't get the information they sought. My parents' home was raided very frequently afterwards. In fact, from 1918 our home was raided 73 times and on occasions three times in the one day.

Before the Mulnahoe ambush, accompanied by Mick Quinn armed with a Thompson gun, and myself with two grenades, ready to be thrown, we had been driven through Coagh in broad day-light, bringing a large quantity of arms and ammunition from Cookstown to Ardboe. Probably these were part of a previous consignment from Dublin to the North. It might be adviseable, at this point, to identify Tommy who was a very good pre-Truce volunteer. There are two Tom O'Neill's; this one is known as Tommy of the head of the lane. He now lives in Cookstown and was married to a Miss McKeown, who was a teacher.

I asked him had there ever been faction fights between A.O.H. men and Sinn Feiners, in the early days of Sinn Fein, and he said indeed they were of frequent occurrence. He remembers being very badly beaten up by a number of Hibernians outside the Hibernian Hall in Kinrush, but he had the pleasure of beating each one of them singly, afterwards. He remembers in particular giving a good trouncing to Hugh Kelly, which resulted in their becoming very good friends, and he become a very good I.R.A. soldier post-Truce.

I asked him who was in charge of Keane Barracks and he said that nominally Morris would be C.O., but the Officer mostly there in charge was Dan McKenna. The Barracks in question were situated near the Water Tower. I asked him were there any Cumann na Bhan pre and post-Truce, and he said that he didn't remember all their names, but that there were Alice Mallon, later married to Dan McSloy, who died some years ago; two girls called McElroy; two called Devlin and two called Cassidy. They were very useful in carrying dispatches, arms and ammunition.

He remained in Hare Park until it became obvious by March, 1923, that the Civil War was ending. He did not wish to join the National Army, and there were only two possibilities facing him - emigration or join the Civic Guards. He asked Tom Morris to release him from the Army to join the Civic Guards, but was refused permission on the grounds that there was the possibility that the attack on the North would be resumed. He said to Morris that he couldn't see much hope of that, and that he didn't wish to join the Army, but he said "if I am permitted by you to join the Civic Guards, as soon as war is resumed I will resign from the Guards, and if my resignation is not accepted I will desert from them." He still refused, so I got a reference from Brigadier Paddy Diamond, which got me into the Civic Guards. I joined the Guards in March 1923, and my serial number was 3581. I was sent to Kilfenora, Co. Clare, and my first Sergeant was a man called McCormick, a native of Raphoe. It was a very tough assignment, since there was not two people in the whole police district that would speak a friendly word to us. I was lucky to be only there six months, during which time I studied for an examination for Sergeant. This I did in Dublin, and as it was a very simple examination, I passed, and my first appointment as Sergeant was to Dromore West, in Co. Sligo. I was there from

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October 1923 to October 1924. My transfer was largely due to the fact that I had married a lady in Dromore West, and according to police regulations, a policeman is not allowed to serve in the county of which his wife is a native. I was then sent to Rockfield in Co. Roscommon. This was a very quiet Station, and I spent nine happy months there studying, especially Irish, as I was going to enter for the examination for Inspectorship. I was lucky to pass the examination, and was ~~permitted to re-examine for Inspectorship~~ promoted to Inspector, and after some time in the Depot was sent to Mullingar in June 1925. I was unhappy here, as there was no house supplied for the Inspector, and when there came a vacancy in Galway City for Inspector, I applied for it, and remained there for three happy years in which I perfected my Irish under the tutorship of Padraigh O'Conaire. Padraigh was a great character, but unhappily was given to drink, and he got the impression that I was seeking a conviction against him for drinking outside licensed hours in public houses. I assured Paddy that my vendetta against drink was not directed against him personally; that I had always waged war against drink from my childhood days. In fact, while in Dromore West I had captured and destroyed fifteen poteen stills in less than a year, and that even the smell of a public house always made me sick. Padraigh replied, "I was told that you were after me, by a good man that wore a gold Fainne, and you will never catch me nor wear a gold Fainne". This retort spurred me on to more intensive studies in the Irish language, and I decided that sometime or other I'd make Padraigh eat his words!

I had a little Irish even when I was at school in Ardboe, because we had an Assistant Schoolteacher there, a Miss O'Flaherty, from the Gaeltacht, who had been brought there by a Father McCann to assist him in his Gaelic League work around Ardboe. However, I had a long way to go before I would become proficient in the language, and I had not a great opportunity of pursuing my studies when promoted to Superintendent and transferred from Galway to Newcastle West, Co. Limerick. I remained there for five years but fell foul of the Government when in a batton charge in Limerick against rioting Blue Shirts, when I battoned a few of them at a meeting addressed by General O'Duffy. I hit the wrong men in the wrong place at the wrong time, and three weeks afterwards was sent as Superintendent to the wilds of Donegal, at Dungloe.

This might have appeared to be the best form of punishment that the Commissioners wished to give me, but it was what I longed for. I always wanted to be in Co. Donegal and for preference in the Gaeltacht area of Donegal. I was now in a position to continue and perfect my studies in Irish, and when the Gaeltacht Division of the Gardai was formed I was sent as Superintendent to Killybegs, Co. Donegal, where I remained until my retirement.

When I was stationed in Sligo I noticed that on Lough Conn there was a possibility of eel fishing, and I arranged that my parents and the rest of my brothers and sisters would come down and settle ~~there~~ ~~their homes~~ near Ballina. This they all did, and my parents, my five brothers and two sisters, settled there. Their names are: Peter, Gerald, Charles, Brian, Andrew, Mary and Sarah. Peter, Gerald and Sarah, are, as well as my parents, dead, but the remainder still live around there.

My eldest son, Thomas John, was reared by my parents, and even during his school holidays, when I was in Galway, in Limerick and in Killybegs, he went there - even after his grandparents had died.

He was about sixteen years of age and had entered Summerhill College, Sligo, - I think he was going on to be a priest. At any rate, I went down from Killybegs in September, to bring him back to the Sligo College, and in a cafe in Sligo he said to me, "I'm sorry daddy, but I'll have to go back to Ballina as I have forgotten my suitcase. I could see that this was only an excuse to get yet another weeks holidays around his beloved Ballina, and I said, "Well, I'll come back for you next Tuesday, but you will have to return to college then."

I returned on Tuesday for his funeral (R.I.P.) He had been fishing with his uncles on the lake, as he had often done before, as did his father before him; the boat over-turned, the uncles were able to survive until they were picked up, but the exposure killed my son. Immediately my brothers ceased fishing.

Mr. Martin told me that very many of the volunteers whose names have been mentioned in our talk, came at different times to see him, and vouched for their services in their applications for pensions. Some of these he could not vouch for. For example, he could not vouch for the assertion of Alex McConville of Kilmascally, that he had joined the I.R.B. in 1916, and that he had been in Coalisland and given dispatches to Denis McCullough and others, in Easter 1916. He could not vouch for this because he himself had no knowledge of pre-1916 matters in Ardboe area. He was able to, however, to vouch for the fact that Alex McConville was indeed the first Captain of 'H' Company, First Battalion, Second Northern, when formed in 1919. (Tom Larkin was O.C. of this first battalion). He also was able to corroborate that Volunteer T.J. Maynes had been wounded at the raid of McClure's, and that he had died from his wounds. Mayne was a native of Waterfoot, Ballinderry. He also vouched for the abortive ambush that was planned for Mount Boy, near Coalisland, when the whole of No. 1 Battalion were alerted and waiting to ambush Specials. As in many other instances, ambushes that had been prepared were abortive because the Specials didn't oblige by coming that way.
