

The night Tuam was burned

Tuam suffered one of the worst traumas of its history on the night and early morning of July 19th-20th, 1920, when armed police set fire to several buildings in the town centre and raided it from end to end. This was in reprisal for the shooting of two policemen in what is known locally as the 'Gallagh ambush.' The Town Hall was totally gutted by fire, and Canney's shop, now the site of the Allied Irish Bank, was razed. Another shop picked out for special attention was Nohilly's, now McEvoy's Jersey Bar on Dublin Road.

The account below is a compilation from The Tuam Herald, the Irish Independent and The Freeman's Journal, and the headings are as they appeared.



Tuam Town Hall in ruins.

TWO POLICEMEN SHOT DEAD NEAR TUAM Comrades wrecked the town

£100,000 DAMAGE

**Escape from Burning House Barred
Wild Firing in Streets**

THERE were dreadful scenes of house-burning, looting and firing into dwellings in Tuam early yesterday morning, following the shooting near the town the previous evening of two policemen, Constables Burke and Carey.

With two others, the constables were returning from Galway Assizes, which, it is stated, they were warned not to attend, when their motor was held up by a barricade on the road to Dunmore. They were shot dead, and their companions surrendered.

Large forces of R.I.C. scoured the district during the night and on their return to the town "got out of hand," as the official report puts it.

The Town Hall and some business premises were burned to the ground, the damage exceeding £100,000. Search was made for certain residents, against whom threats that they were to be shot were made. In one house, a lamp was shot out of a woman's hand, and a hand-grenade caused much destruction in another house.

Most Rev. Dr. Gilmartin has sent Sir Neville Macready a demand for an immediate sworn inquiry, so that the culprits may be brought to justice and reparation made to victims of the outbreak. His Grace condemned the shooting of the constables, and equally the subsequent outbreak by the police, and appealed for restraint in temptation to retaliate.

POLICE AMBUSHED

Two Constables Killed

THE first of the terrifying events of the night was the ambush of a party of police three miles from Tuam, when Constables Carey and Burke, of Dunmore, were shot dead when returning from the Galway Assizes in a police motor car.

They left for Galway that morning, accompanied by Sergt. Beatty and Constable Brennan, whom they left at Tuam and took an additional escort of police from Tuam. They returned to Tuam about 8 p.m. and took Sergt. Beatty and Const. Brennan back to Dunmore. Const. Burke was driving. Nearing Newtown Darcy they observed the road barricaded with felled trees.

Before the driver had time to pull up, shots rang out from behind a lodge, and as Carey and Burke were jumping from the car they were shot and mortally wounded.

OTHERS DISARMED

The other two police alighted and, it is stated, discharged all their ammunition at 40 or 50 men who had been in ambush behind the wall. These two police were overpowered and their rifles taken from them.

They were then blindfolded and told to go back in the Tuam direction. Reaching that town in a short time, they reported the matter at the police barracks. Soldiers and police immediately proceeded to the scene, in charge of District Inspector O'Callaghan.

Hearing that the two policemen had been shot, Dr. Hosty proceeded in haste to the scene and found that one of the policemen had expired. He attended to the other man, who was in a very weak condition, and then motored back to Tuam and brought out Rev. Fr. Moane, C.C. When they arrived, they found the other policeman had breathed his last.

POLICE MOTOR BURNED

Neither of the two policemen was married. Const. James Burke, who was aged 32, had twelve years service and was a native of Skibbereen. The police motor car was burned on the road.

Several houses in Cortoon and districts adjacent to the scene of the tragedy were searched by police and military yesterday but without result.

According to our Galway correspondent, Constables Burke and Casey were descending to remove the obstruction on the road when two shots rang out. Their comrades in the motor lay flat and fired till their ammunition was exhausted. They were then compelled to surrender.

It appears they had been warned not to go to Galway Assizes, and had been acting as a relief for their comrades at Tuam who had attended the Assizes.

When the two dead bodies were being conveyed through Tuam streets, awed spectators lifted their hats reverently. A bullet entered behind Burke's ear, coming out at the other side. He must have been killed instantly. Carey was shot in the heart.

TERRIFYING SEQUEL

Shot, Fires and Looting

The bodies of the two dead constables were waked at the police barracks, and towards dawn there began in the town dreadful scenes of shooting, incendiaryism, and wreckage. Great damage was done to property, but fortunately no one was injured.

The town went through a perfect hell, in the words of a leading resident. Following the shootings, police rushed to the district from Galway, and Dragoon Guards came from Claremorris. The patrol parties, who had scoured the country without result, returned to Tuam, and the policemen, having viewed the dead bodies of their comrades, appear to have got completely out of hand.

BURNING AND LOOTING

Fully armed, they marched into the streets, smashed publichouses, and it is alleged, looted their contents; dragged young men out of bed and threatened to shoot them; set fire to some of the most valuable properties in the town.

Damage estimated provisionally at over £100,000 was wrought. A reign of red ruin and terror prevailed. Uniformed police variously estimated at from 50 to 100, shouted "Where are the b..... Sinn Feiners now? Let the cowards come on." An attack had been anticipated on Tuam police barracks for the last three weeks, and the garrison — 50 men — was fully prepared.

Shortly before 5 a.m. a score of rifle shots, discharged at random, startled the sleeping inhabitants. After a brief lull, a score more shots rang out. Soon the shooting broke into a regular roar, and was intermingled with the dull thuds of hand-grenades.

"GET BACK"

The terror-stricken inhabitants, who had presupposed an attack on the police barracks, were speedily disillusioned, for, wherever a face appeared at a window, there was a sharp command, "Get back or you'll be shot," followed by a discharge of musketry through the glass.

Most families huddled together on stairways or in the back portions of their houses and recited the Rosary. Soon a new terror was added to the shooting, for fires sprang out in various parts of the town.

Cheers broke out when the Town Hall, in which a most successful District Sinn Fein Court had been opened last week, caught fire. Nothing remains but the walls, but most of the official papers were fortunately rescued by Mr. Canavan, Town Clerk. Between Vicar Street and Dublin Road stood the palatial drapery warehouse of Messrs. Canney Bros., recently renovated, and probably one of the finest of its kind in the provinces.

FAMILY'S TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE

Mr and Mrs. Canney and a family of little children were sleeping in the premises. The shop under their rooms was in flames. Clad only in such scanty apparel as they had time to collect, they fought their way down a burning stairs to the front door, only to find escape barred by loaded rifles. Dashing back, they clambered onto the roof and after a dangerous climb escaped over the top of a neighbouring house.

When the shooting ceased they were given clothes and succour, by neighbours, and Mrs. Canney was taken to her home in Sligo by motor, suffering severely from the terrible ordeal. The stock and fittings — worth well over £20,000 — were, with the premises, entirely destroyed.

The grocery and provisions stores of Mr. John Burke and Mr. John Nohilly, Dublin Road, were set ablaze. The former came out on the street under fire and endeavoured to extinguish the flames. And incendiary bomb is alleged to have been thrown into Burke's. Practically all the business premises in Shop Street, including those of Mr. P. Murphy, who recently refused as a member of the Waterworks Committee to sign the declaration of allegiance to Dail Eireann, were wrecked.

WINDOWS SMASHED

As the rioters marched along they smashed in windows with rifle butts and discharged shots indiscriminately at upper windows. Many thrilling stories are told of the hairbreadth escapes of the inhabitants, and the most remarkable feature of the whole dreadful affair is that no one appears to have suffered actual physical hurt.

Windows were shattered to fragments in the following premises: McHugh's and Guy's Hotel, Hosty's, Kenny's Bar, McTigue's, Mrs. Maher's Fahy and Co., D. H. Burke's, Waldron's, Heskin's, John Connolly's, Begley's, Murphy's, O'Connor's Saddlery (8 bullet holes in one upper window, and attempt made to set on fire), Cunningham's, Naughton's and Rooney's Garage. Traces of looting and glasses that had been used were found in publichouses.

As Mr. P.J. Lynch, boot factor, and his daughter were leaving their house to go down Shop Street they saw a policeman raise a bottle to his lips, take a drink, and thereupon sink on one knee and fire in their direction.

SINN FEINERS RAIDED

Most sensational stories are told of the arrest of local Sinn Feiners, who were threatened with shooting, but were saved by the intervention of Const. Collieran and Head-Const. Bowles. Jack Neville, a young electrician, staying at Mrs. Starr's, High Street, told me that shortly after 5 a.m. armed police knocked up his landlady and demanded admission with threats.

Dressing hurriedly he came to the front door and found himself confronted with 15 rifles. "Pull the heart out of him," shouted one raider. "No," said another, "we will give him more mercy than some of them showed our comrades." Const. Collieran, with uplifted hand, begged him to desist. Thereupon a group of policemen marched Neville to the barracks, while their comrades discharged a volley of shots over their heads.

In the station they had a dispute as to



John Neville, pictured holding two bullet-riddled tea-chests from a wrecked shop at Tuam. Freeman's Journal photo