

## **List of Suspected Civilian Spies Killed by the IRA, 1920-21**

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*Note about the form of entries in this database: Each of the entries in the Cork Spy Files follows the same format: (1) the name of the suspected spy, including certain variations in the forename or surname that appear in the sources; (2) the victim's age (if known, and usually as derived from the 1911 census); (3) the victim's residence if known and given without parentheses; (4) the place of death, given within parentheses; (5) the exact date of the incident, i.e., the date on which the suspected spy was killed or mortally wounded, or the date on which the victim was abducted or otherwise disappeared, though death took place on a later date; (6) the full range of our sources for each death, with abbreviations as needed, and for which a full list will soon be supplied on the website as part of a comprehensive bibliography; and (7) a note providing all valuable information about the victim available to us and considered relevant.*

### **4. Civilian James Gordon or O'Gorman (The Rea near Knockraha)**

Date of incident: [?] late July or early Aug. 1920 (ex-soldier in civvies, abducted and killed as suspected spy detective by IRA)

Sources: *II*, 5 March 1920; *FJ*, 5, 31 March, 1 April, 15 July 1920; *CE*, 12 March, 5 April, 15 July 1920; *Nenagh News*, 17 July 1920; WS 719 of Maurice Forde et al., 6-7 (BMH); Joseph O'Shea's WS 1675, 12 (BMH); Outrages and Reprisals (Military Archives, A/0530); MSP34/REF27648 (Military Archives); Murphy (2010), 34, 40, 64; Ó Ruairc (2016), 119; Audiotapes of Martin Corry, Denny Lynch, et al., Tape 6, OH/MC (CCCA); <http://www.rubiconheritage.com/2014/10/29/mapping-archaeology-irelands-war-independence-case-study-knockraha-cork/> (accessed 28 March 2016).

Note: A member of the RIC before 1914 and an ex-soldier who had been wounded in the Great War, the Catholic and County Leitrim native Gordon reportedly had rejoined the RIC and in 1919-20 had been moving from one RIC station to another. It had been noted that after his arrival in different areas supporters of 'the national movement' had been shot. Having recently come to Cork city from County Tipperary, Gordon was picked up while drunk on the Cork quays after being reported to Volunteers of E Company of the First Battalion of the Cork No. 1 Brigade by the proprietress of a public house in the vicinity. Gordon was taken into their custody, placed in a cab, and brought to the Pike, north of the city, where he was detained. An incriminating notebook found in his possession led 'the brigadier' of Cork No. 1 to sanction his execution, which was later carried out elsewhere. Before he was shot, a priest by arrangement heard his last confession. Neither the date nor the place of his execution was indicated. See WS 719 of Maurice Forde et al., 6-7 (BMH). Gordon was probably a civilian even though republican sources thought otherwise. His name appears in the Compensation Commission Register under [?] August 1920, with 'L' for Liability, and with a note that only £34 in compensation was awarded. See Ó Ruairc (2016), 119.

Volunteer Joseph O'Shea of E Company, one of the IRA gunmen who shot Gordon or O'Gorman, recalled the circumstances many years later: 'In July 1920 I received information that a Black and Tan named James O'Gorman was in Cork city. This man was suspected of complicity in the murder [on 28 March 1920] of two I.R.A. men named

Dwyer of The Ragg, near Thurles, Co. Tipperary, and it was understood that he was leaving Cork for England by boat. I received instructions to watch for this man and take him prisoner. On an evening in July, following receipt of a report from our intelligence service, I went with five others from E Company to Penrose Quay, Cork. In due course O'Gorman came along, obviously going to the Cork Steampacket Company's boat, which was sailing for England that same evening. I held him up and, with the others, put him into a motor car which we had ready nearby. He was brought to the Kilcully district north of the city, where he was kept in a house under armed guard for a few days. He was then taken by car to Knockraha in East Cork where he was executed.' See Joseph O'Shea's WS 1675, 12 (BMH).

In his IRA pension claim Edward Maloney of Knockraha, who described himself as the 'governor' of the local 'Sing Sing' prison, stated that a captured Black and Tan prisoner had been brought from Cork city by IRA men and held at Knockraha for three weeks before his execution. Maloney asserted that he had witnessed the execution of this captive, whom he claimed was the first member of the crown forces and first spy to be executed at 'Sing Sing'. In the same file with Maloney's pension claim there is a document submitted by prominent IRA member Martin Corry of Knockraha (dated 9 May 1941), briefly noting that in 1920 'Gordon [was] executed'. See MSP34/REF27648 (Military Archives). Gerard Murphy claims that Gordon was the first of numerous British spies or informers to be executed at the IRA 'Sing Sing' prison at Knockraha outside Cork city. See Murphy (2010), 34, 40, 64; <http://www.rubiconheritage.com/2014/10/29/mapping-archaeology-irelands-war-independence-case-study-knockraha-cork/> (accessed 28 March 2016). Martin Corry also mentioned the execution of Gordon at Knockraha in the audiotapes of Martin Corry, Denny Lynch, et al., Tape 6, OH/MC (CCCA).

Gordon is likely to have been the Knockraha prisoner discussed in the context of allowing some of the inmates of 'Sing Sing' to get exercise since, as they were to be executed, they would not later be able to give away the location of the prison. According to James Fitzgerald, the historian of Knockraha, 'Dave Savage of Ballinakilla was involved in exercising one prisoner who was in Sing Sing. This prisoner was an ex-member of the RIC who was involved in some of the murders after the ambush of Solohead[beg] in South Tipperary. They would allow him out in the field in the vicinity of Sing Sing to give himself some exercise.' See Fitzgerald (1977, 2005), 88.

The story of Gordon's fate had a fascinating prehistory. Some Cork republican activists, as previously noted, connected Gordon with the military reprisals carried out by British forces leading to the deaths of Volunteers James McCarthy and Thomas Dwyer at The Ragg/Bouladuff and at the Mall in Thurles in Tipperary on 27 and 29 March 1920 respectively. These Cork city Volunteers understood the victims to have been 'the Dwyer brothers', but the John Dwyer killed at Annesgrove near Drumbane in the Thurles district on 14 July 1920 was not related in any way to the death of Thomas Dwyer. The herd John Dwyer was in fact killed in all likelihood by Volunteers as the forewarned but undeterred caretaker of evicted lands; their gentry owner had seen his residence Annesgrove House burned down by Volunteers in order to prevent its use by British troops. See *Outrages and Reprisals* (Military Archives, A/0530); *CE*, 15 July 1920. *FJ*, 15 July 1920; *Nenagh News*, 17 July 1920.

The funerals of Volunteers Dwyer and McCarthy both drew extraordinarily large crowds. Dwyer's exhibited other arresting features as well. 'The funeral yesterday of Thomas Dwyer, The Ragg,' declared the *Irish Independent* on 1 April 1920, 'was a striking manifestation of the widespread horror felt at the tragedy and an impressively eloquent tribute to the esteem he enjoyed in life. . . . In Thurles the day was observed as a general holiday, [with] hundreds of townspeople travelling to attend the obsequies. Volunteer and Cumann na mBan contingents were present in large numbers, including several cycle detachments, some of which travelled very long distances. The tricolour, draped, was universally worn. Requiem Mass was celebrated at Inch church by Rev. E. Hackett, C.C.,' Borrisoleigh. 'There was a large number of clergy in the choir. . . . At noon the funeral left for Drom cemetery, 6 miles away. For fully an hour before, contingents of Volunteers and streams of vehicles began to arrive at the church, where they were marshalled by the local Volunteers. The coffin was draped in the tricolour. Between Inch and Drom extraordinary evidences of sympathy were witnessed, blinds being drawn in the houses all along the route. As the remains passed, the people reverently knelt and prayed. A company of Volunteers preceded the hearse, while others formed a guard on either side. The procession took an hour to pass a given point and was about two miles in length. A sensation was caused two miles from Drom when it was learned that the cemetery was in the hands of military and police. This unexpected development caused much resentment. A detachment of the Northamptonshire Reg[imen]t and a small body of police under D.-I. Wilson [RIC District Inspector William Harding Wilson, killed by the IRA on 16 August 1920] had been drafted from Templemore some hours earlier and placed on guard within the cemetery. When the funeral reached Drom, the extraordinary spectacle was presented of a cemetery held by military from the inside while Volunteers controlled the approaches. . . . Military lined the walls [of Drom cemetery], a company also being drawn up along the path from the gate to the church door, while armed police stood near the grave. The Volunteers leading [the cortege] were halted opposite a section of the military while the coffin was being taken from the hearse. The coffin was then borne by Volunteers around the church grounds. As the remains passed, the military saluted. At the graveside the last prayers were recited by Rev. M. Finn, P.P., Drom. Beautiful floral wreaths were laid on the grave, which was surmounted by a large black cross draped in the tricolour and inscribed: "Let me carry Your cross for Ireland, Lord." The Rosary having been recited in Irish, the "Last Post" was sounded while the Volunteers stood at the salute. The interment concluded, the Volunteers marched away, cyclists' contingents returned to their districts, and the people quietly dispersed, leaving the military and police in occupation of the church grounds.' See *II*, 1 April 1920. See also *FJ*, 30 March, 1 April 1920; *CE*, 30 March, 6 April 1920; *II*, 31 March, 5 April 1920; *Kerry Weekly Reporter*, 3, 10 April 1920.

What had prompted the killings of Volunteers Thomas Dwyer and James McCarthy (each aged about 29) was an IRA attack earlier in March 1920 on one of 'strong patrols of police and military' that 'went around the town of Thurles by day and night'. On Thursday, 4 March, a group of three IRA gunmen 'called into Larry Fanning's public house in The Ragg for a drink. [The Ragg or Bouladuff is a village near Thurles.] They were not long inside when two R.I.C. men named Henue [John Heanue] and Flaherty came in, apparently for refreshments also. On the spur of the moment the I.R.A. trio [Jim Stapleton, Paddy O'Brien of Silvermines, and Jim Larkin of Upperchurch] decided to attack the police and so opened fire with revolvers. Constable Flaherty managed to escape, but Henue [Heanue] was shot dead as he was trying to get inside the counter [of

the pub]. . . . The shooting in The Ragg led to widespread raiding by police and military around Thurles and its neighbourhood.

. . . On the night of 27.3.1920 a party of R.I.C. went to raid McCarthy's in the Mall at about 1:30 a.m. Four of this family were members of the I.R.A. One of them, Jimmy, went to open the door for the raiders, and as soon as he had done so, they shot him dead. On the succeeding night another party of masked R.I.C. men from Thurles barracks raided the house of Tom Dwyer in The Ragg and shot him dead in his bedroom in the presence of his sister, a young widow. Dwyer, who was also an I.R.A. man, had been seen talking to Stapleton and his companions a short time before the attack on the police in Fanning's pub earlier in the month. On the same night that Dwyer was shot, the R.I.C. force concerned attacked the shop and home of Richard Small [of] The Ragg. His son Mick Small, vice-commandant of the 1st Battn., was then one of the most prominent members of our brigade. The R.I.C., masked also, threw a number of bombs into the house and wrecked the front portion of the premises.' See James Leahy's WS 1454, 27-29 (BMH).