

AUXILIARY REPORTS ON LOCAL AMBUSHES

The Glebe Ambush at Drishanebeag.

The military authorities organised an enquiry into this ambush at the then Victoria Barracks in Cork on 15/2/1921 and took evidence from a number of people involved. The following is the evidence of the officer in charge of the Auxiliaries at the ambush. Both reports naturally portray their side in the best possible light and one absurd result is the huge numbers they claim were involved in the ambushes on the IRA side.

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Lieut. Clarke, 1st Bn. Royal Fusiliers, being duly sworn, states:

On the evening of the 11th January, 1921, (should be 11th. Feb. 1921, J.L.) I was in charge of a party of 4 Other Ranks travelling from Buttevant to Killarney. At Mallow I picked up another 10 Men of the same Regiment, and I took charge of the whole party. The train left Mallow at about 20 minutes to seven. The Sergeant placed the men in two carriages. I gave orders to the Sergeant to detail men to keep a look-out in the carriages. There were 8 men in one carriage, and 7 in the other. There were three coaches on the train - my men were in the leading coach. No directions were given to us by the Railway Officials as to what carriages we were to occupy. I got into a first-class carriage in the next coach.

The train proceeded on its way, and we stopped at Banteer. At Banteer a lot of men, whom I took to be Cattle Drivers, got out of the train. A few people got into the train at Banteer. I did not get out of the carriage at Banteer. I looked out of the window - I saw nothing to arouse my suspicion.

The train next stopped at Rathcoole. I did not get out of the train here, I looked out of the window and I noticed a good many people on the platform. There were so many for the size of the Station that I became suspicious. I drew my revolver and laid it under a newspaper on the seat. I was alone in the carriage at the time, and I was afraid the train might be fired on whilst we were leaving the Station.

Altogether I saw only 4 or 5 men who were opposite my carriage and moving towards the Station exit. I think they were the Cattle Drivers I saw board the train at Mallow. Why I was suspicious was because they were opposite my window and close together. I saw no people on the platform when we drew into the Station. I did not notice the movements of any of the Railway Officials at Rathcoole. I did not notice anything peculiar on the train leaving Rathcoole.

About 10 minutes after leaving Rathcoole I heard the brakes go on and the train began to slow up. I dropped the window and had a look out on the left hand side of the train as it was moving forward. I saw a small bon fire on the left-hand side of the track. The train then pulled up dead. Immediately fire was opened on my carriage - I heard no shouting. When I looked out of the carriage I saw two groups of men on the embankment; one group of men were opposite my carriage, and the other group of men were opposite the carriage in which my party were. They were on the same level as the carriages. I saw flashes and heard the 16 reports as they fired into the carriages.

I was looking out on the left-hand side, but we were also being fired at from the right-hand side of the embankment as I noticed the bullets striking the floor from that direction. I had my revolver in my hand - I fired at the men on the left-hand side who were opposite my carriage. When I had emptied my revolver I ducked down in order to re-load. While I was doing so I heard shouts of "come out the military" also "come out and fight" and "put up your hands".

When I had re-loaded my revolver I opened the left-hand door of the carriage and jumped on to the track. During the whole of this period we were being fired on. The men opposite my carriage made a rush at me. There were about half a dozen men opposite my carriage when I jumped out. They were not more than about 3 or 4 yards away from me. I fired 5 rounds at these - I am unable to say if I hit any of them; they fell back from me. I then dived right underneath the train and got to the other side where I saw other Civilians. They fired at me.

I got underneath the train and tried to make my way to the men's carriages which were about 30 yards distance from my carriage. While I was underneath the train I reloaded my revolver again. When I was underneath the coach in which the men's carriages were I saw some of them on the track with their hands up and the Attacking Party were disarming those on the Railway Track and pulling the others out of the carriages. This all happened on the left hand side of the train.

I was able to see this by reason of the fact that there was a Bon Fire and the Attacking Party carried Flash Lamps and they also had a Railway Lamp. There were shots being fired at the men while they were disarmed. I remained underneath the carriage. The Attacking Party after disarming the men and taking their equipment began to search for me. I heard the attacking party asking the men where the officer was. The Attacking Party searched the top of the train and the carriages but were unable to find me. They used Flash Lamps and the Guard's Lamp.

I started to crawl back to the rear of the train as my wish was to get out into the open country. When I got towards the end of the train I saw that some of the Attacking Party were drawn across the line. I then got back underneath the second coach. I climbed on to the Axle and hid myself there. The Attacking Party during this time were rushing about looking for me. I heard a man, whom I took to be the leader, shout "get the officer." I heard the men being ordered to get back into the carriages. I heard all the doors being closed by the Attacking Party. I heard them say to the guard "get on now", and the train started.

As the train started and the Axle revolved I fell off. I seized the Cross Bar of the brake which is just behind the Axle and pulled myself up half laying and half sat there. I then found out that I had been wounded in the leg. I was unable to make myself heard at Millstreet where the train pulled up owing to the excitement and fuss that there was there - I was feeling very weak and was tangled up and required help to get out.

At Rathmore I managed to extricate myself from the position which I was in and I was helped up to the platform by a policeman. At Rathmore I went and found out what had happened to my men. I also saw the Engine Driver. He then told me that as the train left Rathcoole at the far end of the platform two men jumped on to the Engine - he told me they were armed with revolvers and had given him orders to proceed until he was stopped by them.

I then gave orders to the Driver to proceed direct to Killarney as fast as he could and not to stop at Headford Junction where, in the normal course of events, he should have stopped. He complied with my order. I estimate the numbers of the Attacking Party were at least 100. I saw two men of the Attacking Party in a Military Uniform which I took to be the uniform of the I.R.A. as it was darkish green. I saw 4 or 5 of the Attacking Party were in Service Dress Khaki. Most of the party were armed with Rifles and Revolvers. I could not identify any of them.

The demeanour of the Guard during the whole attack struck me as being completely unconcerned and I could hear him talking to the Attacking Party. When he was told to proceed they called him by his Christian name: also the demeanour of the Engine Driver at Rathmore was very unconcerned, as he did not seem to be at all excited considering what he had been through. I think the name the Attacking Party called the Guard was "Walter". I did not hear any of the rest of the conversation between him and the Attackers. I did not speak to the Guard at all.

As we had not been detailed to the Carriages by the Railway Officials, and as the Rebels were in two parties opposite my men's carriages and my own carriage, when the train pulled up dead at Rathcoole I presumed that they must have telephoned up the line our position in the train. I have never received any instructions or orders re disposing my men when travelling by train at Stations when the train is halted. When I crawled from under the train on the right side I was again fired at by the rebels from that side. I saw about half a dozen Civilians jump out of the train on to the track with their hands up. I heard the Rebels shout at them to get back into their carriages which they did. When I was under the train I was able to see what I have already stated from the lights in the compartments and the Bon Fire on the line.

The following casualties were inflicted on the party under my charge: - Sergt. Box old Killed. Pte. Holly home Died of wounds. Pte. Sutton G.S.W. left shoulder and several minor wounds. Pte. Lloyd G.S.W. Hand, Arm and Side. Pte. Hodge Wrist and Side. Lt. Clarke (myself)G.S.W. through the thigh.

This evidence was read over to the witness.

(Ref: WO 35/88B at PRO, Kew)

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The Rathcoole Ambush

Lieutenant General Strickland sent the following report on this ambush to General Headquarters in Dublin on 20th June, 1921:-

"L" COMPANY AUXILIARY DIVISION, R.I.C. Report on ambush of "L" Coy: by armed rebels at RATHCOOL Co. CORK on the 16th instant.

It is my painful duty to report the facts concerning the above ambush, in which this unit was trapped on the above mentioned date. At 19.00 hours a convoy was at BANTEER station, in order to meet a party returning from CORK, a batch of recruits and the "runner" returning from DUBLIN. The convoy consisted of 2 open Crossley tenders, 1 armoured Crossley and 1 armoured Lancia with 25 personnel of the Company. While on column of route the armoured Lancia was leading. The convoy

left BANTEER and when about four miles from BANTEER and half a mile from RATHCOOL bridge, it stopped.

A reconnoitring party (acting on previous information) left the tenders and proceeded to skirmish the immediate vicinity of the road, to a depth of 400 yards on the left and right flanks. Nothing of importance or of a suspicious character was discovered during the operation. After this, the convoy proceeded over RATHCOOL bridge on its homeward journey.

When about, approximately half a mile beyond the bridge, previously referred to and on the MILLSTREET side of it, the ambush was first encountered.

Here, I might point out for your information, in this ambush, the rebels had adopted an entirely new method of attack. Namely, they allowed the 1st: 2nd: and 3rd cars to proceed and then exploded an electrically controlled land mine underneath the rear car. Almost simultaneously with the mining of the rear car, the second leading car was blown up. The leading car (the armoured Lancia) being blown up last of all. The occupants of this vehicle (including myself) on hearing the explosions in the rear were practically blown out of it, when the last mine of all was fired, i.e. after the car had been turned round, in order to go to the assistance of the rest of the convoy.

Therefore it will be easily seen that the only car to escape being mined was the third in column of route. I may say that these mines were timed and fired with the utmost precision. As soon as the mines had been fired, a heavy and concentrated fire was opened up by the insurgents, along a front of 3/4 to 1 mile in length. The fire was notably heaviest, from the direction of the thickly wooded hills on our left. A fairly concentrated fire was also opened up from the railway embankment on our right. The range when the attack first commenced, was between two and three hundred yards and gradually increased to about 700 when the fight ended.

I should roughly estimate that the strength of the attackers was about 300. From the foregoing it will be easily seen that my party, badly shaken as it was by the explosions, was at a very grave disadvantage the rebels occupied a position of great natural strength and it was utterly impossible to locate them. I believe however that the rebels sustained severe casualties, judging from screams and groans heard coming from their directions.

I cannot speak too highly of the way in which my party behaved, outmanoeuvred as they were by twelve to one; not overlooking the fact that at the commencement of the action, the occupants of each car had to fight as detached groups, until such time as they were able to concentrate. During the whole of the engagement, the discipline of the cadets was perfect. There not being the slightest sign of panic or nerves as might easily have occurred, owing to the sudden nature of the onslaught.

As soon as I considered it feasible, I sent to MILLSTREET for reinforcements. D.I.3. F. Scott being the first to go on this errand and the first to arrive at his destination some five miles distant. I cannot, find words sufficient, to express my appreciation of his hazardous task. He was single handed and under rebel fire for about a mile of his journey and finally arrived in MILLSTREET without a single round of ammunition; having expended it all on his journey. This officer gave the alarm and reinforcements were immediately despatched. Five other members of my party were successful also in getting through to MILLSTREET, but arrived after D.I. Scott.

The reinforcements that were despatched came along at the double. Some in a Ford car and other commandeered jaunting cars. Unfortunately these were delayed by reason of three trees, which had been felled across the roadway just outside MILLSTREET, by the insurgents.

A small number of the reinforcements were left at these barriers and the rest proceeded to the scene of the ambush on foot. By the time these had arrived, the rebels (already beaten back) had broken off the fight, which lasted for two hours, the attack itself commencing at about 19.30 hours and ceasing at about 21.45 hours.

Wireless messages were sent out from the billet for assistance and with the utmost despatch "J" Company responded to our signals, arriving at the scene of the ambush at 00.30 hours on the 17th inst., from MACROOM. This unit with the CO. (D.I.I. Williams) in charge did everything possible to assist and help us.

After an inspection I found to my regret and sorrow that Cadets Boyd W. A. H. and Shorter F.E. had been killed. Also that S/Ldr: Taylor O.C. sustained three wounds. With regards to M.T, which sustained considerable damage, I found that of the four vehicles that were in the convoy, two, the armoured Crossley and the Lancia are severely damaged. In passing, I may state that the armour plate protecting the engine of this car, was discovered 40 yards away: having been flung that distance by the concussion, that this unit has not suffered the loss of any arms whatsoever, or ammunition, with the exception of the ammunition expended during the engagement.

In closing I may state, that I consider the way in which the cadets under my charge behaved, is worthy of the highest tradition of the Royal Irish Constabulary.

Millstreet, (Sgd.)

W. E. Crossey, Lieut., & Co. Cork. & 1st B.D.L. Commanding "L" Coy. 17/6/21 Aux. Div.
R.I.C. –

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