

WITH

IN THE FIGHT
FOR FREEDOM
1919 TO THE TRUCE

THE RED PATH OF GLORY
2/6

al areas and the garril-
l to strengthen those in
mmediately apparent to
R.I.C. Intelligence had
people had been largely
ld carry information to
longer ran, particularly
people had little further
former times, they had
y of them were to take

ack on Ballytrain R.I.C.
vement, but the moral
portance. On the day
was scoured for infor-
ed to questioning the
hope that they might
Ballytrain barrack; but
ion to give them. One
affair, was overheard to
n about such matters.
was obvious where his
rshot of his inquisitors,
give them!" Another
and cart, just to see the
venir from the wreckage.
in 1835, he stated that
st have been in the days
is proud to be in Ulster,
vader.

res of mails in the area
d a bill for fees by the
inded at Ballytrain. It
ted by the Accountant
Carrickmacross, a man
insell's memorandum on
75:—
it be paid, because
lo with policemen in

D.I., Carrickmacross
an account of the attack
what purported to be an
l process of being blown
n shot through the roof
ey sailed through space!
Ulster to be captured by
companies participated
lge (Fermanagh border),
ile River, Magheracluone
n), Carrickmacross and
n had to travel long dis-
were conveyed by motor
their homes immediately
been given a suggestion
iles away, in Co. Cavan,
ventually decided that a
ght be too big an under-
ed for it. The rifles and
rtrain were later used in
alton of Carrickmacross,
attackers were conveyed
ask until 8 a.m. He was

subsequently questioned and threatened by the police, in a vain attempt to force him to divulge information.

Of the officers who participated in the attack the rank of Battalion Commandant was held by Dan Hogan, Terry Magee, James Flynn, Seamus McKenna and P. J. O'Daly. Barney Marron, than whom there was no braver man in the county, was shot dead in a raid for arms on the morning of September 1st, 1920. He is buried in Corcreeagh graveyard, about six miles from Carrickmacross, on the Monaghan-Cavan border. A Celtic Cross was unveiled in his memory, and that of his brother Patrick, in 1939, by the Fifth Battalion, Monaghan No. 2 Brigade. It is one of the finest monuments in the county, and the inscription is completely in Gaelic.

What had been the Ballytrain R.I.C. barrack was subsequently re-built, and is now the Garda Siochana Station. Actually, it is in the townland of Shantonagh, about a quarter of a mile from Ballytrain, a place of about half-a-dozen houses, two of them public houses. Around the time of 1798 about three hundred people lived there, but to-day it puts one in mind of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." The stranger who stops there on his way through is noted by its few inhabitants, and local gossipers will surmise about his business.

From an archaeological point of view, Ballytrain is interesting. On an adjacent hill is a Cromlech that occupies about a rood, and is known as Trean-More's Grave. This Trean-More is said to have been a grandfather of Finn McCool, and to have given his name to the place as Baile Tréin.

And so, as the old song has it, "Everything has but a time." The "battle of Ballytrain" has become but a memory, even for those who took part in it. It is hoped that this short account of the operation will perpetuate that memory of an eventful night, February 13th/14th, 1920, when, appropriately, the I.R.A. password was "303." The occasion went into a ballad much in favour at the time as:

That day of renown
When the rebels of Monaghan they all gathered around
The leaders addressed them and men of great fame
When an order was issued to attack Ballytrain.

ROOF FIRE TECHNIQUE WAS EXPLOITED IN CAPTURE OF BALLYLANDERS BARRACK

East Limerick Brigade, April 27, 1920.

By LIEUT.-COLONEL J. M. MacCARTHY
(Formerly Adjutant East Limerick Brigade, I.R.A.)

HIGH INTO the night sky, there to outshine the bright moonlight and bathe the ground below in sun-like radiance, the Verey light signals rose and fell. These fingers of flame, sent skyward as symbols of alarm and calls for aid by the police garrison of Ballylanders R.I.C. barrack, marked the opening of the I.R.A. attack on that post on April 27th, 1920. It was probably the first time that these firework signals, originally designed for the trench combats in the European war, had illuminated the County Limerick countryside; it was also the first barrack attack by the I.R.A. in that county, and the initiating move in a campaign that was to unfold in widening scope and intensity over the succeeding months.

As befitted such an occasion, one designed to be their baptism of fire, the operation had been carefully planned by the I.R.A. leaders in East Limerick. But first of all, the decision to undertake it had, of course, to be made. Necessarily, this had to be made at brigade level,

as no single battalion or company unit at that time would have sufficient arms at its disposal for the purpose. Neither would it have been in a position to ensure the very essential co-operation of adjoining units in the way of erecting road blocks and so on, to impede hostile reinforcements.

Thus, while the attack was primarily an operation conducted by the Galtee Battalion, the oldest and principal battalion unit of the Brigade, it was carried out under the auspices of, and with the co-operation of, Brigade Headquarters. Indeed, it might also be said to have been under the auspices of G.H.Q. in Dublin. This came about through the presence in the area of Tomás Malone, then known under the name of "Sean Forde." He had been sent to County Limerick nominally as an organiser of the Republican Loan campaign, but actually in practice his duties assumed an increasingly military character. Nor was this to be wondered at, for apart from his inherent military aptitude, his final instructions, as received from Michael Collins, were: "Get those Limerick men into the fight!"

It was not that the Limerick men needed much urging. In fact, the Irish Republican Brotherhood members of the Galtee Battalion had for some time been working for a more pronounced and enterprising military policy in their area. As elsewhere, the I.R.B. members were a small select body in the Volunteers and the spearhead of the organisation at that period. With this policy as the real issue, there had arisen a local dispute among the Volunteers, causing not inconsiderable disorganisation. This was largely because, for the great bulk of the Volunteers, the dispute appeared to be a mere conflict of personalities and they took sides or remained neutral on that basis and in ignorance of the real point at stake.

In the outcome, the decision to attack Ballylanders R.I.C. barrack vindicated the I.R.B. standpoint twice over. For not only was the decision largely inspired by the I.R.B., but it was planned and led almost entirely by its principal local members, and that notwithstanding the fact that not all of them then ranked as Volunteer officers. The decision having been taken and approved by the Brigade Commander, Sean Wall of Bruff, who attended some of the initial meetings of the planners, these then resolved themselves into a small staff for the detailed planning and execution of the operation.

This small planning staff comprised Tomás Malone ("Forde"), Tadhg Crowley of Ballylanders; Edmond Tobin of Glenbrohane, and Jack MacCarthy of Kilfinane, who was also Vice-Commandant of the Battalion at this period. Others attending the staff conferences from time to time included Sean Meade, members of the Crowley family (brothers of Tadhg Crowley), and Thomas Murphy, all of Ballylanders. As occasion required, other Volunteers from the locality were called in for consultation or assignment of tasks.

Most of the conferences to plan the attack were held at Edmond Tobin's house at Glenbrohane, near Ballylanders. The post to be assaulted was a strong stone structure, steel-shuttered, dominating the village street from its site at the corner of a crossroads. But it had one weakness, unrealised, in all probability, by the police garrison. That was the semi-detached character of the building, a second house of a similar type being alongside, gable-to-gable. On the other side, the gable of the barrack was an open one abutting on the road to Kilfinane. The front of the building faced the fairly wide open space of the Square and the long village street. At the rear little or no field of fire existed for the defence, and it only required to be kept under observation by an attacker.

The defenders' weak point—the second building in the block, which served as the local dispensary—was made the pivot on which centred the whole scheme of attack. This scheme was one which the police could hardly have anticipated, at that period at any rate, as it employed what was then a new technique in barrack attacks. This was to break through the roof of the second house from inside, and through the opening thus made to break through the roof of the barrack. The

bombing and ign
Tomás Malone
as a whole. At
upon was O'Gr
Commandant, h
from the barrac
other firing po
these positions
ley's premises,
supervising in
being thus set
details to be p
hour of attack
ments about the

In due course
presented, were
even to the pri
local Command
neighbouring b
from Fermoy, I
when a reinforce
ring of road blo
established and
blocks, at a sim
barrack, and to
Volunteers part
the Ballylanders
and Kilballeck
O/C Sean O'Gr
manning the det
to some twenty
of four Volunte

In the even
down to the sm
of the stretcher
carpentry, basill
sense of the te
was out. Initial
removal of p
of her residence
effected immedi
not without cons
timing and havin
with the loaded

Concurrently
roads less than
where needed, th
points. At the
ruin to the prob
the midst of th
louder than a th
the alarm to th
however, the in
the police were
unusual was a
Volunteers had
of some last-imp
imparted to one
cidentally, this
possible for the
Protestant, a m
which has brat
"Palatines," a n
Palatinate in Ge

ave sufficient
ve been in a
ning units in
ile reinforce-

ucted by the
the Brigade,
operation of,
e been under
through the
the name of
minally as an
y in practice
Nor was this
aptitude, his
: "Get those

ing. In fact,
Battalion had
l enterprising
members were
head of the
l issue, there
ig not incon-
he great bulk
nflct of per-
nat basis and

R.I.C. barrack
only was the
ned and led
notwithstand-
n-tee officers.
Brigade Com-
mitial meetings
mall staff for

ne ("Forde"),
obrohane, and
ndant of the
ferences from
rowley family
f Ballylanders.
y were called

ld at Edmond
e post to be
ominating the
s. But it had
olice garrison.
second house
he other side,
e road to Kil-
open space of
tle or no field
be kept under

e block, which
which centred
ich the police
ate, as it em-
s. This was to
e, and through
barrack. The

bombing and igniting of the barrack top floor would then follow.

Tomás Malone took charge of this critical task and of the assault as a whole. At the other gable—the open one—the firing position fixed upon was O'Grady's house, with J. MacCarthy, the Battalion Vice-Commandant, in charge. From O'Grady's premises, which was separated from the barrack by some fifteen yards of roadway, a semi-circle of other firing points was selected to cover the front of the barrack, these positions being located in Upton's, Burke's, Condon's and Crowley's premises, with Tadhg Crowley, Sean Lynch and Pat Hannigan supervising in this sector. The main framework of the assault plan being thus settled, there remained innumerable lesser, but essential details to be perfected, such as timing of occupation of positions, the hour of attack, collection of equipment, erection of barricades, arrangements about the signals, and so on.

In due course these matters, and the awkward problems some of them presented, were satisfactorily settled. The details arranged extended even to the provision of a stretcher, a first-aid station manned by the local Cumann na mBan and—further afield—the co-operation of neighbouring brigades was secured in the way of impeding road traffic from Fermoy, Buttevant and Tipperary, the British military centres whence reinforcements might be despatched to Ballylanders. An inner ring of road blocks, at a mile or so on all sides of the village, was also established and manned. Counting the parties on these inner road blocks, at a small observation post set up in stables at the rear of the barrack, and those manning the main firing points, the number of Volunteers participating numbered sixty, being comprised—apart from the Ballylanders Company—of parties from Galbally, Kilfinane, Bruff and Kilmallock. The Kilmallock contingent included the then Battalion O/C, Sean O'Riordan. The number in the actual attack, that is those manning the firing positions, was, of course, much smaller, amounting to some twenty-five, each of the firing posts having an average strength of four Volunteers.

In the event all these preparations worked out as planned, and down to the smallest detail, if the workmanship put into the construction of the stretcher be excepted. This appliance was a piece of amateur carpentry, hastily knocked together and fated to let down—in every sense of the term—one of its amateur constructors before the night was out. Initially, however, it fulfilled satisfactorily its first task—the removal of a seriously ill lady to a place of greater safety than that of her residence, which was in the line of fire. This transfer was effected immediately prior to the hour fixed for opening the attack, and not without considerable difficulty, due to the need for quietness, exact timing and having to surmount an eight-foot high fence of barbed wire, with the loaded stretcher.

Concurrently, the attacking party proper was assembling at a cross-roads less than a mile from the village, receiving final instructions and, where needed, the men were assigned local guides to their various firing points. At the last moment, an incident occurred which threatened ruin to the project. Suddenly, in the still night, a shot rang out from the midst of the assembly. To the keyed-up Volunteers it sounded louder than a thunder-clap, and it seemed almost certain it would give the alarm to the nearby police garrison. No such effect was produced, however, the final reconnaissance reports as they came in showing that the police were all within their barrack and evidently unaware anything unusual was afoot. What might have been a very unlucky shot for the Volunteers had, it transpired, been discharged accidentally in the course of some last-minute instruction in rifle manipulation, which was being imparted to one of the Volunteers, Peter Steepe of Kilfinane. Incidentally, this member of the attacking party, who was in no way responsible for the accident, calls for special mention in that he was a Protestant, a member of that community in the Kilfinane locality, which has branches here and there in Co. Limerick, known as "Palatines," a name derived from the place of their ancestors—the Palatinate in Germany.

The Volunteers had moved quietly to their positions around 11 p.m. and had occupied them without incident. After a hurried erection of some protection against the volume of fire expected to be directed on them by the police garrison, all eyes were turned expectantly on the dispensary post, the house adjoining the barrack. From that post was to be given the signal to open fire. After a short, but tense, wait, a green pinpoint of light flashed out. It was the signal. From the semi-circle of firing positions stabbed the rifle flashes of the opening volley, swiftly intermingled with the swish of the Verey rockets and the answering fire of the defenders. For the half-hour that followed, the quiet village street became a focus of concentrated light and sound.

Simultaneously with the opening volley, the break through the dispensary roof was started and quickly accomplished. From the point of vantage thus gained, the roof of the barrack was within reach. Soon the dull thud of heavy stones crashing on the slate roof was added to the volume of sound. A gaping hole appeared in the roof, but the reaction of the defenders was swift. They brought rifle fire to bear on the gap. For a while this fire threatened to prevent the attackers exploiting their initial success. In the end a grenade was dropped through the opening and silenced this defensive effort. The grenade was followed by quantities of paraffin oil and a lighted torch. Almost at once the flaming torch spread a rapidly growing circle of fire through the top storey of this wing of the barrack.

Meanwhile, at the opposite gable, a hot exchange of rifle fire was taking place between the post in O'Grady's and the defenders firing from their gable-end windows. This was a point-blank duel in which the flashing rifles of defence and attack seemed almost muzzle to muzzle. The police, behind their steel shutters, had the advantage of position, being practically immune behind this solid, loopholed protective screen, as against a hastily thrown up breastwork of bedding at the windows through which the Volunteers fired. Of the two upper storey windows in the Volunteer post, one was manned by D. O'Hannigan and the other by the officer in charge of the post, with Sean Meade of the local Volunteer Company, standing in between under cover of the room wall where he awaited his chance to fire. This he could get only by one of the firers yielding position and weapon to him, no more than two rifles and two firing points being available there. Eventually his turn came. For some time the volume of fire from the barrack against this post had been intense and well-directed. It was afterwards noted that the woodwork of the windows was deeply scored from the passage of bullets entering there to impinge on the barricade of bedding or on the opposite wall of the room. This well-aimed fire soon found its mark; a bullet struck Sean Meade at his firing point at one of the windows. It was evidently a serious, and possibly fatal, wound.

His companions, coming to his aid, found him completely collapsed and proceeded to get him downstairs out of the line of fire. That was accomplished with difficulty, owing to his collapsed condition and the impossibility of his helpers adopting other than a crouching posture under the quick succession of bullets still penetrating the windows. On reaching the comparative safety of a ground floor room, his wound was examined and found to be a clear-through penetration of the chest, one obviously needing skilled and swift attention. The stretcher, of which he was one of the constructors, was again brought into use to take him to the first-aid station. On the way it broke under the strain and deposited its burden heavily on the ground. The wounded man was given preliminary aid at the station until the arrival of the local dispensary medical officer, Dr. Hennessy.

Throughout these events the defensive firing of the police from the front face of the barrack remained intense, though less concentrated, as it had to be distributed against a number of separated positions. At the same time it was seen that the flames, which had blazed up at one end of the barrack roof, were gaining grip on the whole top storey. Clearly, the attackers saw that the exercise of patience and maintenance of their rifle fire against the barrack to prevent the garrison fighting

the flames, could realise that, to of surrendering plete cessation the windows.

The group entered to take five—a small half-an-hour's steel shutters single weak Galtee Battalion operation and capture of the garrison, and

Happily, a medically attended first-aid station a chance was provided and hurriedly moved Laurencetown care of Dr. Hennessy he remained. County Hospital until the patient Mount Mellis assumed an office by then had successful effect

HISTORY ON

By
(Formerly)

LONG BEFO
Soldier" can
War, Kilma
the "Unknown
barrack in 18
—and histor
Limerick Br
the night of

In that a
with difficult
of successful
predecessors
also suffered
further conti
Unknown Fe
of County K
Gaelic Leagu

Looking
notable circ