The day a barracks went up in smoke

BY LEADER REPORTER

AN ACCOUNT of an attack on Ballylanders R.I.C. barracks in 1920, reproduced in a recent review of the book "Survivors", has stimulated controversy in the district over the exact events on that fateful day.

Now Mr. John Tobin, of Ballymackey, Ballylanders, is a man who took part in the attack, and has offered his father's version of the events.

The account was originally written for the Irish Times by Edmond Tobin, who died in 1970.

It is offered, in answer to correspondence on the Letters column, as a work of historical interest which dispels the events as given in the book "Survivors".

Ammunition

The following is Edmond Tobin's version of the events, in support of that given in the recently-published book.

"Some two or three weeks before the date of the attack on the 27th April, 1920, rifles and ammunition were coming through by Cork and Limerick.

"Two or three days before the attack the men of Edmond Tobin's R.I.B. Circle were on duty night and day. A new member - Bill O'Sullivan - accepted at this time.

"One day while they were at this work a shot was fired accidentally. Luckily the gun was pointed at the fire grate at the time.

"Sean Ford (Thomas Malone) was coming and going and had some information for us every day. He kept in touch with the officers of the Brigade as well as the officers of Tipperary and Cork Brigade who were to be responsible for attacking enemy reinforcements on their way to Ballylanders during the attack.

"All was now ready. Tom Murphy and John Joe O'Brien were detailed to take up positions in Edmond Tobin's house and were told to take up those positions when they would see the houses being occupied by the rear of the attacking party. Two men from Kilmalkedar had been ordered to report early at my place to go to Walsh's public house situated in Knocknagard road, get there the key of a house near door to the barracks.

"On the night of the attack two of the officers of the R.I.B. Circle were ordered to report early at my house to go to Walsh's public house and get there the key of a house near door to the barracks.

"When the key was got, a special posse of R.I.B. Circle arrived at the barracks and opened the door. The house was taken over by the R.I.B. Circle and the officers of the R.I.B. Circle were in charge of the police affairs.

"At the signal a flash of light our guns roared from all positions. Ford and myself broke through the roof of our building and got inside a heavy plank of timber under the building. The R.I.B. Circle was in charge of the police. The house was taken over by the R.I.B. Circle and the officers of the R.I.B. Circle were in charge of the police affairs.

"Paddy Hannigan was the first officer we sent off to take over Upton's house. Chris Upton, the owner, and a member of the local company was waiting for him with six men. I thought this position was the most dangerous, so we advised Hannigan to keep a good look out on the windows. Sean Lynch of Gallahy was in charge at Mrs. Burke's and Jack McCarthy was in charge at O'Grady's. This turned out to be a very hot place, also (see Jack McCarthy's story).

"When the fire had been in progress for about half an hour Ford and I pulled a tin of paraffin oil through the hole in the barracks roof after which we got our torch up. While Ford held it I set fire to the end with the sack which had been saturated with paraffin. He at once drove it into the barracks as he did a great flare of light went up. A few seconds later we heard the shout below "we surrender."

"Ford gave the "cease fire" order which was flashed around from one position to another.

"I came down from the roof and looking up I saw Ford giving orders to the police to march out in front of the barricades with their hands up. He reminded me of some story I heard of Patrick Sarsfield. When the police were all lined up outside we noticed that two of the officers were in their uniform. Ford allowed them to dress.

Warning

"He then ordered a section of our men to go into the barracks and collect as much money as they could from the building and at the same time warned the searches not to touch any money or private property they found. Liam Sealy got the job of examining papers, books and anything in that line that would yield information in the hands of the police.

"While the police were being sent under an armed guard to the police station and as we were about to leave the vicinity I took a tin of petrol and threw it on the grass. The fire came towards me so quickly that I had to drop the tin and only just got outside the door when the stairs were a mass of flames. It was the end of an empty gallows in Ballylanders."

"David Tobin marched a section of our men with all the captured arms, ammunition, bombs, very light pistols and documents to my R.I.B. Circle's private dump, there to be sorted out and counted later.

"It was only then that Ford told me that one of our men - Jack Meade - had been wounded. I was so busy I did not see him being carried on a stretcher to the First Aid Post. It was a great shock to me."