

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 Ballinalacken, Ballylanders, son of Edmond Tobin, who took part in the attack, has offered his father's version of the events.

The account was originally written for the Bureau of Military History in Dublin by Edmond Tobin, who died in 1971.

It is offered in answer to correspondence on our Letters column, of some weeks ago, which disputed 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 Cush Company from all over the Brigade area to my house. We also received a quantity of ammunition from South Tipperary Brigade for the attack. During the period my own I.R.B. Circle were on duty night and day. A new member - Bill O'Sullivan - was accepted at this time.

"Four or five days before the 27th, Jack McCarthy arrived at my house from Kilfinane with maps, paper and pen. All roads in our area as well as roads in County Tipperary and County Cork had to be blocked. I had to work in the forge by day just to show business was as usual. My brother, David was cleaning the guns and was helped by Paddy Hannigan, who was a Lieutenant in Cush Company.

"One day while they were at this work a shot went off 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 Brigades who were to be responsible for attacking enemy reinforcements on their way to Ballylanders during the attack.

"All was now ready. Tom Mur-



David Tobin (left), brother of the late Edmond Tobin. David was shot with Thomas Murphy (right) on New Year's Day of 1921 by Black and Tans, presumably in reprisal for the attack on Ballylanders R.I.C. barracks.

phy and John Joe O'Brien were detailed to take up positions in Condon's public house and were told to take up those positions when they would see the other houses being occupied by the rest of the attacking party. Two men from Kilmallock had been ordered to report early at my place to go to Walsh's public house situated in Knocklong road to obtain there the key of a house next door to the barracks.

"Tom Crawford, Christopher Upton, Jack Meade, the brothers Jack, Joe, Tadgh, Peter and Mike Crowley made last minute arrangements in the village. The remainder of the attacking party assembled on the Knocklong road at a point known as Ballylanders bridge.

"Here we had men from each of the Company areas of Bruff, Bruree, Kilmallock, Kilfinane, Cush and Martinstown. I helped Sean Forde in selecting the men for each of the officers in charge of the five sections.

"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 feather pillows on the windows. Sean Lynch of Galbally 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).

fell on us as a result of rifle fire directed from underneath.

"We directed a few revolver shots at the door and felt comparatively safe. I suggested to Ford that it was time to use the torch - a pole five or six feet long with sacks rolled around one end - but he replied 'We are hardly under fire at all yet'. At the same time I thought our men in Upton's were bearing the brunt of the fight and were in the greatest danger.

"When the fight had been in progress for about half an hour Ford and I poured a tin of paraffin oil through the hole in the barracks roof after which we got our torch up. While Ford held it 'at the ready' 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 barracks with their hands up. He reminded me of some story I had read of Patrick Sarsfield. When the police were all lined up outside we noticed that two of them were in their night attire. Ford allowed them to dress.

Warned

"He then ordered a section of our men to go into the barracks and collect all arms and ammunition in the building and at the same time warned the searchers not to touch any money or private property they found. Liam Scully 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 other end of the village and as we were about to leave the vicinity I took a tin of petrol and threw it on the stairs. 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 enemy garrison in Ballylanders.

"David Tobin marched a section of our men with all the captured arms, ammunition, bombs, very light pistols and documents to my I.R.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.



Mr. Paddy Murphy (proprietor of the Gold...



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