

FREEDOM STRUGGLE

The Killaclogher Ambush - June 24th, 1920

By Jimmy Laffey

IN his publication, *Land and Revolution*, Fergus Campbell argues with considerable merit that many of the IRA engagements of the 1917-21 period in Co Galway were actually “thinly disguised land agitations”.

One such engagement, at Killaclogher on the Skehana-Monivea parish border, was a case in point with an amount of circumstantial evidence to support that argument.

Companies of the IRA were in operation locally at Cussane, Newcastle, Monivea, Menlough and Skehana. Paddy King, then Captain of the Monivea Company, in his witness statement gives us an insight into its formation and operation.

It was formed in Monivea in March 1917 with all meetings being held in the barn in King's yard, beside the school house, while drills and military exercises took place twice weekly in Peak valley, close to Monivea village.

Members performed ordinary volunteer duties at election campaign meetings in 1918 and blocked roads prior to attacks on RIC barracks at Moyville, Loughgeorge and Headford in 1920-21.

Running in parallel with these activities were various land agitation engagements in the areas of Colmanstown and Ballybane, among others.

The *Galway Express* reported that on February 7, 1920, a deputation of local tenants representing the parishes of Skehana, Gurteen, Newcastle and Monivea confronted James H Smith, as owner of over 1,000 acres, on his avenue as he returned from a hunt meet, with their motto of “the land for the people” being delivered to him.

This confrontation appears to have had an almost immediate impact as on April 10, 1920, a follow up report in the same publication notes that James Smith agreed to hand over lands, at the former Quaker Farm, with 200 acres being reserved for his own use with distribution and price being left “to a competent Land Commission Inspector”.

The *Galway Express* of February 7, 1920 further detailed a similar event with the same objective where a deputation of local tenants from nearby Doonane and Kilbeg had waited on another local landowner on the very same day, James Hutcheson, to ask him to give up lands, comprising 160 acres.



DARBY Forde.

The local tenants stated that evening “you have been grazing lands at Ballybane to which you have neither a lease nor a judicial tenancy of any kind as you had succeeded in purchasing the entire ranch and seventeen adjoining tenants were left out in the cold”.

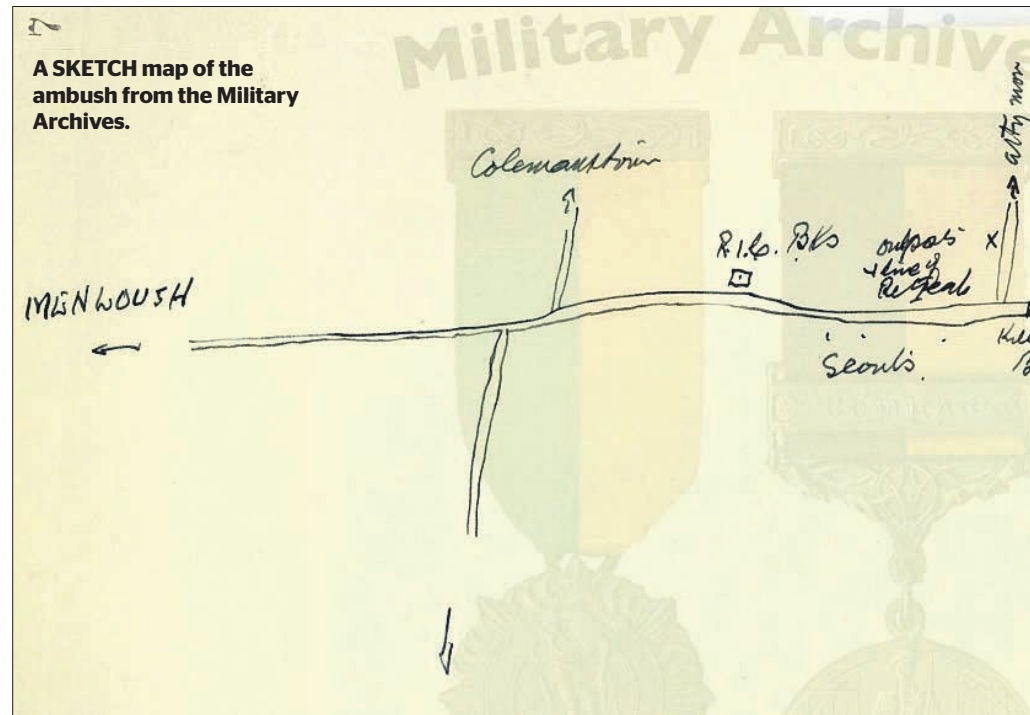
In a defiant response Mr. Hutcheson retorted “if things were pushed they would be playing with fire”. This initial response was very different from that at Colmanstown but then on Sunday June 24, 1920 the Killaclogher engagement took place.

WITNESS STATEMENT

Paddy King relates the following in his witness statement: An ambush was prepared for a party of RIC who were expected to accompany a boycotted farmer, named Hutchinson (sic), of Ballybane, Skehana.

Taking part were Thomas Kelly and Paddy King, Monivea Company; John J. Cullinane, Patrick Cullinane, and Thomas Kennedy, Cussane Company; Michael and Patrick Burns (brothers) and Patrick Healy, Newcastle Company; Darby Forde, Robert Lally, Peter Dolly, Michael Jordan, Walter Costello and Walter Coppinger, Skehana Company and Patrick Ruane of Menlough Company. The latter and Darby Forde were in charge of the ambush.

The position selected was from inside



THE present day location of the Killaclogher ambush near Monivea.

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The driver of the trap turned the horse and raced back home at a galloping speed

a demesne wall (Killaclogher) which was about eight feet high. Holes were punched in the wall for about a distance of eighty yards. A small plantation ran along the inside wall for about a half mile. The width of the plantation was about 150 yards.

It was all open country after that - and very dangerous for retreat. There was no wall on the other side of the road. The land there is about eight feet lower than the level of the road. One would have to jump down to the field below, inside of the road.

At about 2 p.m. on the Sunday in question, four RIC men accompanying Hutchinson (two in front of horse trap and two in rear) ran into the scene. Fire was opened, and the RIC men were called on to surrender.

The driver of the trap turned the horse, and raced back home at a galloping speed, standing up in the trap and whipping the horse as fast as he could. One of the RIC men, Constable McGloin, threw his rifle on the road. The other constable opened fire, and was wounded while jumping from the road down into the field on the other side of the road.

The other two constables, who were in front, seemed very anxious to surrender and held their rifles over their heads, at the same time, taking a few side steps towards the opposite side; then suddenly they jumped