

Armed Attacks on Troop Trains, 1921

The following are the dates and locations of 25 armed attacks on trains carrying troops between 31st January and 8th July, 1921, as recorded in the Daily Railway Situation Reports from the Colonel of the Staff, Deputy Quartermaster General, from Parkgate HQ to the Under Secretary in Dublin Castle¹. While, doubtless, there are better and more detailed accounts of some of them, these pithy descriptions give the totality of this phase of the War of Independence.

Armed Attacks

7th February: On the 31st ultimo a shooting affray took place at Mallow Station following the wounding of County Inspector King, in which 1 railwayman was killed and eight wounded. All traffic was suspended until 0600 hours on 1st instant

14th February 1921: On the 11th instant between Rathcoole and Millstreet, Co. Cork the 1830 hours train ex Mallow to Tralee was held up about 1900 hours by 200 rebels who opened fire on the train in which an escort of 1 officer and 14 other ranks were travelling, of whom 1 sergeant was killed and one officer and four other ranks wounded

It appears that on the departure of this train from Rathcoole two armed men jumped on to the footplate of the engine and ordered the driver to stop at 17½ mile post, which is about 1½ miles outside Millstreet Station

After the ambush the train ran direct to Killarney by order of the officer in command

21st February: On the 17th instant the 0750 train Foynes to Ballnegrane was held up between Foynes and Askeaton by armed and masked men who opened heavy fire on the train. One woman was slightly wounded. A party of R.I. Constabulary was travelling in the train, and sustained no injury. The engine and carriages were badly damaged

21st February: On 9th instant the engine and rolling stock of the 1420 hours train ex Burtonport were re-railed (it had been derailed between Kincaslough Road and Crolly by three boulders of c. one ton each) and proceeded to Gweedore. When passing Crolly about 1700 hours it was heavily fired at. No casualties

21st February: On 15th instant the 0930 train ex Cork was ambushed at Upton Station about 1015 hours by about 50 armed men, who had imprisoned the station staff a short time before the arrival of the train

A mixed party of about 20 troops were travelling in the train. When the train came to a standstill fire was opened by the rebels who wounded 5 soldiers and killed 7 civilian passengers and wounded 6 others. Three of the Railway employees were injured.

The troops detrained and engaged the rebels, the latter losing 2 killed and one wounded (since dead).

7th March: On 3rd instant about 2010 hours the passenger train ex Sligo for Dublin was fired at between Kilfree and Boyle. 4 windows of a coach which was occupied by troops were smashed. No casualties are reported. The troops detrained at Boyle

¹ UK National Archives CO904/157/2 July 1920 and January 1922 If there were previous daily reports they have not survived

7th March: On the 4th instant the 0915 train ex Cork for Waterford was ambushed at Ballymoyle between Dungarvan and Durrow. The train was heavily fire on, especially the front and rear carriages. A party of troops was travelling in train and returned the fire and the ambushers withdrew. There were no military casualties

21st March: On 12th instant at Ardfert, Co. Kerry the 1800 hours passenger train Limerick to Tralee was ambushed by armed men who had previously entered the Station and held up the Station staff. They placed luggage barrows in position for cover and opening fire on the train they killed 1 officer of the Auxiliary Division and wounded the engine driver

28th March: On 21st instant at Headford Junction the 1345 hours passenger train Kenmare to Headford Junction was ambushed by a large number of armed men, Military casualties 7 killed and several wounded

31st March: On 28th instant at Creagh Crossing in the Castledawson District between 1600 and 1700 hours 3 armed men called at the signalman's house and ordered the gates at the crossing to be closed. This, the wife of the signalman refused to do. A few minutes later a train passed and was fired at by the men. No damage was done

21st April: On 19th instant at 1730 hours, the 1720 train ex Gortalea was derailed between Gortalea and Castleisland, a length of rail having been torn up beforehand. The train was brought to a standstill and fire was opened on the coaches containing Military and Police. There were no casualties. One coach was derailed and 1250 yards of the permanent way was destroyed. No passengers or goods traffic will be accepted for Castleisland until further notice

30th April: On 29th instant the 1510 hours train ex Cork was held up between Durrow and Kilmacthomas, the gates of a level crossing being closed against it. Fire was opened on the train by rebels, and two other ranks, who formed part of an escort of 1st Devons to Military Stores consigned from Fermoy to Waterford, were wounded – 1 severely and 1 slightly – The train subsequently arrived at Waterford 2 hours late

12th May: On 11th instant the 1500 train ex Wexford was held up between Wexford and Killurin by a red flag. The train was fired on. 1 N.C.O. and 10 other ranks escorting rations to Enniscorthy were in the train, which they left and engaged the rebels, who were driven off, two of whom were seen to fall. 1 soldier was slightly wounded. Several coaches were badly damaged.

18th May: On 17th instant at Ballaghaderreen about 1500 hours the passenger train ex Kilfree was stopped and boarded by armed men about 150 yards from the Railway Station and nearly opposite the RIC Barracks, which was fired on from the train. The RIC returned the fire. One 1st class civilian passenger was wounded and the train was slightly damaged

10th June: On 8th instant between Ballybrack and Farranfore Junction the 1720 hours train ex Killarney to Tralee was ambushed by armed men who fired on the train. Casualties:- 1 soldier killed.

16th June: on 17th instant at Old Drumcondra Station, Dublin about 0805 hours a special troop train ex Kingstown to Kingsbridge was ambushed by armed men who attacked the train with bombs, rifles and machine guns. The following casualties are reported:- 1 Private severely, 2 sergeants slightly wounded belonging to Royal West Kent Regiment

17th June: On 17th instant at Ballyfermot Bridge between Inchicore and Clondalkin the 0610 train ex Dublin for Kildare was fired at by armed men. A party of RIC were travelling on the train. There were no casualties

17th June: On 15th instant at Cratloe, Co. Clare, the 1155 hours passenger train ex Limerick was ambushed by armed men, who fired upon the train which cleared the ambush. The O.C. Detachment of Royal Scots Fusiliers stopped the train and returned with his men inflicting heavy casualties on the attackers

23rd June: On 21st instant at Geasehill, King's Co the 1725 hours train ex Portarlington for Tullamore was fired on by armed men; the fire was returned by a party of R.I.C. There were no casualties to Crown Forces

24th June: On 24th instant near Raheny, Co Dublin, a bomb was thrown from Killester Bridge at the 1000 hours passenger train ex Howth; the rear coach was struck. There were no casualties

25th June: On the 24th instant near Adavoyle, Co. Armagh about 1030 hours a Troop Special train ex Belfast was derailed by a explosion of a land mine. The train contained 1 squadron 10th Hussars with troop horses. The following casualties are reported :- Killed 3 other ranks, 10th Hussars, 1 civilian (Guard of train) also 30 horses; wounded 2 other ranks and assistant guard. The telegraph wires had been previously cut. Further particulars later

27th June: On 24th instant between Inchicore and Clondalkin, Co Dublin, the 1930 hours Troops special ex Kingsbridge for Curragh was fired on. There were no casualties. Four windows damaged

29th June: On 27th instant at Limerick Station the 1740 hours train for Charleville was fired upon by a party of armed men when moving out of the station. The Escort in charge of Military Supplies returned the fire. A party of RIC on duty at the station also opened fire on the raiders. No casualties to Crown Forces

3rd July: On the 2nd instant between Lucan and Hazelhatch at about 1520 hours the Special Troop train ex Kingsbridge for Curragh was signalled by aeroplane to stop, Troops descended from the train, and corporated (*sic*) with troops in the vicinity. A party of rebels were found and dispersed. Six land mines were found on the permanent way. The train proceeded to destination when the line was cleared

9th July: On 8th instant the 1315 hours passenger train ex Kingsbridge was fired at, and bombed between 2½ and 3rd milepost near Ballyformit (*sic*). One passenger travelling in a horse box was severely wounded, one leg being blown completely off. Several other passengers were injured by broken glass. No military casualties

Other Military Attacks

Destruction and theft of railway infrastructure, mails, stores, etc was very common, though related injuries rare. Here are some exceptions

14th March: On 18th instant at Limerick Junction about 2005 hours a Military Foot Policeman was shot while standing on the platform opposite the 1900 hours train ex Limerick which had just arrived. The station-master telephoned to Tipperary for a doctor and ambulance to meet the train, and the wounded man was conveyed to that station

14th March: On the night of the 10th instant at Newbliss Station, Co. Monaghan, an attempt was made to kidnap Ticket Collector Wallace, who escaped but was wounded in three places. He was subsequently conveyed to a hospital in Belfast

11th April: This morning at 0745 hours the L & NWR Hotel was attacked by armed rebels, who threw about 12 bombs through the windows. Revolver and rifle firing continued for about 25 minutes. 1 rebel was killed, 1 wounded and 1 Auxiliary policeman was wounded. This hotel is now occupied by Auxiliary Police

4th July: On 2nd instant at Ardfert, Co. Kerry, the 1050 hours passenger train ex Tralee for Limerick was held up by rebels. Four Crown Forces in mufti opened fire and the train proceeded without further incident. (Note: Raids on trains carrying mail and stores were common and normally unopposed, this one of the few instances where they were repulsed)

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