

Railway Employee Resistance in the War of Independence:

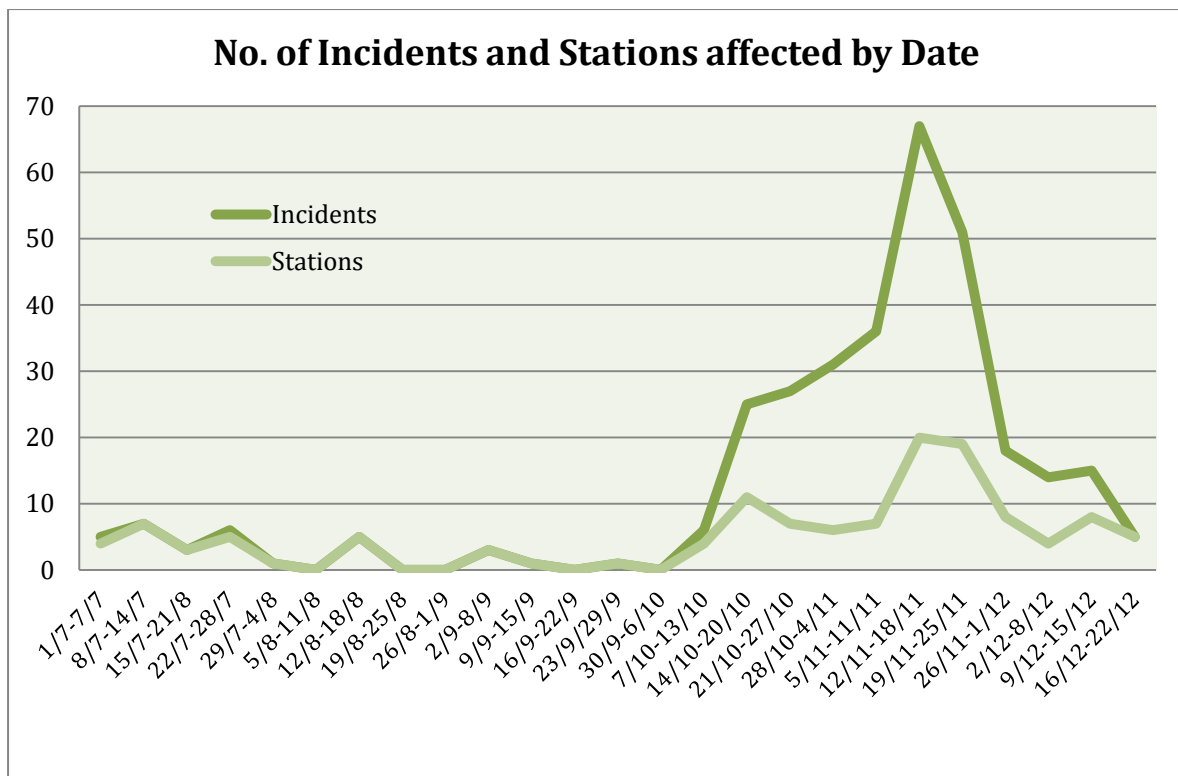
July-December, 1920

Railway staff from July to December 1920 disrupted the movement of troops and military stores by refusing to operate trains. The dates and locations of these incidents were 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. They are listed as ‘Cases of refusal by Railway Companies’ Employees to operate trains carrying troops or military stores’.

There were two scenarios. The first was where a military force entrained and/or military stores were loaded at the terminus and staff refused to start the train; the second was when during a journey the train stopped to entrain or load stores and the staff refused to continue the journey. There is no indication either way of the home stations of the staff, which depends on the rosters of the particular railway company. Reports usually just state their rank and whether they were suspended or dismissed.

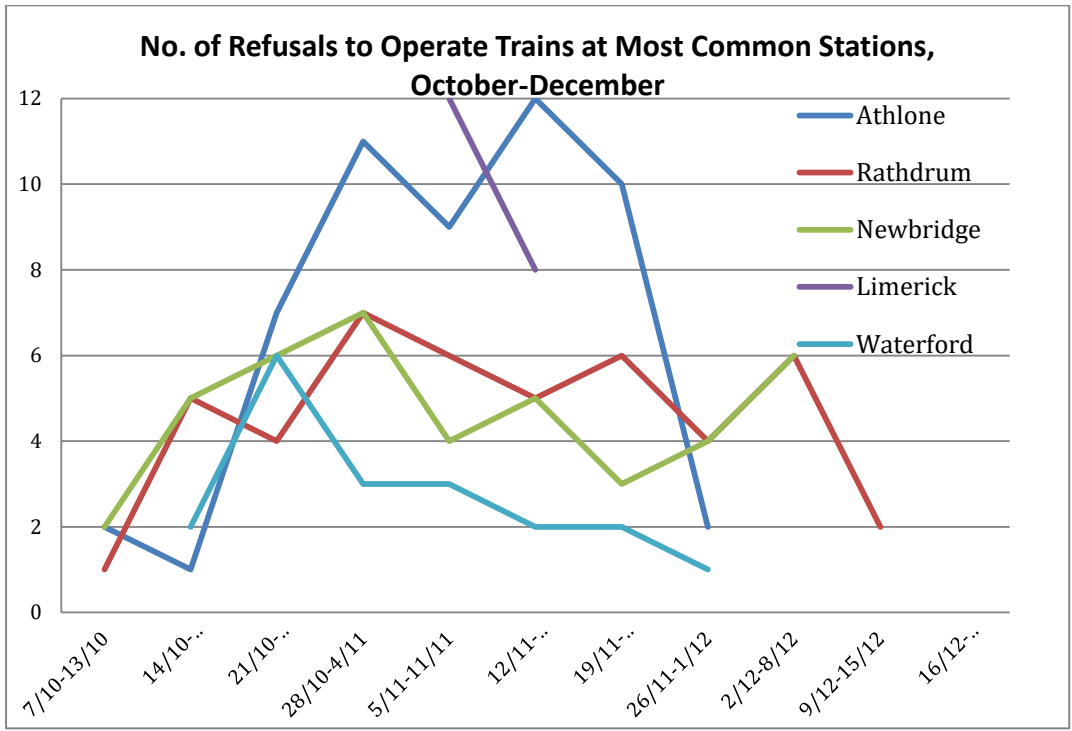
As a result the train was delayed while replacement staff was found or the train was cancelled if there were no replacements. A rare third (less than six in total) was when all employees refused; all services could be completely shut down on a minor branch line, an option not open at major stations. Troops and stores were either delayed or transferred to another train; road transport was often substituted.

This appears to be a civil resistance movement run by guards, drivers and firemen that was independent of military leadership and affected all railway companies, though some more than others. However operatives were sometimes intimidated and/or assaulted; these are listed in an appendix

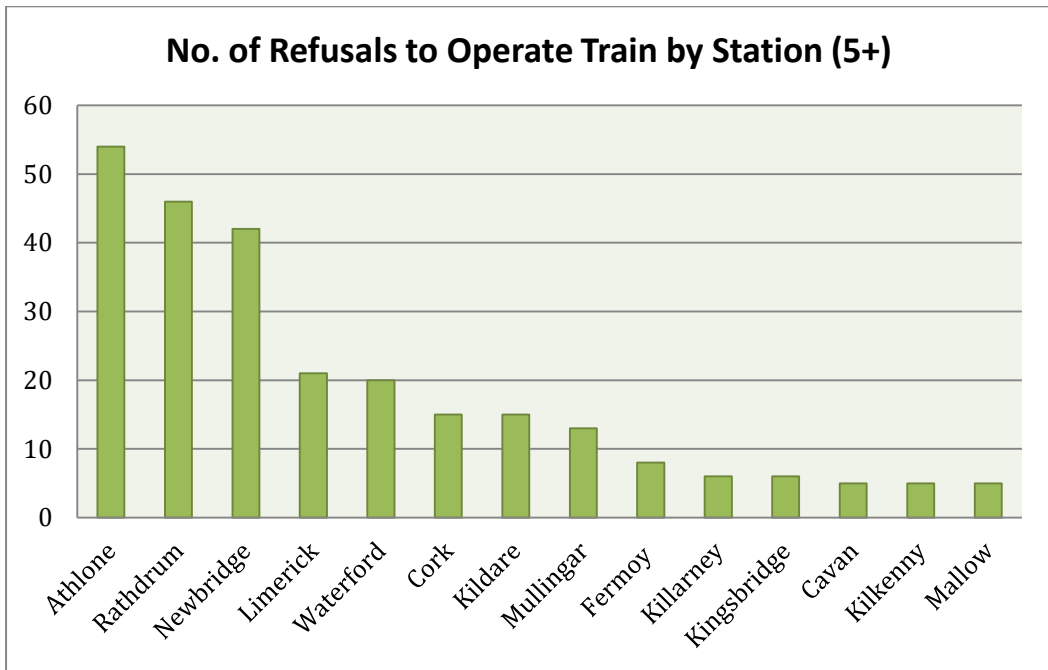


¹ UK National Archives CO904/157/2 If there was previous daily reports they have not survived. This is the article's sole source. Many were extensively reported by local and national newspapers, particularly Nationalist

The 327 reported incidents were spread among 55 stations; the most active period by number of incidents with 46% (30% for 12th-25th November) was mid-October to mid-December².



The number of railway stations involved also increased at this time, though for many it was an isolated one-off incident. The majority were in the top 14 stations (with five or more) with 80% of incidents; the top three, Athlone, Rathdrum and Newbridge made up 43% of the total. Outside of this period they were geographically well distributed.



² The last recorded incidents were on the 21st December at Mullingar and Baltinglass

The following table shows the staff breakdown per incident. Drivers were more likely to refuse to operate up to October, usually with guards and or firemen; after that it were mostly guards acting alone (two guards were listed as ‘acting guards and porters’). Others were Porters/Loaders (3), one Goods Checker and one Booking Clerk.

The totals do not include the unspecified numbers where all staff refused to work and one instance when a number of horse-shunters refused to shunt wagons with stores. Examples include 2nd November line from Letterkenny to Burtonport closed due to refusal of employees to carry troops; and on the 3rd at Castlebar and Clonmel employees refused to handle cases of rifles and stores or to facilitate troops

Before October, suspensions were the most common punishment; the number of dismissals subsequently rose and became almost universal. It is likely that staff members were first suspended and then dismissed for another refusal, depending on railway companies’ regulations. No punishments were listed for c. 50 cases.

Guards	281	75%
Drivers	62	16%
Firemen	25	7%
Signalmen	4	1%
Others	5	1%
Total	377	
Suspended	86	27%
Dismissed	235	73%
Total	321	

Appendices

A typical well reported instance was reported for 10th July: “A party of 1 officer, 30 other ranks with 10 tons of baggage proceeding to Kells boarded a train at Skerries at 1225 hours, yesterday, 9th instant. The driver refused to operate the train which was held up, and in consequence the down line was temporarily blocked. A fresh driver having been obtained this train left at 1430 hours for Drogheda, where this party was again held up by driver and fireman of the 1550 hours train ex Drogheda for Kells refusing to operate same. Neither this train nor the 1625 hours train Drogheda to Kells functioned, and the party are still held up. It is hoped to get the train away at 1005 hours today.” They were still there three days later.

Intimidation of Railway Staff

22/7 “About midnight 21/22nd instant at Dundalk 4 signal cabins were raided by armed and masked men who compelled the signalmen on duty to sign a declaration to the effect that they would not work or help to work any trains conveying troops or munitions”

31/7 driver and firemen kidnapped at Newbliss and Newtownbutler

1/8 driver kidnapped at L’ derry “but was subsequently liberated on giving an undertaking not to work military trains”

5/8 Strabane to Letterkenny closed due to line obstructions and drivers being fired on

16/8 “At Dundalk about 0120 hours on the morning of the 18th instant Driver McKeown was shot at and wounded by armed and disguised men. The reason for their action was that he drove a goods train containing military stores i/c armed escort to Dublin on the morning of the 14th instant.”

19/8 guard kidnapped at Ardfert

18/9 “on 18th instant at Dundalk between 2000 and 2100 hours 2 signalmen who had been transferred from the Bundoran branch were held up by 4 armed and masked men and told to cease work”

17/11 “at Inver station a train was raided about 1730 hours by armed and masked men who removed the guard from his van, handcuffed and threatened him with revolvers and made him promise not to act as guard again on any train carrying armed troops”

Named Railway Staff that Refused to Operate Trains

11/10 0750 hours train Galway to Dublin was held up by Guard Kerney and driver Dudley refusing to operate train owing to armed escort boarding same.

11/10 Guard John Fahy of Kilkenny, Driver Henry Doran of Kildare, Fireman Daniel Liston of Kildare @ Newbridge,

13/10 Guard James Lynch 2192 of Dublin, Driver James Moylan of Inchicore, Fireman James Benson of Inchicore,

14/10 Guard Thomas Gaffney; Porter & Acting Guard Behan, Maryborough @ Newbridge

15/10 1) Guard J Edwards @ Longford, 2) Guard G Gaffney and Driver J Finnegan @ Rathdrum, 3) Porter & Acting Guard M Connelly of Thurles @ Newbridge

17/10 Guard Coen and Driver Lennon @ Mullingar

19/10 1) Guard J Carpenter @ Athlone, 2) Guard M Lennon @Rathdrum,

20/10 Guard Hemenstall @ Rathdrum,

21/10 Guard Tully @ Athlone,

22/10 Guard Hastings @Athlone,

23/10 1) Guard Mullen @ Athlone 2) Guard Maher @ Rathdrum,

25/10 1) Guard Keating @ Athlone, 2) Guard Leggatt @ Rathdrum,

26/10 Guard ‘McGrane’ @Athlone

30/10 Goods Checker Hughes @ Athlone

13/11 Railway Porter Larkin & Booking Clerk Corkery @ Tuam

List of Stations and number of times affected

Athenry	1
Athlone	54
Balbriggan	1

Ballincollig	1
Baltinglass	1
Bandon	2
Bantry	1
Belfast	2
Belmont	4
Birr	3
Carlow	1
Castlebar	1
Castlerea	4
Cavan	5
Clifton	1
Clondalkin	1
Clonakilty	2
Clones	3
Cloughjordan	1
Cork	15
Drogheda	2
Dublin	1
D/Amiens	1
D/Kingsbridge	6
Dundalk	3
Dunmanway	1
Ennis	3
Enniskillen	1
Fermoy	8
Galway	1
Goraghwood	2
Kenmare	1
Kildare	15
Kilkenny	5
Killarney	6
Kinsale	2
Limerick	21
Limerick Junction	1
Lismore	1
Londonderry	1
Longford	3
Loughrea	1
Mallow	5
Maryborough	1
Mohill	2
Mullingar	13
Nenagh	2
Newbridge	42
Portarlinton	1

Rathdrum	46
Skerries	1
Tipperary	1
Tralee	3
Tuam	1
Waterford	20
TOTAL	327

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