

# **The 1<sup>st</sup>. Battalion Royal Fusiliers ( The City of London Regiment )**



**IRELAND  
1920 – 1922**

**Compiled and Edited from The Regimental Archives**

**J P Kelleher 2003**

The 1<sup>st</sup>.Battalion was no stranger to these shores. It was stationed here in Cork in 1914 prior to leaving for The Aisne to support the B.E.F

The young soldiers of the battalion were now to experience not so much open hostility to individuals, but the never to be missed opportunity by the rebel murder gangs to inflict casualties upon the forces of the Crown.

1920 : 27<sup>th</sup>. July - Aldershot Garrison : Under orders to proceed to Ireland

The battalion disembarked at Queenstown from HMT Steigerwald on July 31<sup>st</sup>. 1920, and spent a few dreary, wet days under canvas at Belmont Camp, and then left by half battalions on route march to Watergrass Hill. This took two days, and we passed a very uncomfortable night at Kilworth Camp. On arrival at Kilworth on 5<sup>th</sup>.August, we became part of the Divisional Reserve, and therefore had a very small area to patrol, this giving ample opportunity for our musketry, Lewis Gun, and revolver courses to be completed. On September 10<sup>th</sup>. Army numbers were introduced in lieu of battalion numbers – commencing 644-.

The battalion average for musketry being 110.79. ‘B’ Company

( Major Gubbins) had an average of 118.72, and CSM Burrill was battalion shot with a score of 170.

We were, however, soon disturbed in our quiet life at Kilworth, the authorities being apparently quite unmoved by the fact that we all wanted to follow Captain Hebden’s hounds on the Government Lands. On October 6<sup>th</sup>. and 7<sup>th</sup>. Lieut. H E S Wall and Lieut. A G Creed and 50 O/R’s of D Coy. with Capt. G L Cazalet DSO MC and 37 O/R’s of D Coy. moved to Buttevant. We were ordered to send detachments to Galbally ( Lieut. Adams and 32 other ranks) Kildorrery and Buttevant ( one company). We were now fairly involved in the war, and this was indeed soon brought home to us. On the morning of November 7<sup>th</sup>., while escorting a R.A.F. convoy from Fermoy to Oranmore, Lieut. Allan and 30 other ranks were ambushed at Grange, near Bruff. The rebels, however, were speedily dealt with, and a quantity of arms, ammunition and two prisoners were taken. Unfortunately, Flying Officer Watling and Bandsman Bailey were wounded, the latter seriously. The only other casualty was Private French, who was shot at when a sentry at Galbally, and had the back luck to lose his arm. On the 8<sup>th</sup>. December the battalion received a draft of 36 O/R’s., and orders were received to send Headquarters and ‘B’ Company to join ‘D’Company at Buttevant, where we relieved the 17<sup>th</sup>.Lancers.

On December 18<sup>th</sup>. 45 other ranks proceeded to the Depot to join the 2<sup>nd</sup>.Bn. pending embarkation to Aden.

Christmas approached, but the authorities were again inconsiderate enough to start us off, and portions of the battalion spent their Christmas at Killarney, Tralee, Castleisland, Buttevant, Kilworth, and some indeed in broken down lorries scattered by the wayside.

In the middle of December we received orders to relieve the 2<sup>nd</sup>.Bn.East Lanc’s. in County Kerry, but for various reasons unknown to us regimental soldiers the move was repeatedly postponed until Christmas was upon us.

The noticeable difference between Kerry and Cork seems to be the assurance of the civil population here that they have no quarrel with the military, but only with certain other forces of the crown. They, however have such a peculiar way of showing their love for soldiers that the B.G.C. has laid down that never less than three cars shall go out, all of which shall contain soldiers armed to the teeth.

We remain however, “*nec aspera terrent*”

In trying to write some account of the life of the battalion during the ( past) year it is difficult at first to find the right note in which to pitch the story. So many good men have been killed and maimed ; so many popular illusions and fallacies about the Irish have been shattered ; so much discomfort and absence of the most ordinary comfort has been cheerfully put up with by the troops. But it hasn't been too bad a year at all really for soldiers. The many who during the first six months showed such curious reluctance to comply with their posting orders were probably much better out of it.

January found the battalion installed at Killarney with one company on detachment at Kenmare, and with small temporary changes that has remained the situation ever since. The Killarney sub-area, command of which goes with the command of the battalion consists of the largest, the wildest, and probably the “hottest” sub-area in Ireland. It is 60 miles by 40 as the crow flies; nearly double as the roads go. It varies from typical Irish grass country in the East, through miles of bog land to the Kerry mountain ranges, and beyond them to the sparsely inhabited rocky hills of the Valencia Peninsula sticking out into the Atlantic. You can't expect a country like that to breed ordinary peaceful citizens. It doesn't.

Besides the battalion, the Crown forces in the command consist of the Royal Irish Constabulary grouped under three District Inspectors at Killarney, Kenmare, and Cahirciveen, and a strong detachment of Royal Marine Light Infantry at the fortified coastguard station at Lackeen Point.

At Killarney our quarters are the Great Southern Hotel adjoining the railway station, and its poor relation, the New Hotel. As always with hotels, the accommodation is too unequal. Officers are very well off and the troops very badly off, the latter being overcrowded in little hotel bedrooms from which everything but the walls have been taken away, and denied the rudimentary comforts of any barrack - room, a bed, a box and a shelf.



**The Great Southern Hotel, Killarney**

The grounds of the hotel are good; a great improvement on the surrounding of most barracks and big enough to take in all the usual regimental activities, specialist's

classes, recruits on the 'square', 30 yards range, etc., with the extra features of a large wireless mast, aeroplane dropping ground, and a carrier pigeon loft.

There are three good grass tennis courts in the grounds and a football field across the road, which is used vicariously for everything from polo to Rugger. The landing ground for the aeroplanes is three quarters of a mile off. Brigade HQ is at Buttevant, 50 miles away, a new special brigade having been formed for the war. Our neighbours are the Loyal Regiment at Tralee, the Gloucester's at Kanturk, and beyond them the East Lanc's at Buttevant and the Cheshires at Ballyvonare. So much for *mise-en-scene* .



**The Band of the 1<sup>st</sup>.Battalion Royal Fusiliers at Killarney**

We were given special for the war in the shape of eleven motors of sorts, including two armoured cars ( quite useless, as the roads are too soft to bear them) but mostly of the Crossley tender type; and 100 bicycles. And whilst the war lasted, they earned their keep. This war will be hard for anyone to visualise who did not see it for himself. All guerilla warfare imposes a higher test and a greater strain on regular soldiers than any form of conflict. But surely this was the most repulsive, malignant form of even guerilla warfare yet known. Young unseasoned English soldiers – boys – guided and bound by traditions, principles and ideals, opposed to the Irish rebels, utterly callous, utterly conscienceless and utterly craven . Fourteen men of the battalion were killed, twenty one wounded, many maimed for life by the loss of a leg or arm. And not one of those but was shot down in cold blood by a concealed assassin without any semblance of a fair fight. Many were wholly unarmed.

No sensible person will deny that things have been done in Ireland during the last year by members of the Crown Forces which reflect nothing but discredit. But, under such circumstances of outrageous provocation, is it to be wondered that in rare instances - and they were rare-some few individuals, particularly of irregular units, without any young officers who were real leaders in mind as well as in body, may have seen red and run amok and gone for anything, and anybody Irish within reach ? I don't wonder. I only wonder why that they showed the restraint which they did show.

In the battalion which suffered what are in all probability heavier casualties than any other unit in Ireland, not one man on any single occasion forgot himself, the name of his Regiment, and his duty, and took revenge into his own hands. The Irish rebels have been described as craven, and not without ample justification. No attack has ever been made by them except by an ambush. And no ambush has ever made its attack unless it had overwhelming superiority of numbers, of position, of cover, of surprise ; and a good line of retreat. Most of us agree that a railway ambush is the most dangerous. Men are caught like rats in railway carriages, they offer no cove, they are illuminated at night, and they are very hard to get out of particularly these Irish third class carriages which have door handles inside and in which the window, even when down, blocks half the opening.

On 7<sup>th</sup>. January a draft of 25 men arrived from the Depot, while on the 13<sup>th</sup>. 20 men proceeded to the Depot for discharge. A draft of 21 men arrived on the 28<sup>th</sup>. January. Our first bad ambush was on February 11<sup>th</sup>. Fourteen men were coming back after dark by the evening train from Mallow. They were mostly Courts-Martial witnesses returning from Buttevant. In a cutting between Rathcool and Millstreet the train was stopped by the rebels by prearranged signal to the engine. Fire was poured into the leading coach where the troops were. It was quite indiscriminate : the rebels, as always happened were indifferent to the fact that ordinary civilian passengers were also being hit also. The "I" Branch at Division have since reported that there were over 300 rebels in this ambush.

On March 5<sup>th</sup>., Gen. Cumming ( late D.L.I.), the Brigade Commander, who had been staying with the battalion for a few days, left to return to Brigade HQ by motor. We sent a convoy with him to the boundary of our area, and reconnoitred in advance every likely ambush position, as an attack on the General's party was thought likely.



At Rathmore we handed him over safely to an escort of the next battalion. A few miles further on, at Cloonbannin, the convoy was ambushed, and the General and Maligny, the Brigade Motor Transport Officer, were killed. We all felt the General's death very much. He had been a good friend to the battalion and was very popular with it.

On March 21<sup>st</sup>., Adams and 27 men of 'B' Company were coming into Killarney from Kenmare. 'B' Company was overdue for relief, but it had been postponed several times owing to the difficulty in preventing the news leaking out. Eventually orders to

move half a company that day were issued to 'C' Company ( the relieving company) only an hour before their train left at 9.20. Adams party left Kenmare at 1.50, arrived at Headford Junction at 3.0'clock. As the first men were getting out of the train – they had to change at Headford – fire was opened on them by concealed men from banks on both sides the line and from station buildings. The rebels had a machine gun in the stationmaster's house.

Adams and the three senior NCO's were knocked out at once. Eight of the party were killed and eleven wounded. But the few survivors got what cover they could and put up such a stout fight that for 50 minutes the Sinns, who outnumbered them by certainly 10 to 1, and probably much more, did not dare to make a move. At 3.50 another train from Mallow was due. By a lucky chance Clarke who had escaped by a miracle in the Millstreet ambush was on this train with fourteen men who had been on escort duty to Cork. Hearing fire ahead he stopped his train, got his men extended out across the line and beat up towards the station. That was quite enough for the rebels, who fled precipitately. They left their leader – a battalion commander – and one other man – a bomber – dead behind them, and two other bodies were seen during the persuit. From the number of funerals which took place in the neighbouring churches during the few days following it is surmised and hoped that they may have lost even more. The "I" Branch have put it as high as fourteen.



**Burial Party for the Royal Fusiliers killed at The Headford Junction Ambush**

The Court of Inquiry, which was presided over by a Colonel in the Gunners, brought in a Finding which included the following passage

***"The Court, before proceeding to finding desire to place on record their admiration for the gallant fight put up by a small party of the 1<sup>st</sup>.Battalion Royal Fusiliers, against very heavy odds, and in spite of their unfavourable position and the loss of their Officer and senior Non-Commissioned Officer's at the very moment of the fight."***

A little dust up on February 25<sup>th</sup>. Had shown the real quality of the I.R.A. and what to do with them. Following wireless news received at mid-day of a big ambush of auxiliaries near Macroom, we had gone out with three Crossleys to see if we could help, or catch any Sinns on their way back from the ambush. In this we had luck. Following a clue of two machine guns which had been in the ambush and whose probable homeward route was deduced, sixty rebels were sighted striking off from the road towards the hills north of Ballyvourney.



**Medal presentation by General Cummings on 4<sup>th</sup>.March 1921  
He was killed in a rebel ambush on the following day**

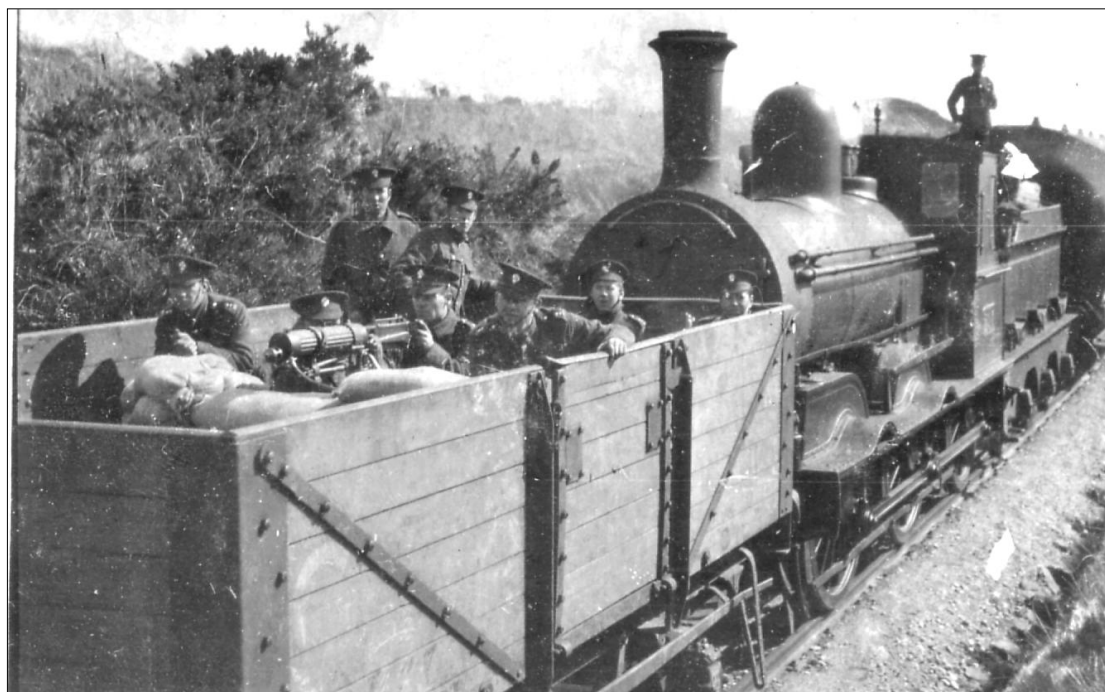


**Crossley vehicle bearing the ancient Buddhist sign of the Sun !**

Munday, Wall, and Bate had after them with eighteen men. The rebels had a start of 600 yards and they never showed inclination to reduce it; quite the reverse. They had plenty of ammunition and used it whenever they came to a bit of cover. Our men will never be as nimble as the Sinns are over their native bog, but they had a very encouraging run for their money, and I never saw an advance go better according to the book – fire and movement – in my life. They pushed the gunmen over the hills till,



as dusk was falling, it was clear they wouldn't catch them, and another party was seen in the distance working round towards the cars, which had been left in the road. Frankly the shooting in this fight was vile; happily on the other side as well. We think we dropped two of them, but the bodies were not actually collected. We had no casualties. Since then the official Sinn Fein account of the fight has been obtained and shows that we scattered them better than we knew; it took them three days to collect themselves. April saw the introduction of new methods by the I.R.A. in this district; roads began to be cut. At first simple trenches were cut across the roads which caused little delay as they could either be crossed by the cars on strong wooden running boards which went out with every convoy, or by filling in the trench with stones from the bank at the side of the road. Trees felled across the road were not much more trouble. If the cars could not pull them aside with their tow ropes, it did not take very long to saw them into lengths which could be moved. As time went on, however, the obstructions became more tiresome. Bridges were destroyed on the single line connecting with Mallow and the outside world, and also on the roads. Trenches appeared not singly but in rows, and the most troublesome to cross were those cut to a width of 30 or 40 feet in the low lying ground with no stone walls near, and in places where the road passed through a waste of bog which oozed in from all sides. Although we managed to keep routes open in our own area, there were long periods in April, May and June when we were completely cut off from outside by road and railway breaks in the adjoining districts. Bicycles came more and more into use, and a special train with our home-made armoured cars was kept ready to take men quickly farther afield towards Rathmore or Farranfore.



**Armoured train with a Vickers Machine Gun at the ready**

Mail and any individuals who had to travel came by aeroplane ; in fact for some weeks 20 men of ours, who were sent to strengthen the R.I.C. post at Rathmore after a bad ambush there, had to be fed by rations dropped in sandbags from aeroplanes. The Rathmore ambush on May 4<sup>th</sup>. Was a rather more than usually disgusting one. An old man of 80 was kidnapped by the I.R.A. at Knocknagree fair, where he had been singing ballads, and after being shot was planted as a bait in the middle of the road



less than a mile from the police barracks. The I.R.A. took up their ambush positions in a semi-circle commanding the road, and caused word to be conveyed to the R.I.C. that a body was lying there. The latter sent out a patrol of eight men to investigate; seven were killed and one made a very lucky escape. Only four R.I.C. were left in the barracks, but the I.R.A. did not risk an attack on that.

On May 15<sup>th</sup>. Sgt. Goldsmith was shot while bicycling alone and unarmed between the two billets of the Kenmare detachment.

Towards the end of May and into June, we took to expeditions on a larger scale, one or two companies going out with their own transport, living on the country for four or five days and thoroughly searching tracts which were suspected of harbouring concentrations of rebels. The chief difficulty throughout was that no inhabitant, of whatever class or walk of life, would ever give any information of the smallest value until after the event ; and the second difficulty, that even where every man was rounded up in a district known to be actively rebel, it was seldom possible to identify any of them as men who were 'wanted'. We know that we had several men in our hands who were badly wanted, but let them go for lack of identification. Only one or two old R.I.C. men, who had lived for many years in one police and knew every man in the neighbourhood by sight and name, were of any help in this. I was the rarest thing to find a man with arms actually on him, though the area was known to be full of them. Where every field is enclosed by four banks, any one of which may be hollowed out at any point , it is not a difficult matter to hide arms. We never had a good haul of them ; in fact, except in Dublin or Cork, no one did.

Whenever a party left barracks, smoke fires would go up on the hills, and fires would be kept ahead of the troops whichever way they went; one for a small party, two for a larger party, and three after they had passed, so far as we could judge the code. At closer quarters and at night, cow horns would echo from farm to farm to give the alarm. One of the few occasions on which a Sinn household was really completely surprised was on a night in June, when Bate supported by Busk, Barkworth, and Clarke, took a party across the lake in boats and surrounded a house which was known to shelter men "on the run" before they had any inkling of danger. A good bag of men and arms were made in that house.

On July 10<sup>th</sup>. – the night before the armistice commenced – pretty heavy fire was opened on the troops at Kenmare, but if any attack had been intended discretion prevailed when they found our men quite ready for them. We had one man wounded.

The armistice was announced as taking effect from 12 noon on Monday July 11<sup>th</sup>. At a quarter to 12 Sgt. Meares, Officers Mess Sgt., and Sgt Clarke-Messing Sgt., walked down to the town to order goods. They were unarmed. On arriving at the centre of the town they were held up and shot in cold blood by about half a dozen civilians with revolvers. Sgt. Meares died of his wounds the next day, but Sgt. Clarke is now happily, recovered. The attack was carefully planned and carried out with typical care for self-preservation, it being impossible for the troops to take up the pursuit before the time for the truce to begin.

Many protestations were made by the local inhabitants on this, as on other occasions, that the crime was committed by men who were strangers to this part of the country, whose action roused nothing but indignation in the breasts of the natives. Such expressions of feeling would have carried more weight if they had been backed by one single deed of actual assistance, or even of warning.

The writer may be blamed for writing bitterly of the Irish now that a settlement has been reached, and all sores are supposed to undergo automatic healing. He remains of the opinion that there are some things which are better not forgotten too quickly. A self-sacrificing patriot of whatever nationality commands respect ; but when that alleged patriotism is expressed in such terms of bullets fired at unarmed victims by a well protected assailant, it can command nothing but contempt.

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10<sup>th</sup>.January 1922 : The battalion was still at Killarney expecting to move to the Rhine when advance parties were detailed to move to Aldershot. On the 20<sup>th</sup>. The battalion left Killarney and were bound for Fishguard where it boarded the SS *Glengarriff*, an evil smelling little coasting steamer that had just been used to transport cattle and pigs, all this and a bad crossing made for a totally forgettable journey. When the battalion finally arrived at Aldershot where it was greeted with the news that it was bound for India, a long way from the Rhine !

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The only honour that could be won in Ireland for gallantry in action during the rebellion was the Order of the British Empire; the battalion has won more than any other unit in Ireland.

#### **HONOURS AND WARDS**

##### **MEMBER OF THE ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE**

Lieut.	G T M Allen	For the action at Grange	8.11.20
Lieut.	Cecil H W Clarke	For the action at Headford	21.3.21
Capt.	Frederick W Coleman MC	For the action at Kenmare	10.7.21

##### **MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE**

6446360	Sgt Drmr S Sutton	The Grange 8.11.20
6446370	Pte George Brantigan	Headford 21.3.21 Wounded
6446112	Pte. William Finch	Kenmare 10.7.21 Wounded

##### **SPECIAL COMMENDATION**

6446018	CSM H Crawford	Kenmare 10.7.21
6446496	Pte G French	Wounded at Galbally 15.10.20
6446014	Bdsmn T Bailey	Wounded on RAF convoy 8.11.20

#### **CASUALTIES**

##### **MILLSTREET TRAIN AMBUSH 11.2.21.**

6446251	Sgt F Boxold	Killed : Buried Killarney New Cemetery
6446476	Pte J J Holyome	Died of Wounds 12.2.21.: Buried City of London & Tower Hamlets Cemtery London Son of John & Sarah Holyome

##### **Wounded**

Lieut	C H W Clarke MBE
6446360	Sgt S Sutton MBE
6446469	L-Sgt J Maxfield
6446562	Cpl G King
6446432	Pte A Hodge
6446263	Pte E Lloyd

**HEADFORD JUNCTION TRAIN AMBUSH 21.3.21.**Killed

Lieut. C E Adams DCM  
 6446503 A-Sgt.G Brundish  
 6449781 L-Cpl. E Chandler  
 6446510 Pte A George  
 6446447 S West  
 6446536 Pte F Woods  
 6453611 Pte G.E.L. Young

Died of Wounds

6446547 Cpl C Greenwood 22.3.21

Wounded

6453588	Pte F Carpenter	6453631	Pte A Tuck
6449774	Pte A Norman	6446449	Pte J Watts
3300871	Pte V Coles	6453632	Pte W Read
6649705	Pte J Price	6449763	Pte W Thomas
6449718	Pte M Cashell	6449762	Pte H White
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6446069	Sgt S Goldsmith	Wounded at Kenmare 15.5.21. Died 20.5.21	
6446205	Pte W Edmeads	Acc'. Wounded at Rathmore 30.5.21 Died 2.6.21	
6449751	Pte H Woods	Acc' Killed on escort duty on Blarney Railway 9.6.21	
6446011	Sgt F G Clark	Wounded at Killarney 11.7.21	
6446401	Sgt C E Mears	Wounded at Killarney 11.7.21. Died 12.7.21	

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