

VERY few of our younger readers will know anything about the ambush at The Gap. It occurred in the blackest and most unnecessary war of our history, the Civil War. Without passing any judgment on the War, I will give the facts as I have pieced them together.

The Free State Army, under Sean McEoin and Tommy Lawlor, had been trying to win back control of North Connacht. The War was not bitter. Prisoners were taken and released. McEoin had lost his armoured car, the Ballinalee, at the ambush at Dooney Rock, Sligo. The Ballinalee, with its Lewis gun, was a difficult enemy and could raid at will. It was a familiar sight on the streets of Sligo with its crew of five or six Republicans.

In September, 1922, they, the Republicans, tried to capture Tubbercurry, but failed after a five-hour battle, and one casualty on each side. On September ??, 1922, they "swooped down Ardnaree" and captured Ballina, taking the policemen prisoner. McEoin sent Lawlor to re-take it. The Republicans left in different directions and Lawlor set out on the return journey to Tubbercurry. According to Lawlor, "General Michael Kilroy was waiting in the Ox Mountains. The road made a series of 'S' bends. We had a number of vehicles and could not see more than one car's length in front of us. They ambushed us and got us badly."

In fact, it was not Kilroy's men but locals and some Ennisrone volunteers. The main body were in Glenree. The road was to be mined, but they hadn't time to set the mine.

Lawlor took one side of the road; Joe Ring the other. Lawlor was hit in the arm. He saw a man lying on the ground with a revolver. "Once discovered he did not stay to argue." The man with the revolver was Patsy Fagan, from up the country,

The Drumsheen Ambush

BY PADDY MORAN



Joe Ring, Batt. Comdt. (IRA); Brigadier-General National Army; Assistant Commissioner, An Garda Siochana. This photograph was taken shortly before his death in action during the Civil War.

he was in the Free State Army. He shot a fellow-soldier, in Piper Hill, and joined the Republicans in Glenree. Lawlor's companion was badly wounded so we carried him to a shed, where they discovered three Republicans. They left and there were no further losses.

Some of the Republicans got back to Glenree. Ten set out across the mountain to meet up with Frank Carty and his men with the "Balli-

nalee." They saw men coming towards them, hailed them mistaking them for Republicans, left cover and were captured.

At Mullarkey's Public-house, the "Ballinalee" appeared from a side road. Ingram, McEoin's driver, was shot dead, but another driver took over the armoured car and the "Ballinalee" retreated. The prisoners were taken to Tubbercurry, according to

McEoin. There, they were tried by court-martial and sentenced to death. There was a Mission in the town and the priests pleaded for their lives. McEoin then released them. He had no intention of shooting them.

McEoin is not correct, here, I think. They were taken to Longford Jail.

Joe Ring, who was killed at the ambush, played a large part in the War of Independence against The Tans. He was Commandant under Michael Kilroy in West Mayo, and played a large part in defeating The Tans and R.I.C. at Carrowkennedy, where many of them were killed and much artillery captured. After the Treaty he was made Commissioner of the Guards. The British had a price on his head when the Truce was signed.

The "Ballinalee" had a sad end for the Republicans. Surrounded in the Benbulbin Mountains, the occupants tried to escape on foot. All five were shot and killed on the top of Ben Bulbin. One of them was Bryan McNeill, who's father, Eoin McNeill, was Minister for Education in the Free State Government.

No Doubt, others can give a more accurate picture of the ambush. It is now past history and writing of it will not be seen as re-opening wounds. If it does they never healed.

Drumsheen is a townland situated between Bonniconlon village and The Windy Gap on the Mayo / Sligo border. Joe Ring was shot with a Sergeant Ingram in a small field now owned by Gerry Hennigan. There is a small memorial with a broken Cross on the spot where they died.

My thanks to Mick Mullarkey for taking time to show me the site. It is hoped that a proper memorial will be built in the near future, hopefully, in 1997 - 75 years after the ambush.

Michael Ring, T.D., Westport, has shown great interest and I know he will do what he says.



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