

Eye witness account of...

On the afternoon of 11th March 1921, Frank McGrail and his brother John were digging for potatoes near their home in Coldermin, Foxfield, when they heard a solitary gunshot being fired from the Gortvagh direction. They passed no remarks on it, what with the military and

Tans constantly patrolling the road between Mohill and Ballinamore, the occasional gunshot was not unusual. Getting tired of their labour they adjourned to their home for a cup of tea. It was then they heard a volley of shots being fired close by. They immediately left the house and went up a nearby

hill to see if they could get a view of what was happening. Here they met Johnny and Pee Guckian who were also digging potatoes, down a little further. Both had taken cover behind a ditch when the gunfire started. From their vantage point they could see men running down from Flynns.

Frank Mc Grail

Selton Hill Ambush

The following is Frank's own description of the scene.

"We could see the men falling where they got shot. We seen one fellow get a long distance away from them by running through cattle. He was wounded, got as far as a ditch, crept across it and into shelter the other side. An officer gave a command. Two or three soldiers searched around, passed by him, but didn't see him. Then two Tans were sent away to the same place. They seen where the man was lying in a gripe the far side of the ditch, and shot him dead. It was Joe Beirne. He was dragged up, with the others, by the heels to the lorries on the road. There was another fellow wounded, Hurt. He must not have been too bad. He got out of it, I don't know how.

Then there were two or three other fellows in McCullaghs. They weren't all in Flynns. They got out and escaped, McDermott from Ballinamore, Guckian from near Drumsna. Andy McPartland made his escape, the best of the lot of them. He didn't go for the open. He crawled along a ditch, got around it and into a gripe. They didn't see him at all, because he stayed under cover. He got on to the back of Murphy's and away. The other fellows, (in Flynns) when they were surprised, went out into a pure open face. Baxter was the first killed. He was from Cavan. He had a job in Leitrim and that's how he came to be with the Leitrim brigade. Three were shot in a little bit of a drain, where they had taken cover. John Joe Reilly was also killed in a drain with no cover, out on a bottom. Jim got a ten shilling note where he pulled it out of his pocket and put it under a sod just over the drain."

Rescue of Bernie Sweeney

After the ambush Frank and his brother returned home. It was just falling night, when his father, who had been out foddering cattle returned and said he could hear somebody shouting for help from a distance.

Once again we have Frank's account of events.

"The wind was coming from the west, a cool hardy evening. When I went out, I heard the "Hi". I went across the hill to Johnny Guckians. There were two other fellows there, Willie Murphy and Patrick Woods. I told them there was somebody shouting for help in the bottoms. Some of them said it was a decoy. I said, it wasn't. We all went out and up over the house. We could hear the "Hi" but it had got very low, I told them it was coming from over near a big ash tree in Murphy's meadows.

It was getting darkish, but walking on about ten yards from the tree, we heard this little "Hi". There in front of it was Bernie Sweeney. Myself and Patrick went up to John Donnelly's and got a sheet to carry him. We brought the sheet down, but weren't able to manage it. The four of us lifted him and brought him to Michael Murphy's house in Glos-

drummon. That's the big slated house beside the school and we left him by the fire there. Willie Murphy asked "Should we get the Priest" I said I'd go for a Priest. I went to Fenagh. (The curate, Fr. Dunne and his sister were living in a house where the new school is now.) I told him about the man been wounded and we wanted him to see him. "That's in the parish of Mohill" he said. I told him "it's in the parish of Fenagh". He looked at me then and said "you were in the ambush. Why is there blood on your hands and clothes?". I said "that's from where we carried the wounded man". He decided to come, I went down to call a local woman, a dress-maker, to stay with his sister while he was away. He went to Ellis' for cigarettes. On the way back we met two men going down to Johnny Sweeneys and told them about Bernie Sweeney being wounded. They sent out word for others to come.

Patrick Woods and I were then sent home. We were the youngest and they said we had no business there. They got a pony and trap and blankets, headed for the

road and brought Bernie Sweeney on to Fenagh, down Tully lane and out to Ballyduff. A Dolan man lived there in a cottage. They brought him to his place and went for Dr. Dolan in Ballinamore. He came and attended him.

He was wounded in the thigh, but the bullet went straight through. He had crawled into a drain, where there were flaggins and weeds growing. He tumbled into it and kept under cover. The military had passed him, but didn't see him. It was freezing cold. That helped him in a way, because he could have bled to death. They brought him from Dolans up the mountain to Cafferty's house. There was a nurse there who looked after him. Of course, there were men guarding him all the time, in case the police or military came around. They had a place ready to take him out and hide him. He stayed there until he was able."



Frank McGrail

The above is an eye witness account of the ambush at Selton Hill and of its immediate aftermath. Frank related these events in a taped interview given in April 1991. He still lives at Coldermin, Foxfield.

DES FOLEY who runs the ever popular 'Gerties Canal Stop' in Keshcarrigan has scooped the Leitrim Publican of the Year Award. A total of 16 publicans competed for the title. Each publican was judged on ten categories including their ability to organise novel fund-raising

LEITRIM PUB OF THE YEAR

events for charity the Winner was announced at a Gala Night in Rock 'n Robins in Carrick-on-Shannon and a total of £2,900 was handed over to the North West Rehabilitation Institute. The highlight of the night was the appearance of 'Sam Maguire' with Donegal Full Back Matt Gallagher and the International Wild Rose Ann McTiernan who adjudicated the event.



*Pictured are: L to R
Des Foley, Winner
Matt Gallagher, Donegal Full,
Back
Breege Golden, Organiser
Ann McTiernan, Wild Rose.*