

THE
WPTON
CAMBUSH

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1 The Upton ambush
At 10:18, on February 15, 1921, a station master at Upton station, a small isolated red-brick building on the line between Cork City and Bandon, was approached by a person he later described as "a stranger", who asked him when the next train from Cork was in. The railway employee told him that a goods train was due in about ten minutes. "What about the passenger train?" the man asked. That was due shortly after he was told. The man went away, "satisfied", but minutes later 14 armed men descended on the station tied up the station master and made ready to fire on the incoming train. Some made a "strongpoint" of corn bags, while others occupied the station house itself.

An improvised ambush
The guerrillas were a scratch force assembled by Charlie Hurley, the commander of the IRA Third Cork Brigade. The Brigade's flying column - its fulltime guerrilla unit, led by Tom Barry, was elsewhere, returning from an attempt to blow up the RIC barracks at Drimoleague. Hurley had heard from the IRA in Cork City that 20 British soldiers from the Essex Regiment, would be travelling to Bandon in one carriage and hastily mobilised men from the local IRA companies to attack it. Seven had rifles, the rest were armed only with handguns.

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Despite the improvised nature of the attack, Hurley had reason to be optimistic. Just five days earlier he had led a similar ambush of a train at Drishanebeg, killing one soldier and wounding five. What he did not know was that along with the original 20 soldiers, another 50 had boarded at Kinsale junction. The IRA had posted two scouts at Kinsale junction, but although one of them raced by bicycle to tell the ambushers of the extra troops on board, he arrived too late. On the train's four carriages as well as the 70 odd British soldiers, were many civilians including a large number of "commercial travellers" or wholesalers. One, for instance was G. P. Johnston aged 50 originally from Cork but resident in Rathmines, Dublin. Another was the ticket collector Richard Arthur (45) of St Luke's road - Cork. Despite the ongoing guerrilla warfare, normal life for the most part went on and the passengers could not have expected what happened next.

A storm of fire when the train pulled into Upton station, a storm of fire broke out from the ambushers, ripped into the carriages, smashing through the windows and into soldier and civilian alike

Reports speak of "a shower of bullets" 'sweeping' and 'riddling' the train. When the British troops recovered from the initial shock, they returned fire on ~~the~~ the outnumbered IRA fighters. One of them, according to the inquest, worked his way to the rear of the Volunteer's position and killed two of the IRA men. Pat O'Sullivan was shot in the stomach and was taken in at a local farmhouse. Despite being smuggled to a hospital in Cork city by horse and trap he died of his injuries a few days later. Another man Dan O'Mahony recovered in the short term but died some years later from his wounds. Charlie Hurley himself was shot in the face but survived. The firing had lasted just ten minutes. The British had suspended Coroners Court in Cork and replaced them with Military Courts of Inquiry. It found that the two dead IRA men they knew about died from wounds inflicted by the military in justifiable self-defence. My great-granddad a fighter in the ~~upton~~ Upton ambush
 | Denis O'Connor

By Diarmaid Brady

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About Denis O'Connor Lisanisky

On the day, my great-granddad was having his breakfast and an IRA soldier came in and said we need you to fight at the railways and he said, "Can I finish my breakfast first" and he finished his breakfast fast and went down to the Upton railway. And when the firing broke out the IRA were out-numbered and then they said take cover. My great-granddad ran back home on the railway track and hid his gun. The next day he went to get his gun but it wasn't there so then he knew he had been followed. He was from Lisanisky Upton.

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