

— Michael Collins



General Michael Collins

commander in chief of the National Army
visited this hotel on 22 August 1922.

The Lee hotel now Munster Arms Hotel Dandon.

Shortly after his departure, his convoy was ambushed
at Béal na Blá (15 km from Bandon) and he was
fatally wounded.

Before



The Lee hotel

After



The Munster Arms hotel

Now

The programme arranged mainly by Collins himself for 22nd August was for a series of visits to army posts in the major West Cork towns and to his own home near Clonakilty. At 5.30 am his army escort paraded at Cork Barracks and, some forty minutes later, the entire party left the Imperial Hotel and headed westward via Coachford to Macroom, arriving before eight o'clock when the Lewis gun, forty rifles and extra ammunition were delivered to Commandant Conlon.

The Collins party was informed that the main road from Macroom to Bandon was impassable as bridges had been destroyed. A local hackney driver, Tim Kelleher, who then worked for Williams' Hotel and who knew every road in the district, was ordered to board the Crossley tender and guide them to Bandon. Since Tim was not dressed for the journey, John Lynch, the senior local officer who had called him out of bed for the purpose, lent him his own overcoat. Kelleher took his charges three miles out the main southern road towards Cork City, then via by-roads through The Forge Cross, Toames and Doonisky where he entered Kilmurry Parish, past the I.R.A. hospital, De Lacour Villa, in which the wounded of Crossbarry had been cared for by Nurse Baby Lordan and her sister. They then turned eastwards on Beamish's Lane to Ballymichael Bridge. The place seemed calm and peaceful to those in the convoy all of whom were there for the first time.

My Great Grandfather's Connection to Michael Collins.

My great grand father grew up in Gearagh (pronounced gearca), Rossmore, Clonakilty Co. Cork where he attended school, Michael Collins also attended this school!

This is the last known photograph taken of **General Michael Collins** leaving Lees Hotel (now Munster Arms Hotel) at approximately 6.30pm. on the evening of the 22nd August 1922. Shortly after his departure, he was fatally wounded at Beál na Blá.

From left rear: General Michael Collins, General Emmet Dalton
From left front: Pte. M. Quinn (co-driver), Pte. M. Cory (driver)

Boy with milk can is John Ellis Connolly Street.
Man with hat is Sergeant Patrick Poland R.I.C.

Photo taken by Agnes Harley, Mallowgaton, Bandon, County Cork.



• my greatgrand-father grew up in
Geiragh, Rossmore, Clonakilly Co.
Cork, where he attended
school, & Michael Collins
also attended this ~~the~~
school!



which was the second anniversary of the nearby Lissarda ambush where Q.M. Michael Galvin of the Kilmurphy Company was shot two years earlier in the Anglo-Irish struggle. Many people knew of the convoy since the local postman on his delivery-round told the news "Collins is gone west, but he won't go east".

The convoy headed southwards towards Beal na mBlath, another strongly Republican district where Denis Long was on guard duty on the road leading to Murray's, the 1st and 3rd

Brigade headquarters, about a hundred yards uphill. The motor cyclist halted, hesitating to choose from the maze of five narrow unsignposted roads. At the corner of the cross-roads, opposite to the motor cyclist, stood Long's pub where a number of Republican officers and men who had retreated from Kilmallock and Buttevant were resting. They were alarmed by the noise of the vehicles and crouched inside the windows with rifles at the ready. When asked for the road to Bandon, Long pointed up the motor cyclist's right. He could see Michael Collins since the yellow touring-car had an open roof and he immediately informed the Brigade staff at Murray's.

Beyond Beal na mBlath, at another cross-roads, the touring-car became detached from the rest of the convoy but the latter by retracing routes, four Collins standing on the road looking at Newcestown church. The convoy then proceeded, via Tinker's Cross and Kilbrogan Hill, to Bandon where Provisional Government troops were based with Major-General Sean Hales in command. Here, Kelleher told Collins that he did not know the roads beyond Bandon and that he already had a commitment to take a passenger to Cork for the boat to America that day. Collins thanked him for his warning and said "We won't let you walk back to Macroom and won't disappoint your friend. We will send you back by car." He wrote a chit and said, "take the car to some man like yourself and he will drive you back to Macroom".

Kelleher found a man named Quinn who drove him back to Macroom, actually stopping for a drink at Beal na mBlath; in Kelleher's case this was lemonade and was all he had that morning since he had missed out on breakfast. Long's pub was full to the brim with rifle-men. He got to Macroom in time to bring his party to the boat and it was next morning, at breakfast, that he heard of the tragic sequel to the Collins' journey.

The convoy left Lee's Hotel, Bandon, via Lord Bandon's demesne, as the main Bandon road to Clonakilty was blocked. Some miles outside Bandon the armoured-car seemed to have been lost. The rest of the party retraced the route and found the armoured-car stopped outside a public house while her crew were enjoying a drink. Private John O'Connell in his account of that day stated that Collins did not reprimand the men when he got the excuse that the car required water, but jokingly remarked "Sure the car needs a drink, why not the men?" The convoy found that the road outside Clonakilty town was

blocked by trees. The obstruction was partly cleared by troops using hatchets and saws from the Crossley tender (Collins personally assisted in the work) and the convoy entered Clonakilty where they had a meal and where Collins met some friends of his youth.

They then travelled to the towns of Rosscarbery and Skibbereen where Government troops were inspected. An argument is said to have developed Callinan's pub in Rosscarbery between members of the Collins' convoy and some ex-British army members of the local garrison when Jock McPeake took a bottle of whiskey from a shelf. The convoy proceeded to Collins' old home, at Woodfield near Clonakilty which had been burned by the Black and Tans and then to Sam's Cross where, at his cousin's Jeremiah Collins' pub, he met members of his own family. Crowds had cheered him during the day and at the pub Collins called for two pints of the local potent brew (Clonakilty Wrestler) for each man in the escort. *my great grand father came from here and went to school with Michael C.* Having said goodbye to his brother and friends, Collins and the convoy headed on its return journey through Clonakilty and into Bandon where at Lee's hotel they met Provisional Government army officers and stayed about half an hour. A girl who worked in the pub next door often boasted that she served Michael Collins his last pint there. The group left the hotel with, it is said, his friends expressing concern for his safety.

There was a choice of routes to Cork. The Bandon - Inishannon road was open; so were the Bandon - Crossbarry road and the Bandon - Kinsale road. Dalton stated that his decision unstated was overruled when Lieutenant Smith said he knew the route through Macroom and it seems that he decided the issue, although each of the other roads were less complicated and considerable shorter. Dalton does not say who over-ruled him, but it could only have been Collins.

In the writer's opinion, the maze of narrow roads from Beal na mBlath to Macroom which, because of broken bridges, cut roads and felled trees on other routes the Macroom guide Tim Kelleher had followed that morning, would be very difficult for a non-native such as Lieutenant Smith to navigate in near darkness.

To return to the scene at Beal na mBlath after the Collins convoy had passed. Brigade Commandant Tom Hales was the senior officer present when de Valera and Liam Deasy O.C. First Southern Division arrived around 9.30 am at Brigade H.Q. at Beal na mBlath. They were informed of the presence of Collins in the convoy that had headed towards Bandon a short time earlier. Captain Bill Powell of the 1st Brigade (Crooks town Co.) told the author that de Valera's comment was "A pity I didn't meet him". The meaning taken was that de Valera would have liked to meet Collins to discuss possible peace arrangements. De Valera asked Deasy what was likely to happen and Deasy replied that in his opinion the men who had retreated from the Limerick, Kilmallock and Buttevant fighting were in the frame of mind that they would challenge the incursion of a Free State army convoy into their own strong-hold. De Valera said that it would be a great pity if Collins was killed because he might be succeeded by a lesser man. The de Valera group remained a short while in the parlour at Murray's, the Brigade H.Q.. De Valera, Jim Flynn, Sean Hyde and Denny Crowley, Castletownkenneigh, the driver, left by motor car travelling through Ballymichael and westward via Beamish's Line to Ballyjourney and then north to Glashabee to meet Liam Lynch.

The Divisional officers at Beal na mBlath, in accordance with the policy of mounting attacks on Free State army convoys, decided to lay an ambush on rising ground at a site between Newcestown and Beal na mBlath Cross, on the assumption that the convoy would probably return later in the day by the same route. Arrangements were made to collect a mine from Lordans, Newcestown and vehicles were used to block the main road and also the serpentine bohereen (by-road). Four senior officers of Cork No. 3 Brigade who arrived for the Brigade meeting about noon found that preparations for the ambush were nearly completed and they also joined the ambushers who were under the command of Brigade Commandant Tom Hales. Liam Deasy accompanied by Tom Crofts, his adjutant who had slept at Murray's, the Brigade H.Q., the previous night returned by pony and trap to Divisional H.Q. at Gurraneageh and remained there until both left for Beal-na-mBlath, walking to attend the Brigade meeting that night.

The Hales family who split on the Treaty issue epitomises the tragic situation of many families in Ireland at that time. Tom Hales was the I.R.B. Divisional Commander of the South Munster Division until his arrest in July 1920, after which the Supreme Council requested Liam Lynch to act in his place. Collins and Sean Hales (brother of Tom) had been interned in Frongoch in 1916. Subsequently the Collins and Hales families had become close friends. In fact it was Michael Collins who chaired the meeting, held at Kilnadur, Dunmanway in January, 1919 when the 3rd Cork Brigade was established and where Tom Hales was appointed O.C. and his brother Sean Vice O.C. ["Who could possibly foresee that three years later Tom Hales would be O.C. of the Cork Republicans who would set an ambush for their much admired friend?"]. After Tom's capture and torture by the British in

The Collins escort, fronted by a motor-cyclist Lieutenant Smith consisted of a Crossley tender containing fifteen men who were armed with rifles and two Lewis machine-gun, the Leyland open touring car with its two drivers and with General Collins and Dalton in the back seat and the Silvenamon armoured-car crewed by five soldiers including Private Jack McPeake from Glasgow. One machine gun was mounted on the back of the tender which was under the control of Commandant O'Connell.

The convoy stopped at the foot of Ballymichael hill, outside the author's family home. The armoured-car was unable to mount the steep hill unaided: my father, who was working in the yard, and my mother, from an upstairs window, saw the soldiers get out of the tender and help push the armoured-car up the steep hill.

The convoy was again delayed at Farran hill where a roadman, Denny Collins, was at work breaking stones. Again the soldiers had to get out and push the armoured-car up the hill. Tim Kelleher later described it (the armoured-car) as "only pulling itself by the tail". The convoy continued into the village of Kilmurry. The motor cyclist who was some distance ahead knocked on the doors of three different houses to shout "The Commander-in-Chief is coming". Locals thought they were expected to come out and cheer, but with the exception of Bill Keogh, a Kildare man married into the village, no one appeared. Bill was very worried about his clutch of young ducklings that had just gone onto the road. He ran out to usher them to safety shouting "mind my ducks".

The parish of Kilmurry (population at that time about three thousand) was strongly Republican with over 200 men enrolled as active Volunteers in the Cork No. 1 Brigade. In addition, at Beal na mBlath it was host to the 1st and 3rd Brigade staffs and to a group of 3rd Brigade men who had fought at Limerick, Kilmallock and Buttevant and subsequently retreated towards West Cork. This tired group had arrived the previous day and were billeted at Long's pub and in neighbouring houses. In Gurraneeragh and Muinegave, four miles to the west, in the adjoining parish of Kilmichael were located

GENERAL MICHAEL COLLINS

Commander-in-Chief of the National Army,
visited this hotel on 22 August 1922.

Shortly after his departure, his convoy was
ambushed at Béal na Blá and he was
fatally wounded.

11 JOURNEY TO WEST CORK

CHAPTER 11

THE JOURNEY TO WEST CORK