

NED DALY

John Edward Daly (known as Ned) was born into perhaps the most republican family in Ireland, on February 25, 1891. The Dalys of Limerick were well known for their involvement in the IRB. His father, Edward, had been imprisoned for his IRB activities in 1866 but was released in time to participate in the Fenian Rising of 1867. He died as a result of a heart condition six months before Ned was born. His uncle John Daly had been the principal organizers of the IRB and at the time of Ned's birth he was serving a life sentence in Portland Prison, England. He had been convicted of treason felony for possession of explosives at Wolverhampton train station.

Ned Daly was the youngest of the nine children and the only son born to his mother, Catherine. Ned attended the Christian Brothers School. He was not a bright student and it was said that he showed 'an aversion to school life in general'.

In 1896 Ned's uncle John secured release from prison. A crowd of 20,000 greeted him on his arrival home to Limerick. Donations presented to him in Ireland and during a speaking tour of America enabled him to open a bakery at 26 William Street in the summer of 1898. The following year John Daly was elected mayor of Limerick.

When Ned was fifteen, John Daly sent Ned to Scotland to learn bakery skills so he could eventually learn the skills needed to take over his business. Ned's relations with his uncle were strained and after a bitter argument with him in 1913 Ned left for Dublin.

Ned Daly had shown a strong interest in the military but, given his family's republican past, there was no possibility of him joining the British army. The move to Dublin provided new opportunities for a frustrated young man.

On arrival to Dublin, Daly stayed with his sister Kathleen, the wife of Thomas Clarke. He was living in a house that was no less republican in its politics than the one he had left. Living with the Clarkes brought Daly into contact with his brother-in-law's republican associates, including Sean Mac Diarmada. He worked for building contractors and a chemist, but a turning point in his life came with the foundation of the Irish Volunteers in November 1913, which provided him with an outlet for his enthusiasm for soldiering. Kathleen Clarke recalled her brother's joy when returning from the Irish Volunteers: 'I never saw a happier young man than the night he joined. He told me it was what he had always been wishing for.'

Daly joined B Company, 1st Battalion and his dedication and family credentials led to his promotion to captain and later to the rank of commandant. He was absorbed in his soldiering activities and when he was not out drilling, he was reading military manuals.

Daly was present in Howth for the landing of arms for the Irish Volunteers from Erskine Childers' yacht, the *Asgard*. He described an encounter with a group of British soldiers. On their way back to Dublin the Volunteers spotted a party of officers at the junction of Howth Road. Ned decided to proceed ahead of the Volunteers and speak with the soldiers as to distract them. In the meantime, all Volunteers approaching the junction were given word to clear away. This distraction worked so well that there were very few Volunteers left when the British officer caught on to what was happening.

Daly participated in many key events in the run-up to the Easter Rising. He was present for an Irish Volunteers parade in Limerick in 1915, with Pearse and Mac Diarmada in attendance. By the time of O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in August 1915, Ned was commandant of the 1st battalion and led his men in the procession.

He was not a member of the supreme Council of the IRB, nor was he a member of the military Committee that planned the Rising and so was unaware of the details of the plans for the rebellion. In fact, Tom Clarke told Ned about the Rising the Wednesday before it was due to take place and Ned's reaction was total surprise.

On Holy Saturday, Daly and his buddy Seamus O'Sullivan spent the day hurrying around Dublin ensuring that as many Volunteers as possible would turn out the next day. They stayed in the Clarence Hotel on Saturday night and upon leaving the Hotel on Sunday morning to attend mass, the pair saw the Sunday newspaper containing MacNeill's notice to cancel the Volunteer maneuvers for that day. O'Sullivan recalled that 'such was their state of confusion that I could not remember if we went to Mass at all afterwards'.

Daly and O'Sullivan went to Liberty Hall, where Sean Mac Diarmada informed them that the rebellion was postponed until the next day.

The 1st Battalion assembled at 11am on Easter Monday. Only one-third of the total membership turned out. He addressed his Battalion about the reason for mobilization and informed them that an Irish Republic would be declared shortly and that their duty would be to defend this republic. Any Volunteer who did not wish to participate was allowed to leave.

Daly was involved in some of the earliest action in his command area, shooting dead a British soldier on Easter Monday afternoon. He established communications with the GPO by couriers from Cumann na nBan and the Irish Volunteers. James Connolly recognized Daly for his quick action in burning down Linen Hall Barracks because if the British occupied that building would have been disastrous for the rebels. Daly's command post was Father Mathew Hall in order to be in the center of the Battalion zone.

On Thursday the area of the Four Courts came under heavy attack from British forces. Nevertheless, he kept going and was a source of inspiration for his battalion members. On Friday, Daly was forced to withdraw his headquarters position to the Four Courts. Fierce fighting took place around the Four Courts as the British had the area surrounded.

On Saturday news of the surrender of Pearse and the rebels was conveyed by a local priest, Fr. O'Callaghan, who was accompanied by a British officer. Daly said he could not surrender without orders from his superior. It was confirmed with the arrival of Elizabeth O'Farrell, who handed the surrender order to Daly. He checked the murmuring of those who objected to surrender by an appeal to discipline. Daly was permitted to march to Sackville Street at the head of his party of rebels, where they surrendered.

Daly awaited his court martial in Richmond Barracks along with other rebels. His brother-in-law, Tom Clarke, was tried the day before and was awaiting execution. Clarke asked to see Daly and his request was granted but there was some difficulty bringing Daly to Kilmainham given that he was a high profile prisoner in Richmond Barracks. Michael Soughley, a sergeant stationed at Kilmainham, recalled that Daly did not arrive until after Clarke had been executed:

Daly said he would like to see him dead or alive and he was allowed to remain. When the three men [Clarke, Pearse, and MacDonagh] were executed their bodies lay in an old shed in which prisoners broke stones in bad weather. Daly went out to this shed – stood to attention and saluted the remains. He then took off his cap, knelt down and prayed for some time. He put on his cap again, saluted again and returned to his escort.

Daly would return to this yard the following morning for his own execution. Although he had not signed the Proclamation, Daly held the rank of commandant and so Commander-in-chief John Maxwell felt it justified in confirming his death sentence.

The night before his execution his sisters Kathleen, Madge, and Laura visited Daly in his cell in Kilmainham Gaol. Madge found him still wearing his Volunteer uniform and observed that he ‘looked so proud and strong and noble with eyes alert and full of the fire of enthusiasm that it was hard to believe that he was a captive doomed to be shot in a few hours’. He sent loving messages for his mother, aunt, and sisters and said to ‘tell Uncle John I did my best’.

Ned Daly was the first of four prisoners to be executed at dawn at Kilmainham Gaol on May 4, 1916. He was 25 years old. John Daly passed away following an illness just two months after Ned’s execution.

Source: 16 Dean Men