

Diarmuid Lynch: The Forgotten Rebel

On Saturday night April 22, 1916, a tense meeting in Dublin went on into the small hours of the night to decide whether or not the Easter Rising would proceed. Present at that meeting were Pádraig Pearse, Tomás MacDonagh, Joseph Plunkett and Seán MacDiarmada. The fifth man present at the all-night session was Diarmuid Lynch. The meeting reconvened on Sunday in Liberty Hall where the five were joined by James Connolly, Eamonn Ceannt, and Thomas Clarke. The consensus decision was to proceed with the planned rebellion at noon the following day. It is difficult to understand how Lynch, a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB, has been forgotten so completely.

Of this group only Lynch was alive a month later. But who ever heard of Diarmuid Lynch? Diarmuid's problem was that he was not executed. For this reason he is absent from the scores of literature about the 1916 Easter Rising.

Lynch was at the heart of plans for the Rising and was aide-de-camp to James Connolly and a captain of the GPO battalion. Lynch was the last volunteer to leave the GPO the Friday of the surrender. Initially sentenced to death, his sentence was commuted to ten years penal servitude because he was an American citizen. However, he was released on June 16, 1917. Immediately following his release, Lynch became active again, and along with Michael Collins and Thomas Ashe, participated in the reorganization of the IRB. After the 1917 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis (Ard Des: Irish political party conference), Lynch, like Collins, held three senior posts: they were to draw up a new constitution in the IRB, secure positions of influence in Sinn Féin and revamp the Irish Volunteer organization. He was again arrested and deported to America in 1918. Lynch was elected, although still in the US, as a member of the first Dáil in the 1918 elections. (Teachta Dála – member of Dail Eireann lower house of the Irish Parliament) In America he was working frenetically as the national secretary of the Friends of Irish Freedom organization (FOIF), but later sharp differences arose between de Valera and the Friends of Irish Freedom about how funds raised in America should be spent. Lynch made the painful decision to resign his seat as a consequence of the dispute that had arisen during de Valera's time in America in 1919 – 20. He did nothing wrong but made that painful decision to step down.

Lynch was a man who was an utterly central figure in the 1916 Rising – as a member of the Supreme Council as well as the Military Committee he describes in detail the events that led up to and occurred during the Rising. Some of these are:

1. Sean MacDiarmada's busy and demanding schedule kept him from attending to his routine duties as business manager of the Irish Freedom paper. So at Sean's request, Lynch would substitute for him and act for him in that capacity.

2. Lynch knew exactly where to find MacDiarmada when he needed to. The landlady knew him well as a close friend of Clarke and MacDiarmada and without hesitation directed Lynch to the room where Sean was. On one occasion, Lynch knocked on the door and entered to find in conference the members of the Military Committee (Pearse, Plunkett, Ceannt, and Clarke) all of whom were aware that he had been party to the appointment of this committee. Connolly was new to the committee and by the expression on his face was unaware that Lynch was a member of the Supreme Council and unaware that he was also a member of the Military Committee. Lynch describes "his look of astonishment on my entry convinced me that he had no notion that any person other than his then colleagues of the Military Committee knew of the existence of such a group."

3. Lynch reminisces about that smile of MacDiarmada's. Lynch said "He smiled that smile so characteristic of Sean whom his friends loved." When Connolly was missing for several days alarming several members of the Military committee, Lynch asked MacDiarmada about Connolly's absence who in turn said nothing but returned his characteristic smile that his friends knew so well. To Lynch, this indicated that MacDiarmada knew of Connolly's whereabouts. Another time was when Lynch knew the exact date of the rebellion, MacDiarmada became alarmed as only the signers were privy to this information. Lynch allayed his fears by explaining that he got the impression that the committee's last meeting would take place on that Sunday. MacDiarmada was satisfied with the response and gave his characteristic smile.

4. There were many occasions when Sean MacDiarmada and Diarmuid Lynch enjoyed lunch together. Good Friday was one of those occasions. MacDiarmada and Lynch lunched at Red Bank Restaurant (as they frequently did). Lynch provided the sketches for the Four Courts, Jacobs Factory, South Dublin Union, and Boland's mill for his delivery to the respective Commandants; Ned Daly (Four Courts), Tomas MacDonagh (Jacobs Factory), Eamonn Ceannt (South Dublin Union), and he visited de Valera's home to give him the Boland's mill sketch.

5. And on the lighter side, while in the GPO, Lynch suggested to Tom Clarke that we take a look through the letters marked RIC Headquarters. They chuckled at the fact that all the British spying was in vain and that they now spied on the people spying on them.

6. Lynch recalls that one of his happiest recollections of Easter Week was that of Sean MacDiamada and Tom Clarke sitting on the edge of the mail platform – beaming satisfaction and expressing their congratulations.

Lynch's concise report compiled in 1936/37 gives a description of his activities during that week. It was Lynch in 1935 who proposed recording the individual experiences of the GPO survivors. At subsequent meetings he coordinated and reviewed those reports with the consensus gathered from the survivors and completed a 44-page report which is now with the National Library. This invaluable document was created a decade before the Bureau of Military History began on a similar task, but naturally many more survivors had died by 1947.

'No country to my knowledge was ever better served than Ireland by Diarmuid Lynch. He had courage and determination and loyalty, and when he had belief in any cause he did not hesitate to serve it faithfully without ever flinching in his duty...up to the day of his death he had subordinated all else in his devotion to Ireland'

Denis McCullough. Irish Nationalist, politician and President of the IRB

"When the true story of the last forty years of Ireland's struggle for complete national independence is written, few names will shine as bright a luster as that of brave, honest, incorruptible Diarmuid Lynch"

James McGurrian. President General of the American Irish Historical Society, New York in the Gaelic American, November, 1950.

Now, Diarmuid Lynch is no longer the forgotten man!