

Window on the Past

Ned Daly

NED DALY'S place at the barricades in Easter Week was inevitable. In none of the leaders of the Rising was the rebel spirit so inherited. His father had been imprisoned at the age of 17 for his Fenian activities and had taken part in the Rising of 1867. He had developed a heart condition and died at the age of 42 in 1890 while his brother, the famous John Daly of Limerick, was serving a long prison sentence for his own Fenianism.

Some months later Ned was born, the first son in a family of ten and, understandably, his birth was the cause of considerable excitement in the family circle. He showed no particular academic flair and was intended to take over one day the family bakery business in Limerick. But there were obstacles in the way of his learning the business from the bottom and he was sent to a technical school in Glasgow.

He returned from there in bad health and after working for some time in Limerick he went to a job in Dublin where he remained for the rest of his short life, living with the old Fenian Tom Clarke, who had married his sister.

He was one of the first to enrol in the Irish Volunteers at their formation in 1913 and, until his execution less than three years later all his spare time was devoted to military training. He attracted attention by his coolness during the Howth gun-running and at the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa in the following year he was in command of the Dublin Brigade of the Volunteers.

His command in the Four Courts area during Easter Week saw some of the most intense fighting of the entire rising. With 150 men disposed over an area which would absorb four times that number, he not only held his positions intact over the entire week but made several assaults on enemy positions. His second-in-command, Piaras Beaslai, related how he received, with tears in his eyes, Pearse's order to surrender, and how he checked the objections of his men with an appeal for discipline.

Only 25 at the time of his execution, Ned Daly was born 90 years ago today.

S.J.L.

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