

DIFFERENT SPANKS FOR DIFFERENT RANKS

From Journalist Andrew Bushe, Dublin:

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A new call for Britain to pardon Irish soldiers executed during the First World War has been made after campaigners claim to have found evidence of a dual standard of justice that operated for officers and ordinary soldiers.

Irish Shot a Dawn co-ordinator Peter Mulvany said new statistics from the British Public Records Office in London showed officers got off much more lightly.

"It was a question of different spanks for different ranks. There was one law for the officers and another for the soldiers. There were only three officers executed and one of them had been sentenced for murder."

He said the records also show that some court-martialled officers were granted retrospective pardons - either outright or conditionally - after intervention by the King.

"This has been kept quiet up until now for obvious reasons. Britain has never admitted there was any such thing as a retrospective pardon," Mr Mulvany said.

The new records show a series of pardons were granted.

They included a Lieutenant-Colonel A E Mainwaring of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers who received a royal pardon in 1914 after a military court found him guilty of shameful conduct.

In the Curragh Camp in 1915, an officer had his dismissal from the army commuted to a severe reprimand after royal intervention.

"The most important case involves a Lieutenant G D Tracey of the Gordon Highlanders who was pardoned after being found guilty of cowardice in 1915.

"He was only 21 at the time and ran away from the trenches in the middle of the night and refused an order to go back up to the line again." Mulvany has been fighting for pardons for 26 Irish-born soldiers who were court-martialled and shot for cowardice, desertion and

falling asleep at their posts during the 1914-1918 conflict. Most were led out blindfolded at dawn to face firing squads.

Mulvany, whose campaign is being backed by Foreign Minister Brian Cowen, describes the executions as "judicial murders".

Many of the men were victims of what is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder, and deserved help, rather than punishment. Several were only teenagers and were condemned to death as an example to other soldiers.

"The British have never conceded there was any sort of retrospective pardon and the fact that there is a precedent means it is now possible for minds to change and to finally resolve this issue with dignity for all concerned.

"Surely with the 90th anniversary of the outbreak of World War One coming up on August 4, this outstanding issue should finally be laid to rest with posthumous pardons."

Mulvany said there was no proper justice or medical evidence at the courts martial.

"They were shot - not in the name of justice - but as a stupid, spiteful and shameful example to others. It was incredible what went on. The men on the front line were simply cannon fodder."

The statistics also show that in comparison to British, Canadian and New Zealand troops, Irish soldiers were four times more likely to be executed as a result of courts-martial.

The New Zealand government has already unilaterally granted pardons to all its citizens executed while serving in the British forces during WWI.

However, the Government has been advised that pardons for Irishmen can only come from Prime Minister Tony Blair as they were recruited directly into the British army and subject to its discipline.

Ends

<http://www.shotatdawncampaignirl.com>