

Executed for the sake of example:

Not all the Irishmen who died during the Great War 1914-1918 were executed for desertion. Limerick-born Patrick Downey, of the 6th Leinsters, was a 19-year-old volunteer with the (10th) Irish Division who had shown a disinclination to follow orders of superior officers. A Gallipoli survivor, he was stationed in Salonika in late 1915. When he refused an order to fall in for duty and put on his cap he was brought up on charges, along with a number of his colleagues.

At a court-martial presided over by junior officers (a captain and two lieutenants) the other defendants received relatively light sentences for their misdemeanours. Downey, however, pleaded guilty to what he believed to be an equivalent charge. In fact, the maximum tariff in his case was death by firing squad. He should never have been allowed to enter such a plea, a fact that was recognised in the aftermath of his sentencing. After the shocking verdict was handed down, it was then up to the commander of the Salonika force, the Irish Boer War veteran General Sir Bryan Mahon, to commute the clearly unjustifiable sentence. He chose instead to approve the execution on the basis that, because of the widespread indiscipline amongst his troops, “an exemplary punishment [is] highly desirable”. Private Patrick Downey was executed on Monday 27 December 1915 at Eurenjik, near the port of Salonika, and is buried in the Mikra British Military Cemetery, Kalamaria, a suburb of the city of Thessaloniki in Greece.

General Sir Bryan Mahon guilty of desertion:

This was the same General Sir Bryan Mahon who had, himself, been guilty of desertion in the face of the (Turkish) enemy in August 1915. On that occasion, in a fit of pique at not receiving an anticipated promotion, he abandoned his 10th (Irish) Division and took himself off to a distant island. There he nurtured and cultivated his wounded pride. His actions contributed to the decimation of the 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers (The Dublin Pals) on the slopes of Kiretch Tepe Sert overlooking Suvla Bay.

The battalion, which included the famous rugby-playing “Pals” company, recruited at Lansdowne Road in 1914, should have been withdrawn from an indefensible position on the night of August 15th, 1915. But no one was prepared to give such an order in the absence of the divisional commander. The 7th Dublins did not have the option of taking

umbrage at Turkish grenades. Mahon un-resigned within a week and his career – whatever about his reputation – did not suffer greatly.

Galway born, General Sir Bryan Mahon (1862-1930) retired at the end of the WW1, married, and settled in Ireland. Appointed twice to the Irish Senate (1922 and 1925), he was also elected to the 1928 Senate. Mahon died in Dublin 1930.

<http://www.shotatdawncampaignirl.com>

www.irishseamensrelativesassociation.com/ShotatDawnCampaignIrl.htm



Photo: © IWM Q 31934: Lieutenant General Sir Bryan Mahon with Mrs Katherine Mary Harley (Sister of Field Marshal Lord French and serving with the Girton and Newnham unit of the Scottish Women's Hospital) Captain Tyler R.N. (H.M.S. AGAMEMNON) and Dr. Isabel Hutton (Girton and Newnham unit of the S.W.H.) watching an aeroplane during a British Salonika Force during the review of the British 28th Division in April 1916.