

# Heuston's *station*

Dogged defence of the Mendicity Institution lead to execution, writes **Richard McElligott**

**S**EÁN HEUSTON was born in Dublin and following school, he became an office clerk with the Great Southern and Western Railway Company. At 19, he joined Na Fianna Éireann, the Republican Boy Scout movement founded by the IRB member Bulmer Hobson and Constance Markievicz. Like many, Heuston found it a radicalising experience.

After attaining the rank of vice commandant of Na Fianna's Dublin Brigade in 1913, Heuston was also appointed Director of Training on its headquarters staff. This position led to him becoming a founding member of the Irish Volunteers. Leading members of Na Fianna were soon picked to fill vital positions within the new movement.

In the years before the Rising, Heuston continued to drill Fianna members, often on the grounds of Patrick Pearse's school, St Enda's. In July 1914, he commanded the

Fianna contingent that unloaded the rifles during the Howth gunrunning.

By 1916 Heuston had been appointed captain in the Irish Volunteers' Dublin Brigade, taking command of D Company in Edward Daly's 1st Batt. On Easter Monday, the battalion was ordered to take up positions around the Four Courts. However Heuston's small company of 25 men did not mobilise with the rest of Daly's main force.

## SNAPSHOT

### SEÁN HEUSTON

**Born:** 21 February 1891, Dublin

**Educated:** CBS North Richmond St

**Affiliation:** Fianna Éireann/Irish Volunteers

**Career:** Clerk in railway company

**Died:** 8 May 1916, Kilmainham Jail



Seán Heuston led 25 men down Sackville Street on Easter Monday 1916, and then on to the Mendicity Institution on the south quays, where they held out for two days.

Instead they assembled near Mountjoy Square and marched down O'Connell Street. There after a brief conference with James Connolly, the appointed commander of rebel forces, Heuston's company was ordered to cross the Liffey to take over the Mendicity Institution, a poorhouse located on Usher's Island on the south quays.

This was a vital position for disrupting British reinforcements coming from the Royal Barracks or via Kingsbridge Station (renamed in Heuston's honour in 1966) into the city centre. The decision to station Daly's main force in the Four Courts instead of the Mendicity Institution was a major tactical blunder by the Rising's planners. For the next two days Heuston's men doggedly defended the position as hundreds of British troops encircled his increasingly-exposed outpost.

Desperately short of food, rest and ammunition, hopelessly outnumbered and expecting the position to be overrun

at any moment, Heuston ordered his men to surrender around noon on Wednesday. After spending the rest of the week incarcerated at Arbour Hill detention barracks, Heuston was tried by court-martial on 4 May.

He was sentenced to death for falling into the second category of rebels defined by the British authorities as meriting execution: 'Those who commanded rebels actually shooting down soldiers, police and others'. Though actually only a minor officer, the trial was most likely swayed in its decision by the number of casualties his outpost had managed to inflict.

Despite this, Heuston made an audacious effort to escape this sentence by strongly challenging the inaccurate evidence put forward against him. It was to no avail.

*Dr Richard McElligott lectures in Modern Irish History in UCD*

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