



Michael Mallin (left) and Darragh Gannon at the National Museum of Ireland.

STEVE HUMPHREYS



MICHAEL MALLIN

‘I am prepared’

Darragh Gannon on the Commandant who claimed to be a mere foot soldier at the St Stephen’s Green garrison

THE words, ‘I am prepared’, were among the last written by Michael Mallin to his wife Agnes hours before his execution. Lightly-worn within an emotional final letter, they are nonetheless thought provoking, for an assessment of Michael Mallin’s 1916 Rising is essentially a question of preparation, indeed questions. Was Michael Mallin organisationally prepared as Chief of Staff of the Irish Citizen Army? Was he militarily prepared as Commandant of the St Stephen’s Green garrison? Was Mallin personally prepared to face death after the Rising?

Born in Dublin, Mallin joined the British Army Royal Scots Fusiliers at 15 in 1889. He served as a drummer for the majority of his time in uniform (1891-1902), and saw military action in India. On his return to Ireland he became secretary of the Silk Weavers’ Union and a member of the ITGWU.

Mallin was appointed as Irish Citizen Army Chief of Staff by James Connolly in October 1914. He had much to recommend him. Under his leadership, the ICA became a much more disciplined body than before, with members committing to regular, timely drill sessions. Countess Markievicz joined in several training exercises. Never as well armed as the Irish Volunteers, the ICA availed of Mallin’s contacts in Richmond Barracks to secure rifles, later joining the Volunteers in shooting competitions. His military strategies and tactics evidenced flexible preparation. He joined Connolly in delivering lectures on street fighting and defensive warfare but also illustrated the advantages of guerrilla warfare in a number of articles.

Michael Mallin was appointed Commandant of the St Stephen’s Green garrison. Countess Markievicz became his second-in-command later on Monday. Their objective was to secure the Green. On Mallin’s orders the rebels cleared it of civilians and dug defensive trenches at its four entrances. He declined to take the

SNAPSHOT

MICHAEL MALLIN

Born: 1 December 1874, Dublin

Educated: Denmark Street NS

Affiliation: Irish Socialist Party/ Irish Citizen Army

Career: Soldier, weaver, trade unionist

Died: 8 May 1916, Kilmainham Jail

Shelbourne Hotel, the dominant building overlooking the garrison, leaving the rebels fatally exposed. Machine gun fire from British positions in the hotel had, by Tuesday, forced the rebels into the nearby Royal College of Surgeons from where they surrendered that Sunday. Mallin, on the miscalculation of both garrison numbers and military tactics, was unprepared for the battle.

Michael Mallin was sentenced to death by field court martial on 5 May 1916. Unlike Patrick Pearse, he had clearly not prepared psychologically for this eventuality. During his trial Mallin denied holding any commission in the ICA; having prior knowledge of plans for a Rising; or being in the confidence of James Connolly. He claimed to have been a mere foot soldier in St Stephen’s Green, acting under the command of Countess Markievicz during Easter Week.

Brian Hughes, his biographer, has termed his misrepresentations a “particularly dishonourable” attempt to avoid the firing squad. The distress of leaving his wife and four, soon to be five, children to face into life without a husband and father, may have accounted for Mallin’s uncharacteristic behaviour.

Dr Darragh Gannon, UCD, is currently Curatorial Researcher to the National Museum of Ireland’s ‘Proclaiming a Republic: the 1916 Rising’ exhibition



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