

Cardiff Remembered: The World War One soldier shot at dawn for 'not going to the front line'

New book *Shot At Dawn* by Robert King looks back at the 15 Welshmen shot for desertion during World War One



Sub-Lieutenant Edwin Dyett who was executed following a Court Martial during the First World War

Of the 15 Welshmen who were shot for desertion in the First World War, one of them Edwin Dyett was from Cardiff.

And Robert King in his splendid new book *Shot At Dawn – The 15 Welshmen executed by the British Army in the First World War* (published by The History Press at £9.99) informs us that “Edwin Dyett was born on 17 October, 1895, into a family with an impressive military background. His father was a captain in the Merchant Navy and later in the war was to serve as chief naval transport officer at Liverpool.”

We also learn that both his grandfathers had been colonels and that Dyett, who had lived in Albany Road, had enlisted in the Royal Naval Voluntary Reserve in June 1915.

Dyett, who had apparently got lost on his way to headquarters, was charged that “in the field on the 13th November, 1916, when it was his duty to join his battalion, which was engaged in operations against the Enemy, did not do so, and remained absent from the battalion until placed under arrest at Englebelmer on the 15th November, 1916.”

Also, he faced an alternative charge: “Conduct to the prejudice of good order and Military discipline in that he in the field on the 13th November 1916 did not go up to the front when it was his duty to do so.”

The upshot of it all was that Edwin Dyett was playing cards with two battalion officers on January 4 1917, when another officer entered the room and read out his death warrant.

Sadly, he was led out at dawn, tied to a post, blindfolded, a piece of white cloth placed over his heart and shot.

His last words, we are told were: “Well, boys, goodbye. For God’s sake, shoot straight.”

The Rt Hon. Peter Hain in his foreword to this well-researched book says that the author is to be commended for focusing upon the Welsh soldiers whose stories have not been told and whose memory we salute through this book.

Robert King, who comes from Neath, had asked him in 2006 to support a proposal in the House of Commons to grant a blanket pardon to those soldiers shot at dawn in the Great War and he was pleased to do so, and writes: “The terrible injustice suffered by the 306 British men executed under the Army Act has been a deep festering sore.”

Of the 15 Welshmen shot at dawn two of them, Private Anthony O’ Neill and Private William Jones, are both believed to have been under 18 while Dyett who was seconded into the army from the navy, was still a member of the Nelson Battalion and had no army number.

* You can send your stories/pictures to Brian Lee, Cardiff Remembered, Front Office, South Wales Echo, Six Park Street, Cardiff, CF10 1XR or e-mail him brianlee4@virginmedia.com