

FINGAL & THE FIGHT FOR IRISH FREEDOM



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2016

Clár Comórtha
Céad Bliain
*Centenary
Programme*

Thomas Ashe

**Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall**
Fingal County
Council



By early 1916 the Fingal Brigade/5th Battalion numbered no more than 100, known as Sinn Fein Volunteers, made up of small companies in Lusk, Skerries, St. Margaret's, Swords, and Turvey. In command at Easter were: Thomas Ashe, Brigade Commandant; Dr. Richard Hayes, Battalion Adjutant and Medical officer; and Quartermaster Frank Lawless. Company Captains included: Swords-Richard Coleman; Lusk-Edward Rooney; Skerries-Joseph Thornton; St. Margaret's-James V. Lawless. The Donabate Volunteers were attached to other companies. North County Dublin was described as "quiet" by the RIC County Inspector.

MOBILIZATION

On Easter Sunday an estimated 120 5th Battalion members turn out at 4.30 p.m. at Rathbeale Cross, Swords. Joseph Lawless goes to Connolly with a message from Ashe and returns with orders that all is off but be ready. All volunteers return home.

On Easter Monday orders from Patrick Pearse reach Ashe "Strike at one o'clock today". Ashe orders a second mobilization at Knocksedan Bridge, Swords, but not everyone gets word and only half turn up. They include many from the same families: Crenigan; Doyle; Duke; Kelly; Lawless; McAllister; Rooney; Stafford; Taylor; Weston and Wilson.

Police receive word that an attack on the Marconi Station, Skerries is planned. 200 men of the North Staffordshire Regiment are landed at Skerries to protect the station, effectively cutting off all routes out of Skerries to the Volunteers there.

ACTION

On Tuesday the 5th Battalion is joined

by Patrick Grant, Thomas Maxwell, Richard Mulcahy and Jerry Golden. Mulcahy is appointed second-in-command to Ashe.

Their orders are to disrupt the communication and supply lines into the city, including railway lines, and telegraph services in the Post Offices. Attempts are made to damage railway lines and bridges in Blanchardstown and Cabra on Monday night and Tuesday morning. The Great Northern Railway Bridge at Rogerstown is damaged by explosives by a demolition party.

James Connolly sends a request that 40 of the Fingal Brigade be sent in to the G.P.O. Ashe can only spare 20, and he sends them under Captain Richard Coleman. They fight at the G.P.O. and Mendicity Institute, and one of their number, Peter Wilson of Swords, is killed.

The R.I.C. barracks at Swords and Donabate are attacked on Wednesday, April 26th. The Fifth Battalion is based at Killeek. Molly Adrien brings Ashe newspaper reports and a copy of the proclamation, and also news that the rest of the country had not come out.

BATTLE

On Friday morning, April 28th Ashe orders two sections of men, 21 each, to go with him and Mulcahy towards the Slane to Ashbourne road. At Rath cross roads they dismount, and 11 men under Joe Lawless and Charlie Weston are sent into the fields on the north side of the road and proceed under cover to the back of Kilmoon RIC barracks. Once in position, they signal to Ashe and Mulcahy, who proceed to the front of the barracks and order the officers there to surrender. Two home-made



Richard Coleman

bombs are then thrown at the barracks and the police inside surrender. The barracks had been reinforced during the week and contained nine officers and a District Inspector. The sound of motor cars coming from further up the Slane road is then heard.

County Inspector Alexander Gray, having received word in Navan that the RIC barracks in Ashbourne was under attack, assembled a force of between 54 and 67 RIC men, who proceed to Ashbourne in 17-20 motor cars. After hours of shooting, with most of the RIC taking cover under the motor cars, District Inspector Harry Smyth, 2 sergeants and 4 constables, are killed and 15 are wounded. Gray later died of his wounds.

Dr. Hayes, assisted by the women Volunteers, attends the wounded on both sides. On the rebels side John Crenigan, and Thomas Rafferty, are killed. The wounded were Joseph Taylor, Jack Rafferty, W. Walsh, Matt Kelly, and Edward Rooney.

The Volunteers are overjoyed with their victory, but their joy is short-lived. On Sunday April 30th, under orders from Pearse, the Fingal Battalion reluctantly surrenders at Newbarn, near Kilsallaghan. Some members had already gone on the run.

AFTERMATH

In the following months, almost 150 Fingallians were arrested and sent to internment camps, such as Frongoch, in Wales. These included members of the Fingal Brigade such as Joseph Beggs and Joseph Derham who fought in the city. There were others also from the county, such as the two McNulty brothers from Blanchardstown, who fought with various other brigades in the city. Most were not released until June 1917. Despite the reaction to events immediately afterwards, they were given a warm reception.

Ashe and Coleman were arrested again in August 1917 on the election campaign trail for De Valera. They went hunger strike in Mountjoy and Ashe died from force-feeding. An estimated 30,000 people attended his funeral in Glasnevin. Richard Coleman was later released, and re-arrested and imprisoned a number of times. He died of pneumonia during an epidemic of influenza in Usk prison, Wales, in December 1918.

-Colm McQuinn, Archivist, Fingal County Council



Sources: BMH Witness Statements; J.V. Lawless 'The Battle at Ashbourne', Capuchin Annual 1966; R Bateson The Riding Dead RIC & DMP, 2012; Paul O'Brien Field of Fire-the Battle of Ashbourne, 1916, 2012; Dr. T Dooley, 'Alexander 'Baby' Gray', Ríocht na Midhe, 2003; Sean O'Luing I die in a good cause, 1976; P.F. Whearity The Easter Rising of 1916 in north County Dublin; a Skerries perspective, 2013; Sean O'Mahony Frongoch-University of Revolution, 1987. Curtis, Bairbre 'Fingal and the Easter Rising' article published in Fingal Studies 1, 2010. Images Fingal Local Studies Thomas Ashe Collection and the Garda Museum©. Text may not be reproduced without the written permission of the author.