

Thomas Ashe was born and raised in Kinard, Co. Kerry. Educated in the nearby town of Dingle and subsequently at the De La Salle College, Waterford, Ashe became a National School Teacher. Like so many of his contemporaries, he became a member of the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletics Association during this time.

Through his links with these organisations, Ashe was recruited for the Irish Republican Brotherhood. An eager participant, he rose quickly through the ranks. Evidence of the respect in which he was held was seen in him being chosen to visit America on a fundraising trip. It was during this time that he met such other notables as John Devoy, Joe McGarrity and Roger Casement.

Back in Ireland, Ashe taught at the National School in Corduff, Co. Dublin. It was there that he trained a group of local men to fight in the planned insurrection. He was scrupulous in his preparations and in the devising of tactics for his troop.

During the 1916 Easter Rising, Ashe commanded this Final Battalion of Irish Volunteers. Capturing significant areas of North County Dublin, this group successfully demolished the Great Northern railway bridge; thus, disrupting access to the capital. In addition, they captured the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) barracks at Ashbourne, Co. Meath. The fight to gain control lasted 6 hours during which time 11 RIC men were killed and over 20 were wounded. By comparison, the Fingal Battalion lost only two men and five were wounded.

It was during this week, that General Richard Mulcahy joined forces with the men at Fingal. How this happened and what part he was to subsequently play has, however, been the source of some debate. Nevertheless, the Fingal Battalion is considered to be one of two successful battles occurring in Dublin during the 1916 Rising.



Ashe was arrested for his role in the Rising. Although sentenced to death on 11 May 1916, public uproar resulted in this being commuted to penal servitude for life. From Dublin, he was transported to Lewes Gaol in England where he became one of the leaders of the prisoners at that time alongside Éamonde Valera.

In the Summer of 1917, the Irish prisoners were released and made their way back to Ireland. Ashe resumed his political activities, giving speeches around the country in defiance of orders from the British Authorities. For his own safety, Ashe went into hiding but

was subsequently arrested when he attended, and spoke at, a meeting in Dublin.

Sentenced at a court martial, Ashe was imprisoned at Mountjoy Gaol, Dublin. Similarly to the Suffragettes at this time, Ashe and his Republican counterparts were denied political status. Demands were issued for a change in their status but to no avail. As a result, these inmates began a hunger strike on 20 September 1917 believing that it was the only means open to them to obtain their demands.

The prison authorities retaliated by taking away the prisoners' bedding and boots. Such actions, however, did not break the resolve of these men.

Forcible feeding, a method for dealing with hunger striking prisoners, began almost immediately. All requests to Ashe to end the hunger strike were refused. He was adamant in his opposition saying: "They have branded me a Criminal. Even though I do die, I die in a good cause."

Administered by a trainee doctor, the process of feeding was often quite brutal. On the third day, Ashe collapsed shortly after the procedure.

It was later discovered that the tube had pierced his lung among other complications. He was released immediately from the prison and when asked where he would like to be taken, he responded to the nearby Mater Hospital. That was 23 September. Two days later, he died of heart and lung failure.

After lying in state at City Hall, Ashe's cortege made its way through Dublin to Glasnevin Cemetery on 30 September 1917. It is estimated that 30,000 people lined the streets, some having travelled great distances and over coming such obstacles as limited transport to attend. The Archbishop of Dublin's car was also visible in the funeral procession. At the graveside, a volley of shots rang out and Michael Collins gave the oration.

Ashe was 32 years old.

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