Dr. Richard Francis Hayes (1878-1958)  
Revolutionary Historian

by Des Ryan

There are many accounts, held by the Bureau of Military History in Dublin recording the movements of the 5th Fingal Battalion of the Irish Volunteers during the 1916 Rising. This account is based on the reminiscences of a Limerick man Dr. Richard F. Hayes and it may differ on some points of historical accuracy from the accounts held by the Bureau of Military History.

Richard Francis Hayes was born on 16 July, 1878. His parents were both teachers at the national school in Bruree, County Limerick, where the young Richard began his education. His friend Eamon de Valera also attended the same school when he was living with his grandparents in Bruree. It is believed that the young Hayes was intellectually and politically influenced by Rev. Eugene Sheehy, who was the parish priest at Bruree.¹⁰ The Hayes family moved to Rathkeale, County Limerick in the 1880s where Richard’s father had secured a post as secondary school teacher in that town.¹¹ Having finished his secondary education Richard Hayes attended the Catholic University Medical School at Cecilia Street, Dublin. The 1901 Census returns record his occupation as being a medical student and also the fact that he was at home in Rathkeale on the night that the census was taken. He also attended the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons from which he obtained his degrees to practise medicine in 1904.¹²

In 1905, at the age of 27 he published a short dictionary of medical terms in Irish. The following year he visited Paris where he became fascinated with the connections between Ireland and France. By 1911 he was living in Balbriggan, County Dublin. He had been employed as a house surgeon at the Mater Hospital, Dublin, resident Medical Officer at Galway Central Hospital and was an extern at the Coombe Maternity Hospital, Dublin.

The period from 1912 onwards was a turbulent one in Irish history. Ireland, then a part of the British Empire, was to be given Home Rule, a limited form of self-government. In the province of Ulster the Protestant ruling classes were opposed to Home Rule. In January 1913, they organised a civilian paramilitary army, the Ulster Volunteer Force (U.V.F.) to resist the implementation of Home Rule. Several months later Irish Nationalists in Dublin, established the Irish Volunteers to counteract the U.V.F. threat and to defend the cause of Home Rule. British Army officers stationed at the Curragh Military Barracks in County Kildare, had indicated that they would refuse to march against Ulster in the event of a conflict.¹³ With the outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914, Home Rule was put on hold. In Ulster many of the members of the U.V.F. joined the war to fight for Britain. In the south John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, called on the Irish Volunteers to do likewise. This caused a split in the movement when the majority of the Volunteers supported Redmond’s call and changed their name to the National Volunteers; while the remainder of the Volunteers, those who were opposed to becoming involved in what they saw as a European conflict, retained their title as the Irish Volunteers.

Richard Hayes was an early member of the Irish Volunteers and was a keen student of contemporary military textbooks. In the month of June 1915, he was appointed Commanding Officer of the 5th Fingal Battalion of the Dublin Brigade with a strength of about eighty men on average. He developed a well-structured training programme for the men under his command; giving lectures on military tactics, instigating foot drills and route marches while basic rifle drill was taught, at times, by former and serving members of the British Army. As a doctor he personally provided first aid and field medical training. He introduced routine, small

At the outbreak of the Easter Rising in Dublin, Hayes was a dispensary doctor at Lusk House on the outskirts of Dublin, while his friend Thomas Ashe, from Dingle, County Kerry, was a national school teacher in Lusk [see map]. Thomas Ashe, a member of the I.R.B., told Hayes and Frank Lawless, the Battalion Quarter-master, that James Connolly had informed him verbally on Good Friday that military operations would begin at 7 p.m. on Easter Sunday night. It was at this time that Hayes decided to hand over his duties as Commandant to Ashe with Hayes acting as Adjutant and taking on duties of Intelligence and Medical Officer to the battalion. Accordingly Ashe and Hayes sent out orders on Easter Saturday to the four companies of the Fingal Battalion to mobilise at mid-day on Easter Sunday at Rathbeal Cross, near Swords, in County Dublin.¹⁰

In the meantime Eoin McNeill one of the leaders and founding members of the Irish Volunteers issued orders
The following morning, between 9 and 10 o'clock, the Volunteers set out for the village of Swords. Hayes and Ashe drove up the main street, pulled outside the police station, went in and demanded the surrender of the building. The sergeant in charge handed over any arms or ammunition that they had in the barrack. At the same time Lt. Mulcahy entered the post office and destroyed the telegraph instruments. On leaving Swords the Volunteers cycled to the Donabate police barracks where the police refused Ashe's request to hand over their weapons. Both sides opened fire and when one of the policemen was wounded the remainder gave up and surrendered their rifles. That afternoon the men made their way to Oldtown, where they camped for the rest of the day. Around midnight it was agreed that Hayes would take a small advance party of Volunteers to Garristown where they would wait for the main body before attacking the police station. Some of the men made so much noise, when they got there, that Hayes decided to carry out the raid straight away. After he banged on the door of the station a number of times the sergeant opened the door. When Hayes asked that the barracks rifles and ammunition be handed over the sergeant told him that they had been collected earlier in the day by the Head Constable from Balbriggan. Hayes, believing that the policeman was bluffing, had his men search the station but found nothing.

On Thursday, 27 April, was a reasonably quiet day for the Volunteers. The men were reorganised while those who were not fully committed to the Rising and those who were considered too old or too young were sent home. That evening the Volunteers camped at Berrinstown, just over the border in County Meath.

On Friday, 28 April, Ashe made arrangements to destroy the Midlands Great Western Railway line at Batterstown, County Meath, and to create any diversion that would help to disrupt any British troop movements. It was also decided to carry out a raid on Ashbourne police barracks which lay on the route to Batterstown. Around 11 a.m. about 35 volunteers, divided into three sections, set out for Ashbourne, leaving twelve men, under the command of Frank Lawless, behind for foraging duties. Thirty minutes later Commandant Ashe and the main body of Volunteers arrived at

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for the cancellation of the insurrection which caused total confusion among the Volunteers throughout the country. On the Sunday afternoon Ashe sent one of the men to Liberty Hall, in Dublin, to see Connolly. The Volunteer returned with a message from Connolly that everything was off but the men were not to be disbanded. Just after midnight, on Easter Sunday, Hayes and Frank Lawless decided to drive into Dublin to assess the situation, as no further orders had arrived. They met two Volunteers at a house in North Richmond Street, who advised them to send the men home, but tell them that they could be mobilised at any moment. After the Volunteers were disbanded Hayes returned to his home at Lusk accompanied by Ashe and another Volunteer, where, at 7 a.m., on Easter Monday morning, they received a message from Patrick Pearse with the words: "Strike at one o'clock to-day".

Orders were issued at once to the Fingal Battalion to meet at mid-day, at Knocksedan, a few miles from Swords. With the exception of Hayes who used his two-seater Morris Minor car to carry medical supplies, most of the men travelled by bicycle. On his way to Knocksedan Hayes stopped off at the post office in Lusk where the post mistress told him that she had received a telegram, in code, for the police sergeant at Lusk. The message was, she told Hayes, that he and Ashe were to be arrested. When Hayes arrived at Knocksedan he was disappointed to see that only sixty Volunteers had turned up. Two Volunteers were sent to destroy the railway viaduct between Malahide and Donabate, but they were only partially successful. The battalion was ordered to Finglas with orders to hold the main road leading into Dublin and ambush or fire on any British Officers returning by that route from the Fairyhouse Races, in County Meath, but none returned. Here they were joined by Lieutenant (later General) Richard Mulcahy who was unable to join up with his own company. Half a dozen Volunteers from a city battalion, cut off at Phibsboro, also joined them. Later that night Mulcahy set out, with a party of men, to wreck the railway line and signal box at Blanchardstown, in order to stop British troops arriving in Dublin from Athlone.

On Tuesday morning, 25 April, a dispatch arrived from the G.P.O. in Dublin, with an order to send in twenty men to help with the fighting. Although the order was complied with, Hayes was not happy, as he felt they did not have enough men themselves. As a result the Fingal Battalion was reduced to about forty five men, not even enough, Hayes stated, to form four equal companies. That evening they left Finglas and made their way back to Knocksedan, camping for the night at nearby Killeek.
Rath Crossroads which straddled the main Dublin to Slane road. As they approached the cross they could see an R.I.C. constable hiding in the hedges.

The Ashbourne police station was about a hundred yards, from the cross, down the road on the Dublin side. Meanwhile two Volunteer scouts reported that the police were erecting a temporary barrier, a ladder across two boxes, in front of the barrack. Several Volunteers made their way, cautiously, to the barricade and captured two policemen. With the police station surrounded, Ashe, who was at the front, called on the police inside to surrender. When the police, under the direction of District Inspector MacCormack, opened fire the Volunteers took shelter behind a ditch on the opposite side of the road and opened fire on the barrack. Half an hour later the police decided to give up and were seen to be waving a white cloth from a window.

At this time, Richard Hayes, who had remained at the crossroads with two other Volunteers, was watching the fighting at the police station. Just then one of the men with Hayes spotted a long line of motor cars coming from the direction of Slane. As the convoy of cars got nearer, they stopped a few hundred yards from the crossroads. Hayes and his men knelt on the road and were about to open fire when Hayes called on them to hold their fire as he thought the men in the cars were Volunteers from Dunboyne coming to help them. A volley of gun-fire coming from the direction of the convoy ended any idea that they were coming to help. The police in the barrack seeing what was happening resumed their offensive. As the police, under the command of County Inspector Grey and D.J. Smith, an ex-Army Officer, got out of the cars and hid behind them, others used the roadside hedges for cover instead of trying to out-flank the Volunteers. Lt. Mulcahy, in consultation with Ashe, regrouped the men and divided them into smaller units and arranged them in such a way that the police on the road and in the barrack were a large extent surrounded. Inspector Grey was wounded early in the conflict thereby leaving Inspector Smith in sole command of the police.

While the fighting was going on Mulcahy placed Hayes and another Volunteer behind the barricade with orders to keep the back door covered. Hayes remained in that position throughout most of the fighting, except for a few times when he had to attend to some of the Volunteers who had been wounded. Meanwhile the Battalion Quartermaster, Frank Lawless arrived on the scene with a half dozen men to support Ashe and Mulcahy. Inspector Smith was mortally wounded by a shot from Lawless, which left the police leaderless. Lawless moved his men out onto the road, and firing intermittently, moved at the double towards the motor cars. By this time police morale had dropped and, after five hours of fighting, they came out from behind their cars with their hands up. The police in the barrack also came out and surrendered. District Inspector MacCormack asked Hayes to help C.I. Gray and the wounded policemen. Hayes estimated that during the battle there were seventeen cars with about sixty policemen and another fourteen in the barrack. Out of that number eight were killed and fifteen were wounded. The casualties amongst the Volunteers were two killed and five wounded. Ninety-six rifles were collected by the Volunteers, Ashe had the captured policemen lined up in front of him and warned them not to take up arms against the Irish people again.

The Volunteers left the Ashbourne area and made their way to Barntown where they camped for the night. The following day they moved to Oldtown. On Sunday afternoon, two policemen in civilian clothing drove into the camp and told the Volunteers that Patrick Pearse, and the other leaders of the Rising, had given up and surrendered. They asked that a Volunteer go with them to see Pearse who was now in custody. Ashe sent Mulcahy with one of the policemen to see Pearse and to confirm that a general surrender had taken place. When Mulcahy returned to the camp he said to the Volunteers “It’s all up boys”. The policemen then informed them that a cavalry detachment would come out later to take their surrender. When the police left some of the Volunteers decided to leave rather than wait around for the cavalry to come. A meeting of the Volunteer Staff Officers decided that they would wait and surrender honourably. Some of the younger Volunteers, those in their teens, were ordered to go home. Later that evening the cavalry squad arrived and escorted the remaining Volunteers into Richmond Barracks in Dublin.

During the court-martial that followed the Rising, Hayes was sentenced to death, but this was commuted to twenty years penal servitude in Dartmoor Prison in Devon, England. Several months later he was transferred to the Isle of Wight with Eamon de Valera. In December 1916, Hayes was removed to Lewes Jail in Sussex, England. He was released in 1917 under a General Amnesty and got employment at the Earls Street Dispensary in Dublin and took up residence at Thomond House, on the South Circular Road. His appointment was not recognised by the Local Government Board and he was not paid any salary from 1918 until the election of a Board of Guardians, sympathetic to the Sinn Fein movement in 1920. He was arrested again in 1918 and interned in Reading Jail, Berkshire, England. While there he was put forward as the Sinn Fein candidate for East Limerick, in the British General Election on 14 December, 1918. Hayes was elected when he defeated the Nationalist candidate Thomas Ludden. On 21 January, 1919 Sinn Fein M.P.s, refusing to take their seats in the British Parliament in London, met in the Mansion House in Dublin to form their own government, Dail Eireann. That same day the opening shots in a War of Independence were fired in County Tipperary, when two policemen were shot dead. On 1 April 1919, Eamonn de Valera was elected President of Dail Eireann. He formed a cabinet which included Arthur Griffith, Vice-President and Minster for Home Affairs, Michael Collins, Minister for Finance and W. T. Cosgrove, Minster.
for Local Government. The Volunteers, the military wing of the Dail, now became the Irish Republican Army. Hayes was arrested again in 1920 and detained in Ballykinlar Camp in Northern Ireland. He was released after a cessation of hostilities was agreed to by Irish and British representatives in July 1921. Soon afterwards de Valera, with the consent of Dail Eireann went to London to negotiate with Lloyd George. De Valera demanded a thirty-two county, independent Republic. The British government offered a 26 county Irish State, with a form of independence known as Dominion Status which was similar to the autonomy that Canada, Australia and New Zealand had within the British Empire. When these proposals became known the cabinet of Dail Eireann rejected them. At the same time lines of communication were kept open with the British government. In an effort to break the stalemate and restart the negotiations Lloyd George invited de Valera to London for talks on 11 October. De Valera decided not to go, instead the cabinet agreed to send a delegation led by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins. The negotiations dragged on into early December with no sign of agreement. Finally, on 6 December, the Irish delegates, after being threatened by the British Prime Minister Lloyd George with an immediate and terrible war, signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. When the Irish government T.D.s voted, after a much heated debate, on 7 January 1922, on whether or not to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which would see the partition of Ireland and an Oath of Allegiance to a British Monarch, it was passed by a slim majority of 64 for and 57 against. Richard Hayes was one of those who voted for acceptance. Soon afterwards the country erupted into Civil War between those who were pro-treaty and those who refused to accept it. When Michael Collins, Commander-in-Chief of the newly formed National Army, was killed during the Civil War in August 1922, Hayes took part in the provisional government emergency conference to replace him as chairman with W. T. Cosgrave. Hayes retired from politics in January 1924 to work as a doctor in Donnybrook No. 2 Dispensary, Dublin and to indulge his scholarly interests. Beginning in 1932, Hayes wrote a number of books on the military connections between Ireland and France. He was a fluent speaker of Irish and French, and travelled extensively in England and France to gather information for his literary works on the association of his literary works on the association of the Irish army in the service of the French armies. As a mark of recognition for his work the French Government decorated him with the Legion of Honour. In 1934 he was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Abbey Theatre, where he represented the government. In 1936 he was elected a member of the Royal Irish Academy of Letters. Three years later, at the age of sixty-one, he married Hilda Shaw. In November 1940, he succeeded James Montgomery as official film censor for Ireland, the following month the Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, who was also Chancellor of the National University of Ireland, presented Hayes with a D. Litt. Ireland was a neutral state during the Second World War and it was Hayes duty to remove any visual or verbal references to the warring nations or their leaders. While at the same time the Irish government could recall any material that he passed, if they felt that it was a threat to national security, public order or offensive to any foreign power.

In 1949, he was one of the founding members of the Military History Society of Ireland. As well as contributing to the society’s magazine, The Irish Sword, Hayes also wrote articles for other journals. His love for Limerick and its history was manifest in many of the essays he contributed to the North Munster Antiquarian Journal. During the early 1950s, Hayes was mentioned widely as a possible candidate for the Presidency of Ireland. He retired as film censor in 1954. Dr. Richard Francis Hayes died at his home in Rochestown Avenue, Dun Laoghaire, on 16 June 1958, and is buried in Dean’s Grange Cemetery, Dublin.

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