

THE IRISH DEFENCE FORCES

1940–1949

The Chief of Staff's Reports

edited by

MICHAEL KENNEDY

VICTOR LAING



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PREFACE

This volume has its origins in an approach made in January 2008 by Dr Michael Kennedy to the Director of Military Archives, Commandant Victor Laing, that the annual reports of the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces for the Second World War, known as 'The Emergency' in neutral Ireland which are held in Military Archives at Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, should be published as an edited volume by the Irish Manuscripts Commission (IMC) in a collaborative venture between IMC and Military Archives.

Commandant Laing welcomed the proposal. A subsequent meeting between the Chairman of IMC Dr James McGuire, Dr Kennedy and Commandant Laing in March 2008 examined how Military Archives and IMC might co-operate in a strategic alliance to publish the Chief of Staff's reports from 1940 to 1949, subject to the approval of IMC and the Defence Forces.

The project, with its scope now expanded to encompass annual reports from 1940 to 1949, was approved by IMC at its May 2008 meeting. Concurrently Commandant Laing obtained the approval of the Defence Forces to proceed with the project.

The project then proceeded as a joint venture between IMC and the Irish Military Archives with Dr Kennedy and Commandant Laing as joint editors.

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An artillery unit coming off inspection parade, October 1941 (Military Archives).

INTRODUCTION

1. OVERVIEW: THE ROLE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF AND THE PURPOSE OF THE 'GENERAL REPORT ON THE DEFENCE FORCES'

The Chief of Staff is the professional head of the Defence Forces. His role is to manage the Defence Forces and to ensure the effectiveness of the military measures in place for the security of Ireland in accordance with national defence policy.¹ He has operational control over the Defence Forces as authorised by the Minister for Defence, to whom he is chief military advisor.

From 1940 to 1949 two men held the post of Chief of Staff. Lieutenant General Daniel (Dan) McKenna was Chief of Staff from January 1940 to January 1949.² McKenna was succeeded by Major General William A. (Liam) Archer, who was Chief of Staff from January 1949 to January 1952.³

The Chief of Staff's 'General Report on the Defence Forces' was a limited circulation document issued in numbered copies that provided the Minister for Defence, as well as certain senior officers and the Secretary of the Department of Defence, with a comprehensive annual review of the activities of the Defence Forces at operational level. The originals of the ten reports reproduced below are held at Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin. They outline the administration, structure, equipment and training of the Defence Forces from May 1940

- 1 For further information on the development of the Defence Forces and Irish defence policy see Eunan O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland* (Oxford, 1999), *The Irish Sword*, vol. xix (The Emergency), in particular Donal O'Carroll, 'The Emergency Army', pp 19–46 and Colm Mangan 'Plans and Operations', pp 47–56, and John Duggan, *A History of the Irish Army* (Dublin, 1989).
- 2 Lieutenant General Daniel McKenna (1893–1975), born in Maghera, Derry; Second Derry Battalion, Irish Volunteers; Deputy OC, 2nd Northern Division IRA; Adjutant of Waterford and Claremorris Commands (1922–24); Adjutant, Southern Command (1924–30); Deputy QMG (1930–3); Director, Cavalry Corps, 1933–6; Deputy Quartermaster General (1936–9); Chief of Staff (1940–9); promoted to Lieutenant General from Major General in 1941; GOC designate of the Defence Forces (1941–6).
- 3 Major General Liam Archer (1892–1969); born in Dublin, joined the Irish Volunteers in 1913; fought in Dublin during the Easter Rising; active in the IRA from 1916 to 1921 in intelligence and engineering; joined the National Army in 1922; Director, Signals Corps (1923–9); in charge of the organisation of the Volunteer Reserve Force and OTC (1929–31); Chief Staff Officer, Military Intelligence (1932–41), Assistant Chief of Staff (1941–9), Chief of Staff (31 January 1949–January 1952). Major Pryce, the British Military Attaché in Dublin from 1940 to 1941 wrote of Archer: 'he is a widower with three children and a teetotaler. He seems to me to be straightforward, with a clear character. He is, of course proud of having "served" since 1916, and often refers to having been "in the barricades".' (The National Archives, Kew, London (hereafter TNA) WO 106/6043, Pryce to H.D.3, 13 June 1940). Pryce also referred to Archer's cordial nature and his interest in discussing international military strategy. A postwar MI5 minute referred also to Archer as 'an ardent Republican', though also anxious to maintain good security relations with Britain (TNA KV 4/281, minute by Guy Liddell, 24 Mar. 1952).

to March 1949.⁴ Their content describes in detail the development of the Defence Forces as a functioning military force over a critical nine-year period in the mid-twentieth century where global war prevailed and the threat of renewed international conflict was never distant.

In preparing these reports for publication the editors have left the text of the originals untouched except to correct obvious errors in spelling and to replace underlining with italics. For clarity, the page numbering in the table of contents for each report has been updated to show the page numbers in this edition and not the originals.

2. MILITARY NEUTRALITY, IRISH DEFENCE POLICY AND THREATS TO THE STATE

Ireland adopted a policy of military neutrality in 1922. Newly independent from Britain, Dublin did not want Ireland to be drawn into Britain's wars. Irish involvement in any future conflict in which British interests were concerned could re-ignite civil war in Ireland. Neutrality should have strengthened the case for the creation of a viable armed force to ensure the defence of Ireland's international sovereignty. Instead, following demobilisation after the civil war of 1922 and 1923 and the army mutiny of 1924, the state's defence establishment was progressively run down through the 1920s and the 1930s. As the likelihood of war in Europe grew in the 1930s the mere aspiration to neutrality could not in the eyes of the General Staff shield Ireland from threats to its security and independence. Of paramount concern to McKenna and Archer was the Defence Forces' ability, after many years of reduced defence spending and neglect, to undertake the defence of independent Ireland against internal and external threats.

From 1940 to 1949 those threats were real. Through the Second World War the initial low-level internal threat from subversives, in particular the Irish Republican Army (IRA), was emasculated through harsh domestic security policies introduced by the Minister for Justice. That left the Defence Forces to deal with the far greater external threat to Ireland. From 1940 to 1945 the Axis and the Allies both considered invading Ireland. This threat was at its height during the summer of 1940 when German and British invasions appeared imminent. Ireland's independence was at stake and, fearing Britain's ultimate intentions as well as making clear Ireland's determination to stand firm against a German invasion, Taoiseach Eamon de Valera told the British Representative to Ireland, Sir John Maffey, that 'the country was in good heart ... any attempt to interfere with its independence would stir the whole population to anger ... they would fight to the death.'⁵ As Irish covert military liaison with the Allies developed after the summer of 1940,⁶ and after Germany invaded Russia in June 1941 and the United States entered the war the following December, the likelihood of invasion diminished, though it never totally receded.

McKenna planned to counter an invasion of Ireland, from whatever quarter it came, with all the resources at his disposal. Yet his annual reports left Minister for Defence Oscar Traynor⁷

4 Though McKenna's predecessor Major General Michael Brennan submitted regular reports to the Minister for Defence on aspects of the military preparedness of the Defence Forces, the first specific comprehensive report, covering May to September 1940, titled a 'General Report on the Expansion, Organisation, Training, Equipment and Defensive Preparations of the Army' was submitted by McKenna on 24 October 1940.

5 TNA WO 32/1533, Maffey to Machtig (Secret), 27 July 1940.

6 For further details see Catriona Crowe et al, *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, vol. vi, 1939–41 (Dublin, 2008) (hereafter, DIFP VI).

7 Oscar Traynor TD (1886–1963), member of the Irish Volunteers; took part in the 1916 Rising; Brigadier of the Dublin Brigade of the IRA during the Anglo-Irish War; opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty

with no illusions about Ireland's weak military position. The Defence Forces grew to 40,000 men by 1941, but they lacked modern and heavy weapons. They stood little chance against a determined invader. Rarely did McKenna explicitly state who that invader might ultimately be. Defence plans were drawn up to counter both British and German attacks. However in his report for 1942 to 1943 McKenna explained that 'while the likelihood of a sudden surprise invasion has been more remote than during the periods dealt with in my previous reports', Ireland occupied 'a position of such strategic importance in regard to Great Britain, to the Continent of Europe and to the Atlantic, that an attack on this country by the Axis Powers remains a constant danger'.⁸ An attack from the Allies on the other hand was deemed 'unlikely' but still possible if the Allies were unable to win the Battle of the Atlantic.⁹ Though McKenna stated later that 'our defence plans have still to be based on the assumption that we may have to deal with an attack by either side', in effect the growing level of covert military and intelligence co-operation between Ireland and the Allies by 1943 suggested that neutral Ireland's ultimate enemy was, in McKenna's mind at least, now the Axis, and not, as he had held in previous reports, both the Axis and the Allies.¹⁰

Despite growing Irish co-operation with the Allies, the threat of an Allied invasion of Ireland remained. On 21 February 1944 in the run up to Operation Overlord in June 1944 the American Minister to Ireland, David Gray, fearing a security leak from Dublin that would compromise the invasion of Europe, requested that Ireland expel Axis diplomatic representatives from the country. Known as the 'American Note' incident, Gray's actions initiated the last invasion scare of the war for Ireland. Troops were mobilised and sent to locations in the field to counter the expected American invasion force as it crossed the border from Northern Ireland. The crisis passed and Operation Overlord was successfully launched on 6 June 1944, after Overlord commander, General Dwight Eisenhower, had consulted weather reports secretly provided by neutral Ireland.¹¹

From 1946 to 1949, the early years of the Cold War, it was possible that Ireland, though still neutral, would be drawn into a conflict between East and West. McKenna and Archer ensured that the Defence Forces were ready to meet these threats in the most effective manner possible with the limited resources at their disposal. Postwar defence policy was the subject of a major study: the August 1944 'Memorandum on the Defence Forces'.¹² It envisaged the creation of a large well-equipped regular force of close to 100,000 men. National Service was considered by the government and dropped in favour of a volunteer reserve (the F.C.Á., now the Reserve Defence Force). Ultimately the 1944 statement of requirements for a viable national defence strategy was shelved and replaced by considerations of what was financially manageable rather than strategically necessary. Instead of expansion, from 1946 to 1948 McKenna managed the demobilisation of his wartime forces to agreed peacetime strengths and though force levels would continue to be reduced as the Defence Forces' budget was progressively cut through the

7 *contd.* and fought on the anti-Treaty side in Wicklow during the Civil War; Republican TD for Dublin North (1925–7); founder member of Fianna Fáil in 1926; Fianna Fáil TD for Dublin North (1932–7) and Dublin North East (1937–61); Minister for Posts and Telegraphs (1936–40); Minister for Defence (September 1939–1948 and 1951–54); Minister for Justice (1957–61).

8 GRDF 1942–3, see below p. 181.

9 *Ibid.*, see below p. 181.

10 *Ibid.*, see below p. 196. For further details on this co-operation see Michael Kennedy, *Guarding Neutral Ireland. The Coast Watching Service and Military Intelligence 1939–1945* (Dublin, 2008) and Eunan O'Halpin (ed.), *M15 and Ireland: the official history* (Dublin, 2002).

11 Kennedy, *Guarding Neutral Ireland*, pp 268–72.

12 Copies of this document can be consulted at Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin.

late 1940s, he began, where possible, to modernise and restructure specific elements of the Defence Forces and to improve conditions for those serving.

McKenna's successor from 1949 to 1952, Major General Liam Archer, continued his predecessor's policy of restructuring the Defence Forces and carrying out piecemeal modernisation in a difficult financial environment. In his first report as Chief of Staff, the final report in this volume, he explained to Traynor's successor as Minister for Defence, Dr Thomas F. O'Higgins,¹³ that the Defence Forces were far below effective strength. Their equipment, much of which dated from the 1930s and had seen service through the Emergency, was worn out and required replacement. A small number of new fighter aircraft for the Air Corps¹⁴ and three corvettes for the Naval Service were purchased in the late 1940s, but despite these purchases, nothing took place like the expansion of the Defence Forces the 1944 memorandum had envisaged.¹⁵

Archer retired in 1952 to be succeeded by Major General William S. (Liam) Egan.¹⁶ The Defence Forces entered a period in the doldrums in the 1950s. McKenna had hoped that when the postwar Defence Forces were 'trained and equipped to modern standards, they would be prepared, within their small capacity, to undertake international obligations.'¹⁷ He had in mind early Irish admission to the United Nations. Ireland's postwar international isolation – the fruits of wartime neutrality, failure to gain admission to the United Nations in August 1946 and refusal to join NATO in 1949 – left the Defence Forces without an international role. It would not be until 1958, as a result of Ireland's eventual admission to the United Nations in 1955, and under Egan's successor, Major General P. A. Mulcahy,¹⁸ that the despatch of a group of officers to serve with the UNTSO and UNOGIL observer forces in the Middle East began those international obligations and opened a new chapter in the history of the Defence Forces. After UNTSO and UNOGIL Irish participation in United Nations peacekeeping would expand over the next half century starting with Defence Forces' service with ONUC in the Congo from 1960.¹⁹

- 13 Dr Thomas F. O'Higgins (1890–1953), Minister for Defence (1948–51), active in Kildare in the IRA during the War of Independence, one of the first recruits to the Irish Free State Army in 1922, resigned from the Defence Forces in 1929 to enter Dáil Éireann as Cumann na nGaedheal TD for North Dublin and later for Leix-Offaly and Cork City. A founder member of the Army Comrades Association (The Blueshirts). Brother of Kevin O'Higgins.
- 14 For further details on the history of the Air Corps and detailed descriptions of its aircraft see Joe Maxwell and P. J. Cummins, *The Irish Air Corps. An illustrated guide* (Antrim, 2009).
- 15 For further details on the history of the Irish Naval Service see Aidan McLvor, *A history of the Irish Naval Service* (Dublin, 1994).
- 16 Major General William S. (Liam) Egan (1895–1970), Irish Volunteers (1918–21); joined the Defence Forces in 1923; OC Cadet School, Military College (1930–40); Director of the Military College (1940), Quartermaster General (October 1940–October 1949) OC Western Command (1949); OC Eastern Command (1952); Chief of Staff (1952–5).
- 17 TNA WO 106/5900, Bucknall to Nye, 3 Jan. 1946.
- 18 Major General Patrick Anthony Mulcahy (1897–1987), younger brother of Fine Gael politician and Minister for Defence Richard Mulcahy, served in the British Army in the First World War and later in the Irish Volunteers. Commanded the North Tipperary flying column during the Anglo-Irish War. Joined the National Army in 1922, OC Artillery Corps (1924–26); OC Air Corps (1935–42); Director of Artillery (1942–8), OC Western Command (1949); QMG (1949–52); OC Eastern Command (1952–55); Chief of Staff (1955–60).
- 19 For further information on Irish participation in United Nations peacekeeping see Michael Kennedy and Deirdre MacMahon (eds), *Obligations and Responsibilities: Ireland and the United Nations 1955–2005* (Dublin, 2005), John Terence O'Neill and Nick Rees, *United Nations Peacekeeping in the post-Cold War era* (London, 2005) and Katsumi Ishizuka, *Ireland and International Peacekeeping Operations 1960–2000* (London, 2004).

3. THE DEFENCE FORCES, 1922–40

From 1922 to 1939 the Defence Forces in independent Ireland had, through a mixture of political will and strict financial control, been kept at a low level of effectiveness. At the end of the Civil War in 1923 the Defence Forces stood at just over 48,000 all ranks. Progressive reductions brought the Regular Army to 6,700 all ranks by 1932 and with reserve forces of 8,800 included the total strength of the Defence Forces was 15,500. In 1934, with the formation of the Volunteer Reserve, the paper strength of the Defence Forces increased to close to 21,000. This was equivalent to a force of four reinforced Brigades, each of the four military Commands into which Ireland was divided raising one Brigade.²⁰ However at no time was the necessary staff, officers or men available in the numbers required to lead these forces. Despite a growing awareness from the mid-1930s that conflict in Europe was likely, the Defence Forces remained seriously understrength and without essential equipment. The annual vote for defence spending declined from close to £4,000,000 in 1924–25 to £1,253,000 in 1933–34, rising only to £1,600,000 in 1937–38 and £1,995,684 in 1938–39. Annual savings of almost 10% were routinely required and expenditure on arms and equipment remained low.

In December 1937 it was estimated that to defend Ireland a force of three Divisions (48,000 troops) along with artillery, specialist forces, fixed defence troops, a twelve squadron air force and naval forces – a combined total of 100,976 men – was required. To equip this force required additional spending of £4,723,432. In reality by the late 1930s four reinforced Brigades, slightly more than a Division, was the strongest force the Defence Forces could hope to put into the field. The position worsened. By late 1938 two reinforced Brigades and a handful of anti-aircraft and garrison units were all that the Defence Forces could raise to defend Ireland against an anticipated invasion force of 50,000 troops backed up with naval support. These two reinforced Brigades were judged effective only to maintain internal order.

From 1937 increased yearly military expenditure was sanctioned, but it was too little too late. In the months after the Munich Crisis of September 1938 an expanded war establishment of 37,560 all ranks and the creation of a properly equipped two Brigade striking force was agreed. Equipment at a cost of £2,170,000 would be purchased from Britain and total defence expenditure of £5,011,383 was requested. Wrangling between the Department of Defence and the Department of Finance held up the orders for equipment. When they were eventually submitted in March 1939 there was no promise on the part of Britain that the orders could be fulfilled. Little had been delivered before the Second World War broke out in September 1939 and the bulk of the equipment ordered was never delivered. There was no success from other arms procurement ventures. A 1939 military mission to the United States to procure weapons and equipment failed as the United States War Department could not directly supply the required materials to Ireland. When agreement was reached to deal directly with approved United States firms the project collapsed completely for bureaucratic reasons. The construction of a small arms factory at Cullane, County Clare, stalled in September 1939 when Imperial Chemical Industries pulled out of the venture due to their heavy involvement in the British war effort.

The outbreak of the Second World War saw the Defence Forces mobilise a poorly equipped under-strength force. Their paper strength of 19,136 – approximately 7,600 Regulars, 4,300 Reservists and 7,200 Volunteers – was 30 per cent below the war establishment of 37,560 all

20 A Brigade, commanded by a Colonel, is a military unit of two to five Battalions – normally three in the Irish Defence Forces. It is a sub-component of a Division, though Brigades can be established to operate independently. Commands are areas of territory created for the purpose of military administration.

Chapter 1

GENERAL REPORT ON THE EXPANSION, ORGANISATION, TRAINING, EQUIPMENT AND DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS OF THE ARMY

during the period commencing

1st MAY, 1940

and ended

30th SEPTEMBER, 1940

(Copy No. 12)¹

ROINN COSANTA,

Oifig an Chinn Fhuirinne,

Geata na Pairce,

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH, N.W.5.

24, Deire Foghmuir, 1940

SECRET.

Minister for Defence.²

Sir,

*General Report on the Expansion, Organisation,
Training, Equipment and Defensive Preparations
of the Army during the period commencing
1st May, 1940, and ended 30th September, 1940.*

I have the honour to submit the following report:

1. INTRODUCTION.

Following a significant climax in the war situation in May, 1940, far-reaching decisions were taken to increase the effectiveness of The Defence Forces then standing at an approximate strength of 14,000. Expansion in personnel and equipment was undertaken, general mobilisation ordered and a re-organisation and re-groupment in troop dispositions effected. In the sphere of organisation and training, special attention had to be given to the development of new methods of attack and the possibility of their employment against this country. All these preparations involved a struggle against many deficiencies and difficulties. The measure of success attained is set out in this report.

¹ Each year's Chief of Staff's report was circulated through a series of numbered copies. The details of the distribution can be found at the end of each report with the exception of 1948-9.

² Oscar Traynor TD.

2. RECRUITMENT.

(a) General.

At the beginning of the period under review the strength of the Army was 13,346. The decision to expand the Army involved a revision and increase in War Establishments bringing our total requirements to approximately 42,000. The strength on the 30th September last was 37,310 which shows an increase of 23,000 over the strength on 1st May. This number had to be recruited inside 4 months, and it is hoped that the balance will be secured by the end of the year.

This expansion involved the finding of large numbers of officers, non-commissioned officers and specialists, a fact which added to the great difficulties facing the small Permanent Force. In spite of this, at the end of the period we had reached the strength of 1,832 officers and 4,867 non-commissioned officers which leaves us deficient of 443 officers and 2,827 non-commissioned officers. Against this deficiency we have 234 potential officers selected or undergoing training and a waiting list is available to meet practically our full Establishments when we are in a position to undertake further Courses. Regarding non-commissioned officers, Courses in progress in each Command, and each Corps Depot will eventually meet the deficiency. We are, however, faced with difficulties arising out of the question of exemptions from Permanent Service. At the end of the period under review 49 Officers, 25 non-commissioned officers and 506 Privates had been exempted and it is anticipated that this number will increase. The Officers shown exempted include 16 Reserve Officers who have not been called up. This is due to the fact that the Officers concerned could not be usefully employed and the future of these Officers is at present under consideration. The officers and non-commissioned officers have been transferred to the Reserve with their ranks and accordingly block vacancies in Establishments. It is suggested that we be permitted to hold exempted personnel as supernumerary to Establishments. This method would also assist in solving the question of replacement of casualties in the event of hostilities, a matter which has not been provided for in Establishments and which must be faced eventually.

Details as to progress in recruiting will be found in Appendices A1 and A2 and special Graph.³

(b) Physical Condition and Health.

- (i) Generally speaking, the recruits presenting themselves for enlistment are of an excellent type. The great majority are of splendid physique and intelligence and in every respect superior to the type of recruit we have been accustomed to in the regular Army for many years past. The high standard of intelligence and soldierly enthusiasm greatly simplifies the task of training.
- (ii) During the period under review the incidence of illness in all Units was very low having regard to the very intensive training carried out.
- (iii) Generally, the physical condition and health of the troops leave no cause for complaint.

3. ORGANISATION.

The expansion of the Forces necessitated re-organisation and the two Brigades then in existence were broken up and a Striking Force (a Brigade) was provided for each Command (a total of four). These Brigades are composed of all arms and are intended for employment as a striking

3 This graph has not been located.

force in each Command area. Further, they are so organised as to be easily moved to the assistance of another area should it be required.

The Brigades are further sub-divided into mobile columns of all arms located in strategic points in each Command area. Each column is a complete fighting unit capable of acting on its own or co-operating with others if required.

The formation of a Brigade in each Command absorbed most of the infantry battalions necessitating the raising of 13 rifle battalions for garrison duties. The recruiting for these battalions has been satisfactory and recruits in each Command training depot are sufficient to bring them up to Establishment. It is now, however, proposed to convert 9 of these Units into Infantry battalions to increase the strength of the striking Forces.

The Brigades on the whole are fairly well up to strength with the exception of the S.&T. Field Companies which are short of a number of drivers and a number of tradesmen in Engineer Units. Efforts are being made to have this remedied.

Within the last few weeks certain equipment has become available such as Bren Gun carriers⁴ and Armoured cars⁵ and it has been necessary to form new Units for their employment. The nucleus of these has been drawn from trained personnel and arrangements are being made to have them recruited up to Strength immediately. The Units formed are:—

- 2 Armoured Squadrons,
- 1 Bren Carrier Squadron,
- 2 Cyclist Squadrons.

2nd Line Units.

A scheme for the provision of 2nd Line Units has been evolved. This scheme is designed to cater for individuals who cannot come up for Permanent Service but who are desirous of receiving military training and who would make themselves available in case of an emergency. The units provided for consist of Rifle Battalions, Engineer Companies, Transport Companies, Ambulance Convoys and of Shore Companies for the Marine Service. Up to the present the recruiting for the Rifle battalions has been confined to old members of the Dublin Brigade IRA and this Unit is now actually over strength.

*Construction Corps.*⁶

A further scheme has been recently approved for the formation of a Construction Corps. This Corps will provide for young unmarried men who are unemployed. It is proposed to form

- 4 Correctly known as the 'Universal Carrier'; a lightly-armoured tracked vehicle built by Vickers-Armstrong and used for carrying personnel and equipment, in particular machine guns in support of infantry, on the battlefield.
- 5 A number of armoured cars were produced in Ireland during the Second World War by Thompsons of Carlow, Ford in Cork, Great Southern Railway Workshops in Dublin and at the Defence Forces Cavalry Workshops at the Curragh. See Karl Martin, *Irish Army Vehicles: transport and armour since 1922* (Dublin, 2002).
- 6 The formation of the Construction Corps was announced at a press conference at Government Buildings on 2 October 1940. Recruiting began immediately, though it was initially confined to the Dublin area. The Corps was a non-combatant arm of the Defence Forces which sought to recruit unemployed men, mainly labourers, between the ages of 18 and 25 into what was essentially a labour corps. Recruiting advertisements claimed that the Corps' 'work will be in the country in pleasant surroundings' (*Irish Times*, 3 October 1940). After serving in the Corps for one year it was anticipated that members would join the Regular Army.

them into battalions and after preliminary training to employ them on certain works under the auspices of a Government Department, or a local authority. An amount of time will be devoted to drill, physical and recreational training.

4. TRAINING AND COMBAT EFFICIENCY.

Considerable progress has been made in the matter of training. For the first time, we have had the advantage of continuous field training by Brigade units at full strength in men and with reasonably full equipment. It has not, so far, been feasible to exercise the Brigades as entities owing to the fact that unit and column training had to be concentrated on. In tactical exercises hostile elements were simulated in most instances so as to obtain the utmost value from such exercises. While the quality of our officers has been much improved, this improvement was not effected in time to enable full benefit to be obtained from the Summer's training. Nevertheless, the combat efficiency of all units has improved at a remarkable rate. The improvements still to be effected are considerable but by no means impossible, given time and opportunity.

The training of recent months has been directed with the primary objective of ensuring the earliest possible intervention of our field troops against any hostile act against our territory. For this purpose, mobile columns of all arms have been organized in four Command areas and frequently exercised in quick movement to areas likely to be the scene of enemy action, co-operation with the local covering forces and counter action against the hostile elements. As an essential supplement to these activities troops have been located in areas likely to be threatened initially. Apart from providing mobile columns these troops have been engaged in acting as covering forces and have done considerable work in the siting of defensive positions, demolitions and road blocks. In particular, a very detailed system of blocks and demolitions have been worked out in coastal areas and all ranks have been given opportunities of obtaining a precise knowledge of the terrain in which they would operate initially in the event of an invasion and their counter-action against possible enemy tactics has been frequently rehearsed.

Concurrently with these training activities, the training of the Rifle Battalions and other garrison troops has been proceeding. In the main, these have been devoted to basic training, internal security exercises and practices in dealing with landings of air-borne hostile troops. In this connection, special attention both in the way of the precautionary location of units and practice in action against assumed enemy landings has been given to areas offering suitable seaplane landings accommodation such as the Shannon estuary, Lough Ree, Lough Derg, etc.⁷ In the more recent of these exercises, the L.S.F.⁸ organisation has also been practised in their co-operative functions.

The general training position may be summarised under two main heads:

- (a) Training of Units in the principles of initial counter-action against invasion.
- (b) Training of individuals to fulfil efficiently their respective functions.

Under Head (a) the training of the Brigade troops has been extremely intensive. The necessary preparatory plans and exercise in the execution thereof by these troops have been formulated and practised to such an extent that the standard of training in this aspect of counter

7 Both lakes are on the River Shannon.

8 On 28 May 1940 the Local Security Force was established as an auxiliary police force under Garda control. On 22 June 1940 the L.S.F. was divided into 'A' Group, which on 3 January 1941 was placed under military control to become the L.D.F. (Local Defence Force). 'B' Group remained under Garda control. 'A' Group strength on 6 September 1940 was 93,681.

measures against invasion is very satisfactory and as perfect as the means at our disposal will allow. The extreme importance of the time factor in countering invasion has especially been appreciated in all preparatory measures and in the training exercises carried out by these troops so much so that it may be safely stated that the maximum speed in execution of counter action has now been attained by our Brigade troops. The rifle battalions and other garrison troops are, of course, primarily designed for internal security duties but they have a secondary function as reinforcements for the Brigade troops.

There is, necessarily, some want of uniformity in the training standard of these troops owing to their newly organised status and large proportion of recruits. They are, however, capable of fulfilling this primary function and given the opportunity of further field training, most of them will also attain fair efficiency as Brigade reinforcements.

Under Head (b) the standard is good in the Brigade units except that a certain lack of initiative and resourcefulness has been noticed in the leadership of sub-units when acting independently. The importance of eradicating this defect has been brought home to Commanding Officers. As it is not an inherent fault but one due to developments suddenly imposing greater responsibilities on junior leaders its early disappearance is confidently expected. Apart from the Brigade troops, the individual training standard which it has so far been generally possible to attain in units such as the rifle battalion would not at the moment allow them to be treated as first class field troops. As the personnel composing these units is essentially quite good material it is only a question of the availability of further instructional time as already mentioned above to bring them to the required standard.

The Winter period will be availed of to the fullest extent:—

- (i) To perfect the training of inexperienced Officers (See Appendix B).⁹
- (ii) To fit N.C.Os. and men to take their place in their Units.

5. MORALE AND DISCIPLINE.

On the whole, the morale of the Forces may be regarded as being good, and having regard to the great increase in strength, there has been no undue increase in crime. In all, 28 cases have arisen where members of the Forces have been charged and convicted by the Civil Courts. The charges principally were connected with Larceny. The Head Chaplain¹⁰ has carried out visitations to the various Posts in the different Command areas and has consulted with the various local officiating Clergymen regarding the discipline and general behaviour of troops, particularly in relation to the civil population. He is happy to report that in all cases he has been advised that the standard of discipline, conduct and bearing of the troops has been very high and gives cause for much satisfaction.

Reference must be made here to the difficulties regarding the maintenance among the troops appearing in public of a standard pattern of dress. Up to now, this has been found difficult owing to the general circumstances of procuring the required quantities of clothing in the shortest possible time and the necessity for using up all existing stocks of various patterns. During this interim period it was unavoidable that troops walking in public could be seen in various types of dress, but a big improvement in this respect should show itself from this forward. The matter has been the subject of much attention and every endeavour is being made to improve it.

⁹ See pp 18–19.

¹⁰ The Reverend Richard J. Casey.

6. ADMINISTRATION.

With the advent of large numbers of recruits and the formation of many new units of the various Corps and Services, a big strain has been placed on Unit administration. Having regard to all the circumstances, it can be stated that it has stood the strain well. The decentralisation of Records and the wider powers given to Command O/Cs has helped in this direction, and improvements may be expected, as Officers, many of whom are new to administrative responsibility, gain in experience.¹¹

7. DEFENCE PLANS.

During the period a special Plans and Operations Branch has been formed as a part of the General Staff and has been charged with the preparation of Defensive Plans.

The points at which danger might be anticipated were estimated, certain additional posts were established and dispositions of mobile troops were re-arranged to counter possible enemy action.

The disposition of troops (See Special Map)¹² in each Command has been carefully examined to ensure that they are placed or capable of being rapidly placed where they are likely to be most needed. Provision has been made for the early movement of reinforcements and for all possible security measures.

The Field Troops in the Curragh Command are not yet in their determined positions but this will be rectified in the next week or two. They will be moved further inland as accommodation becomes available. Garrison Units are trained to relieve them.

Latterly, the actions of the L.S.F. have been co-ordinated with military requirements and all Commands have now carried out numbers of exercises incorporating the L.S.F. and Gardaí in the schemes of defensive preparations, especially in regard to L.S.F. responsibilities in the pre-arranged system of zones for blocks and demolitions.¹³

8. INTELLIGENCE.

A special Secret report under this head is being submitted.¹⁴

9. MARINE SERVICE.

A detailed outline in regard to this new Service is given in Appendix C.¹⁵

10. AIR DEFENCE.

(a) Aircraft available in the Army is divided into two categories, i.e., Service and Training.

The Service aircraft number 22 and details are as follows:—

11 The Command OCs were Eastern Command: Col. Liam Hoolan (1940–6); Curragh Command: Col. Seamus O’Higgins (Jan.–Aug. 1940), Col T. J. McNally (1940–4); Southern Command: Col. M. J. Costello (1939–41); Col. James Hanrahan (1941–6); Western Command: Maj.-General Joseph A. Sweeney (1939–40); Col. Felix McCorley (1940–6).

12 Not located.

13 In June 1940 An Garda Síochána was given a combat role in case of invasion. Members were to form small units equipped with rifles to offer localized resistance against invading forces.

14 Not located.

15 See pp 20–1.

(i) *Fighters*

	<i>Serviceable</i>	<i>Unserviceable</i>
Gladiators ¹⁶	3	1

(ii) *Army Co-Operation*

	<i>Serviceable</i>	<i>Unserviceable</i>
Lysanders ¹⁷	5	1

(iii) *Reconnaissance and Bombing*

	<i>Serviceable</i>	<i>Unserviceable</i>
Ansons ¹⁸	6	3
Walrus ¹⁹	2	1

All above aircraft, except 4 Ansons, are stationed at Baldonnel²⁰ and are available for taking part in the defence of Dublin. The remaining four Ansons are stationed at Rineanna²¹ and are available for use when required.

The training Aircraft number 32 and details are as follows:

	<i>Serviceable</i>	<i>Unserviceable</i>
Dragon ²²	1	–
Cadets ²³	4	1
Magister ²⁴	10	5
636 ²⁵	1	1
621 ²⁶	1	2
Hind ²⁷	1	5 ²⁸

All the above are at Baldonnel with the exception of 3 Cadets at Rineanna.

The Unserviceable Machines in both Categories are awaiting spares which, to date, have not been delivered.

- 16 Gloster Gladiator, a British-built single-seat biplane fighter armed with .303" machine guns. Introduced from 1937, by 1940 the aircraft was not suitable for active service in north-west Europe, though it later saw active service in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In reality the aircraft type was obsolete and outclassed by 1938 when it entered Air Corps service. Eight Gladiators on order in 1939 were not delivered to the Air Corps.
- 17 Westland Lysander, an army co-operation and liaison aircraft capable of operating from short unprepared airstrips. The Lysander was in 1940 considered an up-to-date aircraft.
- 18 Avro Anson, a twin-engined maritime reconnaissance and light bomber which was obsolete by 1939.
- 19 Supermarine Walrus, a single-engine amphibious biplane maritime reconnaissance aircraft.
- 20 The principal Air Corps base, situated to the south-west of Dublin city.
- 21 The original name given to Shannon Airport. Through the second world war it was planned that Rineanna would become a combined seaplane and landplane base. The war saw the demise of the seaplane and only the landward portion of the airport was eventually completed.
- 22 De Havilland DH84 Dragon. A 6 to 10 seater passenger aircraft, though it was used by the Air Corps for target-towing.
- 23 Avro 631 Cadet, a single-engined biplane trainer, seven of which entered Air Corps service in 1932.
- 24 Miles Magister, a modern two-seat monoplane basic trainer.
- 25 Avro 636, a single-seat fighter trainer, four of which entered Air Corps service in 1935.
- 26 Avro 621, a two-seat basic trainer which entered Air Corps service in 1933.
- 27 Hawker Hind, an obsolete light bomber/trainer with a crew of two. The Air Corps machines were ex-RAF.
- 28 By September 1940 only three unserviceable Hinds remained with the Air Corps.

- (b) It should be noted that the Gladiator aircraft are now outclassed by the Fighters of the present belligerents. This type of aeroplane is, however, being used daily in the East against Italian aircraft and in the British Fleet Air Arm as a converted sea-fighter. The remaining service aircraft are fitted with armament for their own defence only.
- (c) Arrangements have been made at all Barracks and Posts for ground defence against air attack as far as available equipment will permit. The small number of A.A. guns and searchlights are concentrated for the defence of Dublin.²⁹

11. SUPPLY AND ACCOMMODATION.

(i) *Food:*

Food supplies have been satisfactory. In a few instances, however, it has been found necessary to provide alternatives owing to the difficulty in obtaining fresh milk and certain vegetables.

A stock of non-perishable foodstuffs, equal to three months' requirements, is held in the principal Barracks throughout the Commands. Tea is an exception, in which case, only a month's supply is available. The Department of Supplies has the matter in hands. Iron rations in the form of tinned meat, biscuits, stewed meat and vegetables, have been accumulated to the extent of 30 days' requirements of Brigade Troops.

(ii) *Cooking:*

Training of Cooks and improvement in Cookhouse management is proceeding. The elimination of waste and serving of good and varied meals are having constant attention.

During the period steps were taken to mechanise 70 horse-drawn Field Kitchens to accompany troops in the field. This work was undertaken by the Great Southern Railway, Inchicore, and 42 vehicles have been mechanised to date. Ninety-eight Portable Field Cookers have been delivered from the War Office against an Order for 158.

(iii) *Clothing:*

Great difficulty was experienced up to quite recently in meeting the requirements of enlisted personnel. At present there is a scarcity of Greatcoats, Pullovers, Gloves, Kit Bags, Singlets and Fatigue Suits, but this is being gradually overcome. Now that all available mills and factories are reaching full capacity production, it is expected that the immediate requirements of the Army will have been met by the end of October or early in November.

In connection with the other items, such as Ground Sheets and Web Equipment, we are depending on deliveries from England. The material for Ground Sheets is slow in delivery. An instalment of 5,000 sets of Web Equipment has come to hand from the War Office in the last few days and the balance of the 25,000 sets is promised in monthly deliveries of 500 sets.³⁰

Appendix D1 shows the position in regard to the items required to complete clothing of personnel in the Commands.³¹

29 For further details see Michael Kennedy, *Guarding Neutral Ireland* (Dublin, 2008), pp 162–99.

30 The Defence Forces switched from 1908 pattern webbing to 1937 pattern in 1938.

31 See pp 22–3.

(iv) *Armament:*(a) *Rifles.*

There are sufficient Service Rifles³² to equip each man on permanent service so armed, apart from 2,300 made available for L.S.F. training.

NOTE—20,000 rifles were received on the 21st instant from the United States³³ and there are 10,000 on order from the British War Office.

(b) *Heavy Machine Guns.*

There is sufficient number of these guns to meet requirements on present Establishments.

(c) *General.*

Appendix D2³⁴ shows the position in regard to stocks held and outstanding orders in respect of the principal items of Armaments.

The following is a summary of some of the principal works undertaken during the period:—

- (a) The examination, repair and removal of cut-offs from 8,400 Mk. I^{xxx} Lee Enfield Rifles.³⁵
- (b) The welding of new registers to the breech end of 205 Lewis Gun Barrels.³⁶
- (c) The construction of four A.A. Mountings for .303" machine guns for use on patrol vessels,
- (d) The construction of three surface target mountings for 20mm Madsen Guns³⁷ for use on Motor Torpedo Boats.
- (e) The manufacture of 420 Surveillance Test windows required for inspection of cordite stocks held by Coast Defence Artillery Units (5,500 of these windows have still to be manufactured).
- (f) The assembly of two 20mm Madsen guns from spare parts purchased for maintenance purposes.
- (g) Army stocks and surrendered arms stocks were overhauled and the following weapons put into commission: —
 - 9 Bergmann Machine Guns³⁸
 - 295 Mauser Pistols³⁹
 - 698 Winchester Shot Guns

32 The standard-issue Defence Forces rifle was the .303" Short Magazine Lee Enfield. It is considered one of the best rifles ever manufactured, with widespread international use.

33 These .300" Springfield rifles were ultimately of little value to the Defence Forces and were mainly for L.D.F. use.

34 See pp 24–5.

35 Bolt action magazine-fed repeating rifle first introduced in 1907.

36 The Lewis Gun was an American-designed light machine gun which, though obsolete by 1939, was rugged, reliable and accurate and saw service internationally from the First World War to the Korean War. It was replaced in Defence Forces service by the Bren gun.

37 A Danish manufactured anti-aircraft gun which entered service in the 1930s and which had both land and naval variations.

38 The German manufactured 9mm MP18.1, the first sub-machine gun used in combat, was introduced by the German army in 1918. Produced in Germany and later Switzerland until the 1920s the weapon saw service internationally to the end of the Second World War.

39 Mauser 9mm C96, a semi-automatic pistol of German manufacture.

347 Pistols Webley, .32⁴⁰

151 Assorted revolvers from Surrendered Arms

1,301 12 Bore Shot Guns⁴¹

- (h) The complete stripping and overhaul of six 3.7" A.A. equipments (No Officer or Artificer had any experience of these guns prior to delivery).⁴²
- (i) The supervision of the manufacture in the Great Southern Railway Works of the following equipment:—
 - 260 Vickers A.A. Tripods.⁴³
 - 456 Lewis A.A. Tripods.
 - 8 Armoured Cars, Improvised.⁴⁴
 - 14 Armoured Cars, Improvised (Messrs. Thompson & Sons, Carlow).
 - Mechanisation of 8 4.5" Howitzer Carriages.⁴⁵
 - Mechanisation of 8 18-Pdr. Mk. IV. Carriages.
- (j) The manufacture of dummy drill .303" Cartridges.
- (k) The supervision of the manufacture of marine mines (At Port and Docks Board and Great Southern Railway).

(v) *Ammunition:*

Appendices D3⁴⁶ and D4⁴⁷ show the position in regard to stocks and outstanding orders of ammunition.

(vi) *Petrol:*

Appendix D5⁴⁸ herewith shows the storage capacity in the Army. This has been kept up to a high level. Stocks of petrol in the country as a whole on the 30th September, 1940, were 5,300,000 gallons, a fall of 2¼ million since the previous month. This quantity, if maintained, should, however, be ample for the Army and essential civilian needs.

(vii) *Transport:*

The transport position is set out in Appendix D6.⁴⁹

While the deficiencies look rather serious, the balance of the vehicles required will have to be made up when the need arises by impressment. This is a very difficult problem but is receiving attention at the present time.

40 The Webley was the standard issue British armed forces service pistol from 1887 to 1963. A variant was designed for the Royal Irish Constabulary.

41 The 'Bore' or 'Gauge' of a firearm is the unit of measurement of the diameter of the barrel. '12 Bore' is equivalent to 18.53 mm or .729 inches.

42 The Vickers 3.7" anti-aircraft gun was developed in 1937 and was the standard British heavy anti-aircraft gun of the Second World War. It could fire ten rounds a minute to a ceiling of 25,000 feet, though its effective ceiling was closer to 15,000 feet.

43 Anti-aircraft mountings for the Vickers medium machine gun.

44 These vehicles and the fourteen below were constructed using second-hand lorry chassis, boilerplate and other locally-sourced components.

45 In this instance 'mechanisation' refers to the replacement of wooden wheels with pneumatic tyres and towing gear.

46 See pp 25–6.

47 See pp 27–8.

48 See p 29.

49 See p 29.

As far as possible, the lorries available have been placed at the disposal of the Mobile Columns.

(viii) *Accommodation:*

The accommodation of troops has been arranged by the following methods:–

- (a) Increasing the capacity of each permanent Barrack.
- (b) The acquisition of civilian premises by agreement.
- (c) The erection of huts as additional accommodation at some of the Barracks and buildings taken over.
- (d) The erection of huts on hired lands where no suitable government property is available.

The arrangements at (a) necessarily lead to a certain amount of congestion, but this is steadily being decreased by the acquisition of hired premises. In the latter case, however, we are restricted in so far as we must endeavour to obtain accommodation with the minimum inconvenience to the civilian population.

Up to date, 12 vacant military barracks have been re-occupied, 80 civilian properties have been taken over, 287 huts constructed and in course of erection and sanction for an additional 50 huts has been sought. In addition, a large number of married quarters (Officers and Other Ranks) were taken over for the use of troops generally.

The problem of finding adequate storage and garage accommodation is a serious one and will be tackled as soon as the more important one of dealing with accommodation for troops has been solved.

The accommodation for internal recreation in many areas is limited, owing to the difficulty of obtaining adequate facilities. The position is, however, constantly under review, and according as suitable premises become available every effort is made to take them over.

Considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining sufficient supplies of bedding and essential items of furniture. Articles are being purchased wherever they can be obtained and the position is gradually becoming satisfactory. A serious shortage of pillow-cases and sheets still exists, but as financial sanction, which was withheld until recently, has now been obtained, the matter should rectify itself in the near future.

The position as regards Hospital Accommodation is explained in Appendix D7.⁵⁰

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

MAJOR GENERAL.⁵¹

(Domhnall MacCionnaith)

CHIEF OF STAFF.

24th October, 1940.

⁵⁰ See p. 30.

⁵¹ This document is unsigned.