

The Irish Army 1939-45

The Irish Army - Part I

1939

The Army consisted of:
6000 regulars
6000 reservists
16,000 volunteers

Outbreak of war on 2 September 1939

The army had a total of 19,783 men:
7494 Regular
5066 A and B Class Reservists
7223 Volunteers

British Estimate on 3 September 1939: Regular Irish Army

5 infantry battalions
1 field battery artillery
1 armoured car squadron
1 field company engineers
3 construction and maintenance companies engineers
3 signal companies
4 motor transport companies
1 horsed squadron
1 cyclist squadron
1 light artillery battery
1 anti-aircraft battery
1 tank squadron
21 armoured vehicles included:
13 Rolls Royce Armoured Cars
2 Swedish Landsverk L60 Light Tanks at the Cavalry School

July 1940 the army was 25,000 strong

May-June 1940 placed on war footing with:

7 battalions
an anti-aircraft brigade
2 companies engineers
12 rifle battalions were to be raised to bring strength to 40,000
Local Security Force was to be raised from Gardai

1st Armoured Squadron, Irish Cavalry Corps was at The Curragh

October 1940 four more regular army brigades were to be raised in Ireland

Armour consisted of:
13 Rolls Royce Light Armoured Cars
16 Medium Armoured Cars
Some armoured vehicles based on Ford and Dodge chassis
1st Division was located in Cork

2nd Division faced north
4th Field Company, Irish Corps of Engineers existed
11th Infantry Battalion was at Gormanster, County Meath on
maneuvers near Boyne in December 1940

By 1942 there were 250,000 men in the Irish Army:
1st, 3rd Brigades - Cork
2nd Brigade - Reserve
5th, 6th Brigades - Carlow
9th Battalion - Waterford
two reserved brigades at Trim and Kells

Outbreak of War 3 September 1939

1st, 2nd Reinforced Brigades - organized and mobilized but
each 30% understrength
Five garrison battalions were mobilized but at strength of
270 to 540 below establishment
None of the war establishment eight battalions had been
organized. All were understrength and many provided for
had not been organized.
Regular cadre consisted of five regular infantry battalions
and representatives of corps and service units:
1st Battalion - Galway (An Chéad Cath) - Irish-speaking
2nd, 5th Battalions - Dublin
3rd (the Bloods) Battalion - Curragh
4th Battalion - Cork
10th (Uisneach) Infantry Battalion was mobilized

24 May 1940 - Local Security Force was initiated under wing of
Gardai Siochana 2,249 Special Enlistments for one rifle battalion -
26th (Old IRA) and the engineering unit of Second Line Volun-
teers.

Two brigades broken up in 1940 and formed into all-arms strike
forces for each of four commands:

New units formed in 1940 for strike forces:
two armoured squadrons
one Bren carrier squadron
two cyclist squadrons

Thirteen rifles battalions needed to be raised for garrison duties.

1st Anti-Aircraft Battery was in Dublin in 1939
Other guns allotted to cadres in Cork and Limerick
Became AA Brigade and AA Battalion in June 1940

Air-Defence of Dublin in 1940 had:
Air Defence Command
AA Battalion - 3 medium and 1 light AA Btys
Searchlight Battalion - forming

After 1940 two divisions and three new brigades formed:
First (Thunderbolt) Division - South
Second (Spearhead) Division - North
Commands took over garrison, training, and LDF

Field Force took over brigades and divisions

To complete brigades and divisions the following units were formed:

- 2 divisional staffs
- 3 brigade staffs
- 3 motor squadrons, Cavalry Corps
- 4 field companies, Corps of Engineers
- 4 field companies, Signal Corps
- 3 field companies, Supply and Transport Corps
- 4 field artillery batteries, Artillery Corps
- 1 12-pounder battery, Artillery Corps
- 1 armoured squadron, Cavalry Corps
- 6 cyclist squadrons, Cavalry Corps

Order of Battle for new formations:

First Division: HQ Cork

- 1st Brigade: HQ Clonmel
10th, 13th, 21st Battalions
- 3rd Brigade: HQ Cork
4th, 19th, 31st Battalions

Second Division: HQ John's Road, Dublin

- 2nd Brigade: HQ Dublin
2nd, 5th, 11th Battalions
(C Company Gaelgoiri of the 11th Battalion gave up a large pool of officers)
- 4th Brigade: HQ Mullingar
6th, 8th, 20th Battalions
- 6th Brigade: HQ Dublin
7th, 18th, 22nd Battalions
(22nd subsumed the Regiment of Pearse and also produced many officers)

Each brigade had a Field Artillery Regiment (Seven new regiments including seven Anti-Tank Batteries were formed. Each brigade also had an engineer and signal company.

Also there were two independent brigades and three garrison battalions:

- 5th Brigade: HQ Curragh
3rd, 16th, 25th Battalions
- 8th Brigade: HQ Rineanna (Not fully formed)
1st, 23rd Battalions
Field Artillery Battery
- Garrison Battalions:
 - 14th Battalion: Dublin
 - 17th Battalion: Donegal
 - 24th Battalion: Curragh

Organization of the Irish Army on 30 July 1934:

The Regiment of Rifle - All regular 1st-5th Battalions
The Regiment of Oriel (Counties Louth, Meath, Monaghan)
The Regiment of Leinster (Counties of Kidare, Westwicklow,
Wexford, and Carlow)
The Regiment of Dublin (County and Borough of Dublin and
Eastwicklow)
The Regiment of Ormond (Ossory in 1935) (Counties of
Kilkenny, Waterford, and Tipperary)
The Regiment of Thomond (Counties of Limerick and Clare)
The Regiment of Connaught (Counties of Galway, Mayo and
Roscommon)
The Regiment of Breffni (Counties of Cavan, Longford,
Leitum, and Sligo)
The Regiment of Tírconnail (County of Donegal)
The Regiment of Uisneach (Counties of Lett, Offaly, and
Westmeath)
The Regiment of Pearse (6 November 1935) - OTC

Each regiment had a regular staff and two battalions of A &
B Reservists and two battalions of First Line
New Volunteer Force and two battalions of Second Line and a
depot battalion of Third Line.

Artillery Corps - Field Batteries numbered 5th to 28th
- Light Batteries numbered 2nd to 7th

Cavalry Corps - Permanent Force (1 armoured, 1 cyclist,
1 horsed squadrons)
- Added 4 armoured, 19 cyclist and 7 horsed
squadrons

The Irish Army 1939-45 - Part III

Ireland entered the 'Emergency' period with the following
630 officers, 1412 NCOs and 5452 privates
A & B Reserve - 194 officers, 544 NCOs, and 4328
privates
Volunteers - 237 officers, 557 NCOs, and 6429 privates

Maximum Strength never exceeded:

Two divisions
Two independent brigades
Large scale manouvers in 1942 on the Blackwater -
38,787 all ranks

Summer of 1940 - K.Lines, Curragh Camp
5th Brigade (3rd, 16th, 25th Battalions)

Cyclist Squadrons - Known as the "Piddling Panzers" -
September 1939
13 Rolls Royce Armoured Cars
12 Swedish Medium Landsverk Armoured Cars
4 Irish Armoured Cars on Leyland Terrier chassis

Late 1940, there were enough armoured cars for three Armoured Squadrons. The British later supplied Bren Carriers and Beaverettes

On 6 June 1940, 44,870 members of the Garda enrolled and formed on 22 June 1940 as:

- A - Auxiliary to assist the army proper
- B - Auxiliary to assist the police for police duties

The Irish Cavalry Corps 1939-45

Armoured Car Corps was constituted in August 1922 with HQ at Dublin.

Nine armoured car companies were created with a varying number of cars. Corps HQ moved to The Curragh in 1924 and organization reduced to a HQ and four companies

- One Company at The Curragh
- One Company at Dublin
- One Company in Cork
- One Company in Athlone

All companies moved to The Curragh in 1925. Vehicle strength after the move was:

- 13 Rolls Royce Armoured Cars
- 7 Peerless Armoured Cars
- 64 Lancia Armoured Cars

A Vickers Medium C Tank purchased in England in 1929 Depot (recruit training unit) and a school were added in 1931

- Separate companies were joined into the 1st Armoured Squadron also in 1931

1st Cyclist Squadron was added in 1933

Name changed to the Cavalry Corps in 1933 at the same time as 1st Cyclist Squadron added.

After 1933 reorganization the Cavalry Corps included the following:

- 1st Armoured Car Squadron
- 2nd Armoured Car Squadron (Cadre)
- 1st Cyclist Squadron
- 1st Horse Squadron
- 2nd Horse Squadron
- School and Workshops
- Volunteer Force (a reserve)
 - 19 Cyclist Squadrons
 - 6 Horse Squadrons
 - 5 sub-depots

Note - Horse Squadrons had all ranks mounted on bicycles

Four Leyland Terrier chassis were purchased in 1933

Turrets purchased from Landsverk of Sweden

Engines replaced by Ford engines

In 1936 eight Landsverk L180 Armoured Cars and two Landsverk L60A Light Tanks purchased. Four, six and eight-cylindered Ford Light Trucks with machine guns purchased starting in 1939. These vehicles were called 'Bug Chasers' and formed into motor squadrons as

reconnaissance units, one for each infantry brigade
1st Motor Squadron in 1939 included the following:

Four Reconnaissance Troops

Each troop had five cars and 15 motorcycles

Later, an armoured troop with four Landsverk and Rolls Royce
armored cars temporarily detached from
1st and 2nd Armoured Squadrons replaced one

reconnaissance troop in this and subsequent squadrons

Six more motor squadrons formed during WWII.

Lancias had been withdrawn from service by WWII.

2nd and 3rd Armoured Squadrons were formed in 1941. Armed with
Leyland, Landsverk, Rolls Royce, Dodge and Ford Armoured Cars

Carrier Squadron formed in WWII equipped with British Universal
Carriers Four more Landsverk L180s were ordered from Sweden but
fell into German hands.

4th Armoured Squadron formed in 1944

Equipped with 40 of several Marks of British Beaverette

Armoured Cars. Personnel came from disbanded Carrier
Squadron. 26 carriers turned over to infantry units.

All units listed above were formed into 1st Armoured Regiment in
1942. This was for large-scale maneuvers and not used after that.

After the war the Cavalry Establishment reduced to:

Headquarters

School and Workshops

one armoured car squadron

one motor squadron

Summary of Irish Marks for Armoured Cars and other vehicles:

Mark I - 1920 Rolls Royce called Whippets - 13 obtained

Mark II - 1936 Landsverk L180 - 8 purchased

Mark III - 1933 Mark II type hull mounted on Leyland chassis

Mark IV - 1938 Ford 1.5 ton

Mark V - 1938 Ford 122-in. - 14 built

Mark VI - 1938 MkV with Vickers M-G on Landsverk turret

Mark VII - 1939 Dodge 30 hp with Landsverk turret

Mark VIII - Mark VII with Vickers 50 cal M-G and .303 cal M-G

Mark IX - British Beaverette of various marks - 40 purchased

Peerless - 1921 7 from British - Armor used by other
vehicles after 1934

Lancia - 1922, 64 obtained - withdrawn from served by WWII

Crossley Tender - 1922, Open topped utility cars

Ford - 1934-39, Bug Chasers

Landsverk - L60A Tank Two purchased from Sweden

Vickers Medium D Tank - 1929, one purchased from Britain

Universal Carrier 26 purchased from England