



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

The Naval Forces of the Irish State, 1922- 1977.

by

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List of Abbreviations

ADM	Admiralty
ASDIC	Sonar
B.N.A.	British National Archives
CAB	Cabinet Secretary
CMB	Coastal motor boat
CMS	Coastal and Marine Service
CPA	Competent Port Authority
CO	Commanding officer
DEFE	Defence Ministry
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
FCA	Forsa Cosanta Áitíuil
FIN	Department of Finance
GHQ	General Headquarters
GPO	General Post Office
HMS	Her/His Majesty's Ship
HO	Home Office
I.M.A.	Irish Military Archives
IRA	Irish Republican Army
JUS	Department of Justice
LE	Long Eireannach (Irish Ship)
M-L	Motor launch
MTB	Motor torpedo boat
MRCC	Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre
N.A.I.	Irish National Archives
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NS	Naval Service
OCNS	Officer Commanding Naval Service
PREM	Prime Minister's Office
RAF	Royal Air Force
RN	Royal Navy
RNLI	Royal National Lifeboat Institution
TAOIS	Department of the Taoiseach
U.C.D.A.	University College Dublin Archives

A history of the naval forces of the Irish State: 1922-77

Introduction

This thesis seeks to examine the history of the naval forces of the Irish state since its independence and identify those factors, events and decisions which shaped their development while also providing an overview of the naval history of the state. Since the foundation of the Irish Free State and the civil war which marked its birth, the Irish state has established several naval forces, generally in times of grave national emergency but little of their history is known to the wider public. Although most are aware of the Irish Naval Service, which came into being after the Second World War, few know of its predecessors. The Coastwatching and Marine Service, later to become the Marine Service, provided seaward defence during the Emergency, the uniquely Irish euphemism for the Second World War. Its many constituent parts were responsible for the patrolling of Irish territorial waters, minesweeping operations and the surveillance of shipping around the Irish coast and those merchant ships which entered Irish ports. Its establishment in 1939 marked the end of a period during which the state maintained no naval forces. The Coastal and Marine Service, distinct from the aforementioned Coastwatching and Marine Service, represented the naval forces of the Irish Free State, towards the end and immediately after the Civil War; it was closely involved with the guerrilla phase of the conflict and the anti-smuggling patrols which followed. During the early months of the Civil war, a naval force was established to aid in the fighting, although it was a nameless and rather unofficial organisation, it conducted amphibious landings and provided vital assistance to the National Army in their campaign to recapture those areas beyond the control of the Provisional Government.

The structure of the thesis follows that of the rise and fall of the various services. Each chapter refers to a distinct period which differs from that which came prior and followed. The Civil War, inter-war years and the Emergency are clearly differentiated by the presence of the Coastal and Marine Service, no formal naval force and the Marine Service, respectively and thus provide the first three chapters of this work. The division of the history of the Naval Service into four chapters requires a brief explanation. The

service's foundation represented a time of great progress and rapid expansion and is covered by the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter details the stable maintenance of the service during the 1950s. The 1960s see a dramatic reversal in the fortunes of the service and this time of regression is detailed in the sixth chapter. The seventh and final chapter encompasses the 1970s when the service began to once again expand and prosper.

The naval history of the Irish state is an often forgotten element of Irish historiography and this lack of attention may have a historical basis. The land question has always been of far greater interest to the Irish, both prior to independence and since. As a largely rural entity, land was wealth and, to nationalists, it represented the Irish birthright. The sea was often seen as the domain of the British, an assumption aided by the fact that due to the overwhelming supremacy of the Royal Navy the sea was for all intents and purposes, British territory, and thus maritime issues were irrelevant to the struggle within Ireland. The focus was generally inward and this continued into the early years of independence.

When Irish military history is examined, the situation is little better, the naval history of the Irish state is a gravely under-researched area. As the staples of Irish military history generally encompass the War of Independence, Irish peacekeeping deployments on UN operations and the lives of Irishmen who achieved high ranks in foreign forces other than those of the United Kingdom, it can be seen that the field lies outside the traditional comfort zone of Irish history. Hanley's work of reference, *a guide to Irish military heritage*, has a relatively modern bibliography which clarifies this. There are seven works listed which deal with air crashes and the activities of the Air Corps in Ireland during the Emergency but only one with a maritime connection, and that studies the history of the Irish mercantile marine during the war. Naval history as a discipline in Ireland has been marked by a focus on Irishmen abroad. In fact, it would be fair to assume that more Irish people would recognise the name of Admiral William Brown, the Wexford-born founder of the Argentinean Navy than could name a vessel of the Irish Naval Service. Although there is a surplus of British writers detailing the exploits of the Royal Navy, few detail the existence of the South Irish Flotilla operating from the Treaty Ports in the inter-war

period. Indeed, Stephen Roskill's *Naval policy between the wars* makes no mention of their activities.

Secondary sources on the subject are quite limited and only two general surveys on the subject are extant. These are Aidan McIvor's *A history of the Irish Naval Service* and Tom McGinty's *The Irish Navy: A story of courage and tenacity*. In the former case, the book draws on the primary sources to a lesser degree but does not go into any real detail as to the intentions or motivations of the actors which shaped the services. It provides a broad outline of the history of the service which is sufficient for the non-academic audience. But the tendency to pass over events without in-depth analysis is not in keeping with the historical tradition. McGinty's book although making superior use of the primary source material is overly reliant on anecdotal evidence and it appears that the author consciously avoided publishing any information in the source documents which would reflect badly on the service. Instead a preference is shown to lay the blame for any such unpleasantness at the feet of nameless Department of Finance officials. In some cases, such information is simply omitted. This overtly admiring approach, while understandable with regards to the need to maintain cordial relations with the personnel he sought to interview, reduces his work's historical value. Aside from the aforementioned problems with sources within the Republic, both works suffer from their failure to examine the British sources which in many cases provide a useful alternative viewpoint and in some matters directly contradict the Irish sources. It also results in the understating of British influence on the development of the services. In the interests of portraying the service in a generally positive light, errors are ignored in favour of a sharp focus on positive developments and notable achievements.

General histories of the Irish military, such as Duggan's *A History of the Irish Army*, exhibit a certain unconscious bias against the Naval Service. As a history of the Irish Army, it does focus to a greater extent on the Army, which is to be expected as it represents the larger branch and the most dominant in terms of shaping policy. Comparisons can be usefully drawn between its treatment of the Air Corps and Naval Service. Duggan does devote more time to the Air Corps without providing anything

resembling a similar level of attention to the Naval Service. In fact, beyond the occasional line detailing purchases of new vessels in the post-war period, the Service is ignored completely. This could be ascribed to the fact that post-Emergency, any invasion threat was deemed to be airborne in nature and thus, army defence planning would focus on air forces rather than any form of naval defence.

O' Halpin's *Defending Ireland*, the most comprehensive work on Irish defence and security policy since 1922, allows the Naval Service more attention but only marginally with roughly half a page being devoted to its history from its foundation in 1946 to its near extinction in 1969. Maritime defence during the Emergency is granted a full three pages with a brief mention that seaborne operations were conducted by the National Army during the Civil War. This contrasts with the far more detailed and thorough approach taken to the Army's role in the defence of the state since independence.

Similar tendencies are apparent in Irish works on the Emergency period and the Civil War, authors simply ignore, or perhaps more fairly, are unaware of the nature of the state's naval forces. In those cases where the topic is briefly mentioned, an over-reliance on secondary sources, represented by both McIvor and McGinty's work, has led to the perpetuating of inaccuracies in the naval history of both periods. Fisk's *In time of war* is an exception, however as the possibility of British intervention in Ireland receded over the course of the war so too does Fisk's attention to naval matters within the state. As a result of this long-standing habit, the effectiveness of the state's navies in the Emergency period is generally over-stated, just as during the Civil War period, it is generally under-stated.

The naval elements of the Irish civil war are widely ignored in the mainstream histories and even in the books previously discussed, the information is often conflicting. As is to be expected with a period marked by confusion, propaganda and retrospective revisions of the historic narrative by both winners and losers, primary sources are often contradictory and incomplete. The impact of the Irish Free State's naval forces on the Civil War is largely un-noted despite its decisive nature. The extent of the Royal Navy's

involvement in supporting Free State troops and Irregular activities at sea has been ignored to this point. Harrington's *Kerry Landing* is an interesting case in point. Although ostensibly an account of the landing, its main focus is on the preparations prior to departure and their actions following the landing. The landing itself is only a minor element of the whole. However, it does represent the only extensive first hand account of a Civil War landing. For the remainder, the historian must rely on reports submitted to GHQ and preserved in the Mulcahy papers. It devotes the most attention to the naval aspect of the war by comparison with Younger and Hopkinson's works but falls short of identifying the scope of the contribution of Provisional Government seapower to the outcome of the conflict.

The period between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War II are usually dismissed as irrelevant as the state maintained no naval forces at the time. However, factors which influenced the development of the service can be seen throughout the period and they must be examined. During the inter-war period, the Free State's naval affairs were entwined with questions of sovereignty. Their approach to the naval question is an interesting reflection of their wider defence policy and foreign policy, and their uneasy relationship with British institutions. The concept of an independent Irish navy is closely linked with discussions on Imperial defence, Irish neutrality and independent defence.

During the Emergency period, a grave threat to national security was posed by the failings of the state in the naval sphere. Certainly, instances of Anglo-Irish cooperation are highlighted in the secondary sources. However, in keeping with tradition, they are largely in the realm of the Army and Air Corps. The level of cooperation with the Admiralty in naval and maritime initiatives is either understated or more commonly ignored. The Admiralty's efforts to sway the British Cabinet towards strong measures against the Irish state are counter-pointed by their willingness to extend assistance to the state in naval matters without the intense diplomatic wrangling which ensued when seeking British equipment for the Army and Air Corps.

Internal conflict and tensions within the Irish Naval Service immediately following its foundation have been airbrushed from the existing histories. The wider strategic situation which influenced the development of the service is also largely omitted in favour of a listing of chronological events. There has been a tendency to focus on the successes of the Service and any failings are ignored or mentioned as briefly as possible. The haphazard approach to procurement and erratic plans for long-term development, although uncomplimentary to the officials, involved do explain the stagnation of the service. There may also be a tendency for former personnel to avoid reflecting on years of neglect in favour of the more cheerful years of the 1970s when the service was reborn. Nonetheless, the 1950s and 1960s are worthy of study in that they represent a time when Ireland began to look outward and its naval service began to echo the mindset of the government. The difficulty in matching intent with action when faced with significant constraints on development is of interest when considering the future of the naval service in the 2000s.

The source materials for the study of the naval forces of the Irish state are spread over four main locations. The Irish Military Archives in Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, contain a wealth of material, ranging from the extremely informative to the mundane. There are half a dozen boxes of naval files dating from the Civil War to the mid-Sixties along with a wide selection of relevant materiel in the 2/Bar and 3/Bar series of files. The Emergency Defence Plans provide an insight into the concerns of Irish defence planners while the General Reports on the Army (later re-named Annual Reports on the Defence Forces) give an idea of the gradual evolution of naval policy or as may be seen, the occasional absence of a coherent naval policy. Naval files relating to the 1970s are relatively rare and do not appear to have been transferred in any quantity from Haulbowline.

The Irish National Archives contain primary sources in the records of the various governmental departments, Finance, Justice, Foreign Affairs and Office of the Taoiseach. These often vary wildly in importance with documents of significant interest buried amid a slew of random pieces of correspondence only vaguely related to the naval service. The

records are limited with regard to the Civil War but quite rich in documents from the Emergency period and the 1950-60s. Ireland's accession into the European Economic Community and its impact on the Service is surprisingly poorly served by the primary sources.

The British National Archives provide an alternative perspective on Irish naval development and contain correspondence which no longer exists in the Irish records. The Admiralty files unsurprisingly hold the lion's share of the records but the files of the Home Office, Dominions Office, Foreign Office and War Office are also of use. The maritime history researcher can also draw on the records of the Defence Ministry, Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet papers. These documents provide an interesting counter-point to the Irish records.

For the Civil War period, the Mulcahy Papers in the UCD archives are the most useful collection of sources on the period detailing the landings and the operations of the Coastal Patrol. It represents the largest collection of material relating to naval activities during the Civil War. The archives also hold the Frank Aiken papers, including those from his time as Co-ordinator of Defensive Measures during the Emergency period, including the minutes of the Council of Defence. Although the Military Archives are of greater use to those examining the Emergency period, the Aiken papers do provide the occasional piece of naval interest with regards to attacks on shipping in Irish waters and the activities of neutrals in Irish ports.

Aside from the British National Archives, which are very easy to navigate, naval files are of a low priority in the Irish archives and are often miscataloged and misplaced. Their condition is generally poor, particularly in the Military Archives. This is no doubt due to the infrequency with which they are requested.

All that aside, the sources paint a picture of services which constantly struggle to fulfill their duties despite the constant presence of various unchanging factors within the state which hamper their development. These include the relative poverty of the state with

regards to the resources required to fund a suitable navy, the lack of trained manpower which resulted from the lack of a strong maritime tradition, the sense of official apathy towards naval matters preventing any action beyond the bare minimum, the supply difficulties caused by the absence of a domestic ship-building industry suited to Irish naval requirements and the pre-eminence of the Army in steering Irish defence policy with a negative impact on the subordinate naval service.

In recent years, the state's attention has been drawn once more to the sea with a rise in attention to naval matters. With resources dwindling, many look to our maritime holdings as sources of wealth which need to be protected, a trend which can be seen worldwide as countries seek to stake their claims in previously inaccessible regions. The Irish population as a whole is more aware of the Naval Service although admittedly there remains a great deal of ignorance as to its role and size and it is not uncommon to encounter people who are entirely unaware of its existence.¹ However, with the economic importance of fishing continuing to decline, this surge in attention might prove to be an aberration and a return to their status as the forgotten sister of the defence forces is not impossible. The current position of the Naval Service is not without precedent as the reader shall discover.

1. 'Irish Naval Service' in *Jane's Navy International 2007* (London, 2007).

Chapter 1

The Irish Civil War (1922-1923)

The Civil War saw the establishment of the first independent Irish naval force. Initially established as little more than a coastguard service, it ballooned into a coastal navy of sorts as the war went on. The vessels of the service undertook sea patrols, conducted seaborne landings, ensured government forces were supplied and maintained communication between the various coastal garrisons and ports. These actions remain almost entirely unmentioned in the various works on the Civil War. Their importance in allowing the Provisional Government and later, the Free State to maintain its control in remote coastal areas in the face of sustained Irregular activity cannot be over-stated. The creation of such a force in a very short period of time reflects well on the National Army's ability to improvise but as will be shown, also highlights their failure to think beyond the short term.

The seaborne landings are central to any such discussion and their history is presented below. The landings had the tangible effect of extending government control into the heart of the Irregular held areas and had the additional benefit, through the shock caused by such a rapid series of defeats, of damaging Irregular morale. The history of the Service during the Civil War provides some insight into the benefits of superior seapower and its ability to influence the course of a conflict and in this case, wider Irish history. Often the notion of seapower is believed to be of interest only to those studying the history of great maritime powers and grand fleet battle. This chapter provides useful examples of its relevance to small-scale conflicts. The impact of the marginal seapower available to the Free State is undeniable when utilised against an opponent ill-prepared to adapt and potentially incapable of preventing its use.

The War of Independence and Treaty Negotiations

The Royal Navy remained largely uninvolved in the Irish War of Independence. The main factor was undoubtedly their pragmatic view of the conflict. Although they were approached by the Home Office about the possibility of taking a more active role,

through the use of landing parties to support anti-guerrilla sweeps, it was felt that any contribution they could make would be extremely limited and that being seen to take direct action might result in attacks against the network of coastguard stations along the Irish coast, which were manned by Navy personnel, undefended and normally isolated and vulnerable to attack.²

The Admiralty clearly did not intend to endanger its long-standing presence in coastal towns along the south coast, such as Cobh, Berehaven and Baltimore. The long history of the base at Haulbowline and the presence of large numbers of retired naval officers resulted in a situation whereby the Royal Navy had little to offer and much to lose in any overt clash with Irish republicans. The scope for reprisals against ex-Royal Navy personnel and reservists was deemed to outweigh any benefits which could accrue from the deployment of shore parties.³ This hesitancy did not continue into the Civil War period, as will later be demonstrated.

This policy of non-involvement did not apply to the Treaty negotiations. The Royal Navy strongly defended its need to continue to hold facilities in Irish territory. The Irish representatives, negotiating the Anglo-Irish Treaty in London, had presented their memorandum to the Committee on Naval and Air Defence arguing that no Royal Navy presence was required or desired. Their proposal bore the hallmarks of Erskine Childers, in that it showed a reasonable grasp of the main concerns of the British and attempted to placate them without compromising on territorial sovereignty.⁴ Of British birth, Childers, author of *The Riddle of the Sands*, had served in the Royal Navy as a seaplane observer and intelligence officer during the First World War but was now a committed Irish nationalist.

The Irish party suggested that an invasion of Ireland was incredibly unlikely and that its neutrality would pose no danger to the defence by sea of Great Britain. The Admiralty was adamant that access to Irish facilities in war-time was crucial to the security of Great

2. Coordination of naval assistance for operations in Ireland, 1921 (B.N.A., HO 317/61).

3. *ibid.*

Britain. They expressed the opinion that although an external invasion of Ireland appeared far-fetched at this point in time, that without the presence of the Royal Navy in Irish waters, it would be entirely within the bounds of possibility. The limitation on the freedom of movement of the Royal Navy through Irish waters in a conflict with any Great Power was unthinkable to the Admiralty.⁵

Acknowledging the risk of submarine attacks from Irish waters, it was suggested by the Irish delegation that an Irish naval force of anti-submarine and mine-laying craft be established. It was hoped that should prove sufficient to ensure that Irish waters could not be used by belligerent submarines to rest or rearm.⁶ The Admiralty expressed its doubts that the Irish could fund a suitably large force to provide such guarantees and in a private aside noted that 'the last weapons the Admiralty would like to see in the hands of the Irish in their present mood would be vessels capable of laying mines'.⁷ The Irish delegation proved unable to press the point further and the Admiralty's strong defence of its position ensured that the British retained the Treaty Ports, the term used to refer to the three fortifications and anchorages which were to remain in the hands of the Royal Navy. Aside from these positions in Cobh, Berehaven and Lough Swilly, the Royal Navy also retained unfettered access to Irish waters in times of war under the terms of Article 7 of the Anglo- Irish Treaty reproduced below.

1. The Government of the Irish Free State shall afford to His Majesty's Imperial Forces
 - (a) In the time of peace such harbour and other facilities as are indicated in the Annex hereto, or such other facilities as may from time to time be agreed between the British Government and the Government of the Irish Free State; and
 - (b) In time of war or of strained relations with a Foreign Power such harbour and other facilities as the British Government may require for the purposes of such defence as aforesaid.⁸

4. Admiralty proposed Irish settlement, 1921 (B.N.A., ADM 1/8612/175).

5. *ibid.*

6. Irish memorandum to Naval and Air Defence Committee, 1921 (B.N.A., ADM 1/8612/175).

7. Admiralty remarks on proposed Irish settlement, 1921 (B.N.A., ADM 1/8612/175).

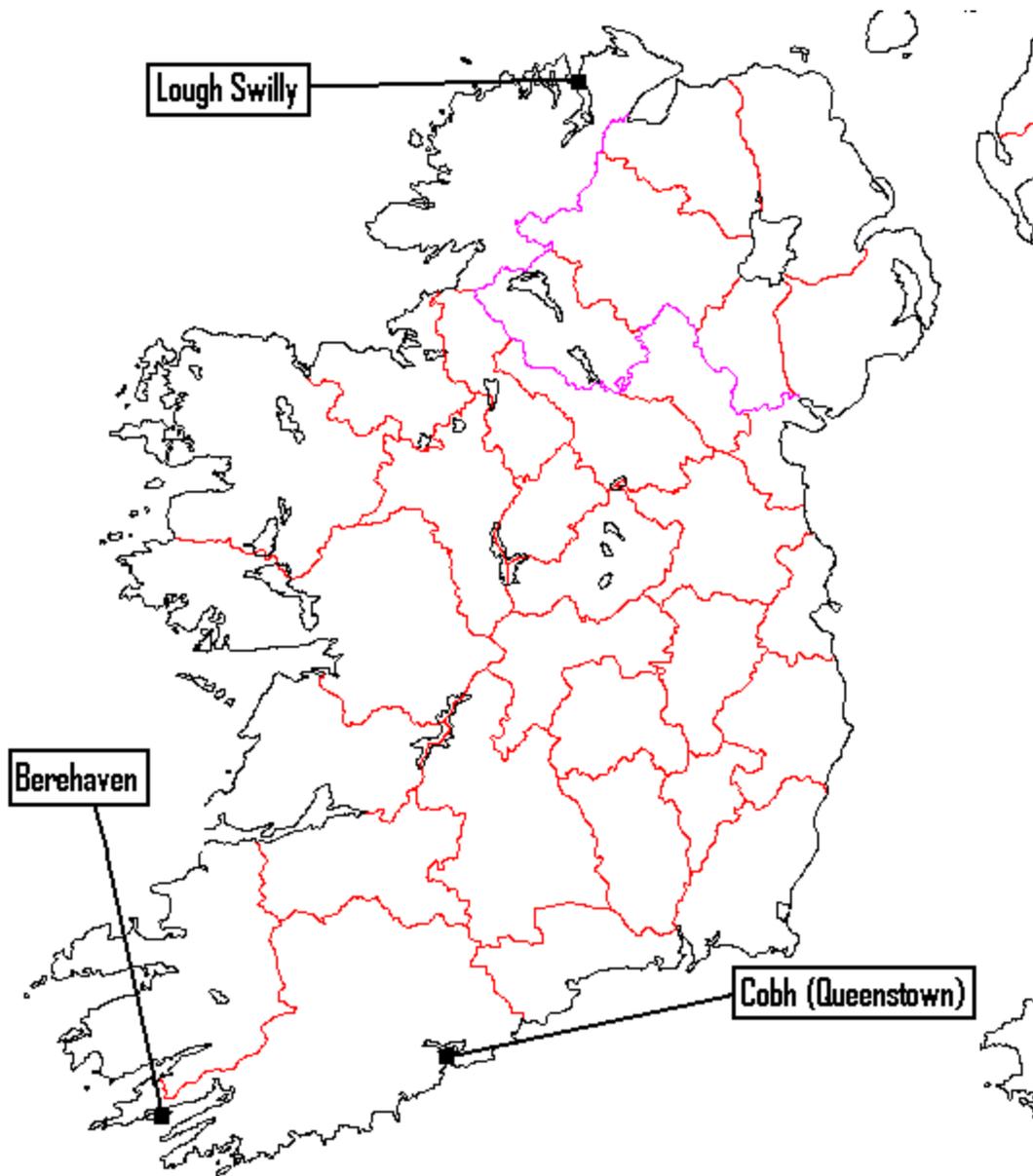


Fig 1: The Treaty Ports

The Irish Civil War

The Anglo-Irish Treaty did not grant the thirty two county Irish Republic which many had hoped for but rather a limited independence in the form of a Free State. While a minority of the Irish Republican Army's members and a majority of the Irish populace were willing to accept the terms, the opposing Irregular faction refused to accept anything

8. Text of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 1921 (N.A.I., DE 2/304/1).

less than total independence. This led to war between the National Army under the Provisional Government, later to become the Free State government, and the Republican or Irregular faction.

The beginning of the Civil War saw Irregular forces firmly entrenched in much of the country. The opponents of the Provisional Government held Connaught, Munster and positions throughout Leinster, although pro-Treaty forces were to be found in Clare, Athlone and Galway. The Irregular presence in urban areas and ports meant they benefited from access to custom duties and levies.⁹ The Provisional Government sought to eliminate these sources of revenue. Regaining control of the major urban centres was the primary objective of the Provisional Government as failure to do so would undermine their legitimacy, both at home and abroad.

Following the crucial early battles for the capital in late June and early July 1922, Provisional Government forces were present in significant force in Dublin alone. Initially, the Irregulars outnumbered their opponents by a margin of two to one but this balance was to swing drastically in favour of the Free State as the war went on. The National Army was composed mainly of green recruits incited by the promise of regular pay while their opponents came from the more experienced units of the IRA. The military and political leaders of the Provisional Government were rightly unsure of their ability to win a military victory. However, the Irregulars were to fail to take advantage of their superior position.

The outbreak of civil war had caught both sides largely off-guard as hopes of a settlement persisted even after the outbreak of hostilities. The Irregulars were especially slow to react and when they did, their focus was on defensive operations. The de-centralised nature of their command, with local commanders deciding local policy, meant planning large-scale operations was problematic if not impossible. The oft-mentioned plan to hold a line from Limerick to Waterford, protecting Munster, came to nothing.¹⁰ The

9. Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against green: the Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 1988), p.131.

10. *ibid*, p.129.

Provisional Government feared a similar line could be held along the Shannon, defending Connaught. Such a line would place much of the country beyond their control and make a mockery of their claims to represent the Irish State, at home or abroad. The Irregulars lacked the training, arms or numbers to establish such defences but without the benefit of hindsight, the Provisional Government erred on the side of caution.

As matters progressed, it became clear that the Irregulars lacked the ability to take or hold the initiative at a strategic level. Regardless, the National Army faced the daunting task of long, dangerous pushes through enemy-held territory. This was complicated by the fact that the Irregulars, when retreating, destroyed any infrastructure that the National Army could utilise. An advance across the countryside would likely prove slow and expensive. Blocked and mined roads, fallen bridges and destroyed railroads did not make for rapid or easy movement overland. The burning of barracks by Irregulars when retreating preventing the National Army from occupying these fortified outposts as bases for their garrisons.

One city was seen as key to a quick victory, Limerick. The main Free State bastions outside Dublin were Clare, Galway and Athlone and a victory at Limerick would ease the pressure on these areas. The capture of Limerick was also seen as a means of dividing the Irregular zone of control while opening the Shannon to Free State shipping. By taking Limerick, the National Army would have flanked both the western and southern Irregular defence lines and render them useless. After fighting broke out on July 11, the town was finally taken, ten days later on 21 July, 1922.¹¹

From a naval perspective, the victory provided the first opportunity to use the Free State's largely uncontested naval superiority to proper effect. With Irregular forces mounting a strong defence south of Limerick, it should come as no surprise that they turned to the sea as a means of ensuring a quicker victory. At Major General Dalton's urging, it was decided to start landing Free State troops at suitable ports along the coast.¹²

11. *ibid*, p.150.

12. Daire Brunnicardi, "The ships of the Army 1922." in *An Cosantoir* (Mar. 1989).

Five separate operations were launched, Westport in late July 1922, Fenit in early August, followed shortly by the largest and most important landing in Cork. Two smaller seaborne attacks were launched with Kenmare being seized in mid-August and Kinsale towards the end of the month.

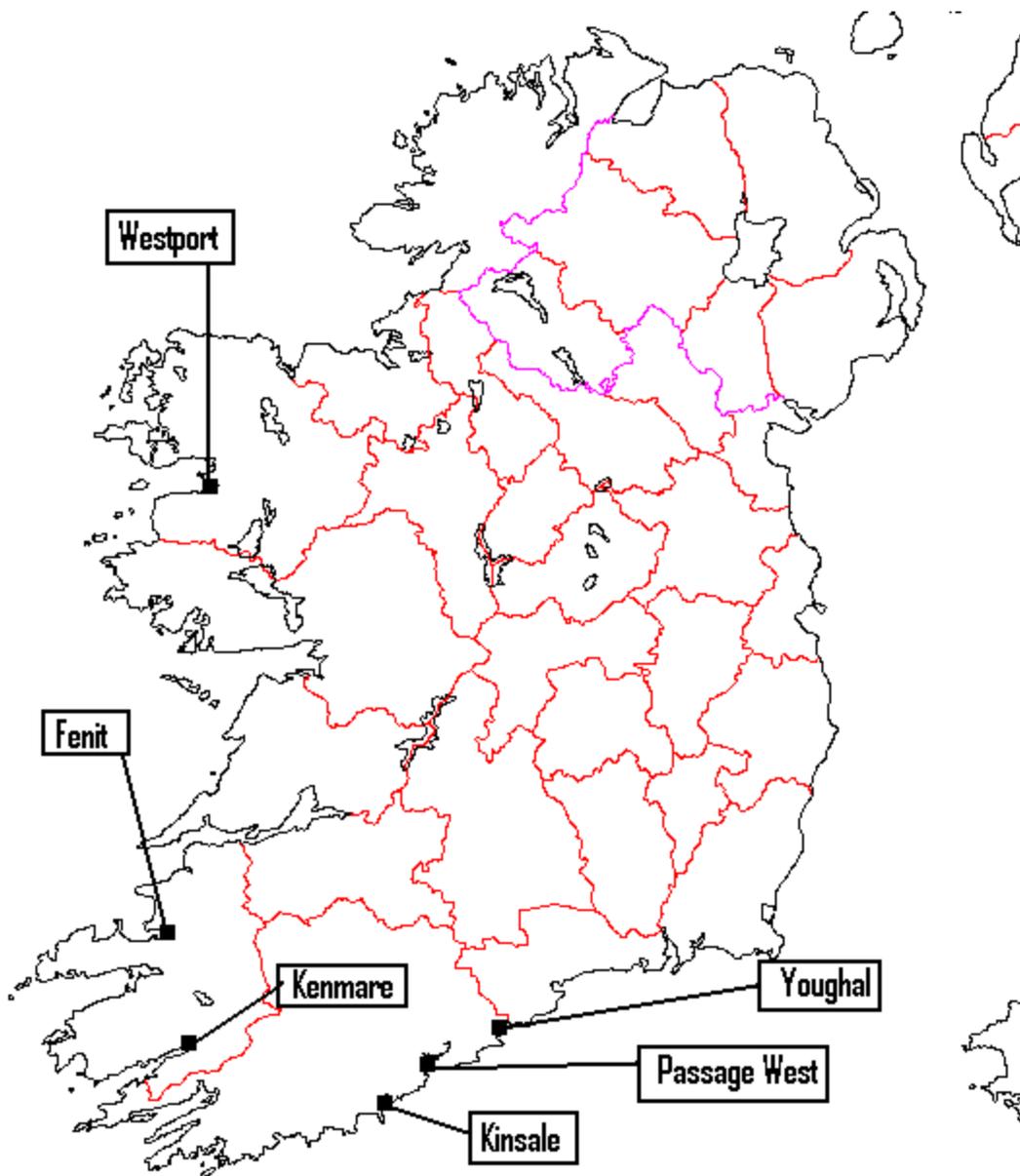


Fig 2: Civil War landings.

The Westport Landing

The landing at Westport, Co. Mayo, could be described a trial run for the later operations. The choice of Westport as the initial landing site could have been influenced by the presence of a strong National Army garrison in Castlebar. Should the landing forces have run into difficulties, relief was near at hand and could have be summoned rapidly.

The *Minerva*, carrying 400 men, one “Whippet” armoured car and an 18-pound field gun, sailed from Dublin Port's North Wall at 8pm on 22 July. The expedition arrived in Clew Bay at 2am, 24 July. A pilot was requested and arrived after two hours. However, he informed Colonel Commandant O'Malley that the *Minerva* was 100 feet too long to dock at the quay.¹³ This was confirmed by another pilot who arrived aboard at 5am. It is possible that the pilots were attempting to prevent the landing by misinformation. The *Minerva* was still at the mouth of the bay and not visible to any defenders onshore. The expedition attempted to contact Portobello Barracks in Dublin for further instructions but did not succeed until Monday evening. The reply was too late to influence events, the order was given to abort the operation and make for Limerick, but by this time the landing was again underway.¹⁴ An attempt was made to continue the operation when a food ship, the *s.s. Admiral* bound for Westport was sighted. She was ordered alongside and an effort was made to transfer the Whippet aboard. However, this failed and the vessel was sent on unhindered. The risk of information on the landing force being leaked in Westport was apparently not considered.

The pilots eventually came to the decision that they would risk bringing the *Minerva* in on the next tide. At 5pm on 24 July, the expedition made for Westport. A party of forty men were detached for an attack on Rossmoney Coastguard Station which was held by the Irregulars. They made their way ashore using local fishing boats and rapidly captured the station and its garrison of twelve. The station was being used to house prisoners and

13. Report from O'Malley to Minister for Defence, 25th July, 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers , P7/B/73).

ninety-six men of the National Army were released.¹⁵ The main party made their way ashore at Westport to find the town abandoned by the Irregulars and the fire in the barracks being extinguished by the townspeople. A local Irregular attempted to board the *Minerva*, in the guise of a fishmonger, but was detained. Once Westport and Rossmoney were garrisoned, the remainder of the force made for Castlebar along three separate routes on the morning of 25 July, arriving without incident.

Had the Irregulars attempted to prevent the landing, there is a good chance that the force would have suffered heavy casualties. The attackers had no landing craft to protect troops during the landing, no armour on the troopship to mitigate against fire from shore and the men had no training in amphibious operations. The *Minerva* had no armaments with which to support the troops ashore other than the machine guns of the landing force itself. However, the landing was successful and Westport was abandoned by the Irregulars without a fight. As a result, the landing force under Col-Comdt O'Malley was able to move inland and link up with elements of General McEoin's command at Castlebar. This operation damaged Irregular control in the West as the National Army now held all major towns in the region. However, fighting was to continue for several months afterwards as Irregulars under Michael Kilroy harassed garrisons through Sligo, Mayo and Galway. Kilroy was to use the sea to great effect in his campaign against the Free State and was the only Irregular commander to grasp the benefit of sea transport as means of out manoeuvring the Free State sweeps.¹⁶ The naval assets of the state were to place a large part in the effort to neutralise the remaining Irregulars.

The Fenit Landing

With Dalton's strategy vindicated, several more landings were organised. The next seaborne operation was the landing at Fenit in Co. Kerry. The *Lady Wicklow* transported 450 men of the Dublin Guard, an 18-pound field gun and an armoured car to the port from Dublin. This force was placed under the command of Brigadier General O'Daly, their founding officer. This combination of armoured car and artillery piece became

14. *ibid.*

15. *ibid.*

almost de rigueur for sea-borne landings and lightly armed Irregular garrisons had no means of countering the landing force's firepower, makeshift barricades were generally rammed and their temporary defence lines broken with ease.¹⁷ The artillery piece, in particular proved devastating time and again. As one Free State commander stated: 'Our object was to break their morale. They had no experience of shellfire and the effects of high-explosives on men who have never known them can be imagined. Once their morale was gone, our objective was nearly gained.'¹⁸ The ship arrived on the morning of the 2 August. Before entering the harbour, the troops were hidden below deck to ensure maximum surprise. The Irregular garrison was not alarmed by the appearance of a merchant vessel, although the pilot who went aboard was quite surprised to find himself part of a military expedition, and the *Lady Wicklow* was able to dock before the attack was launched. Using railway wagons as mobile cover against the fire from the Irregular-occupied coastguard station overlooking the berthing area, the attackers made for shore under covering fire from the Lewis guns on the *Lady Wicklow* and the Vickers of the armoured car firing from the deck.¹⁹ As the defenders numbered roughly twenty men, once the initial advance reached the harbour buildings ashore, resistance was brief and ineffective. The landing could have been stopped as the Irregulars had placed a mine under the pier to prevent this exact occurrence. Had this mine been detonated, the landing would have proven impossible as troops could not be brought ashore elsewhere. The berthing area was connected to the mainland by a viaduct and pier roughly 650 metres in length. Its destruction would have made it impossible for the landing force to bring heavy equipment ashore or, perhaps, could have prevented the National Army's soldiers from reaching the mainland. However, local fishermen fearing for their livelihoods had cut the detonation wires the previous night.²⁰ Again as in Westport, luck was the main factor in the success of the operation. The surviving Irregulars withdrew and the landing force went on to occupy Tralee later that day. The following day, in a supporting operation, three fishing boats ferried 300 men across the Shannon and Tarbert fell into the hands of

16. Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: The Irish Civil war* (Dublin, 1988), p.212.

17. Niall C. Harrington, *Kerry landing: August 1922* (Dublin, 1992), p.118.

18. Eoin Neeson, *The Civil war 1922-23* (Dublin, 1989), p.155.

19. Niall C. Harrington, *Kerry landing: August 1922* (Dublin, 1992), p.95.

20. *ibid*, p.80.

the Provisional Government. The loss of Tarbert along with confiscation of small craft along the Shannon cut all lines of communication between Irregulars operating in West Clare and their counterparts in Limerick.

The Cork Landing

The most important landing of the Civil War took place two days later as the National Army launched an operation aimed at liberating Cork. Equipment was in short supply as the Provisional Government was more concerned with getting troops into the field than equipping them properly. Soldiers wearing mixtures of uniforms and civilian dress boarded the ships in Dublin, two cross-channel ferries were requisitioned for the operation. The *Arvonía* and *Lady Wicklow* made for Cork on 6 August and arrived on 7 August. The vessels had been improved with the addition of sandbags, a clear indication that they expected to approach under fire.²¹ The Irregulars were clearly expected to have digested the lessons of the Westport and Fenit landings.

Cork city was the main Republican stronghold and was seen as the most likely seat for a rival government. Thus, it would have been safe to expect heavy resistance. Two secondary landings were conducted in eastern Cork during the approach. Troops were put ashore at Youghal by the *Muirchu* and the *Alexandria* successfully landed additional forces at Union Hall while under fire from the coastguard station. Once the National Army made it ashore, the Irregulars fled burning all military buildings which could be used by their opponents.²² The *Arvonía* and *Lady Wicklow* made for Cork where the landing forces encountered a Royal Navy vessel during their journey and were appraised of the locations of mines in Passage West. Again, on approaching the target the troops were hidden below deck to ensure maximum surprise. The Irregulars sent a small boat out to make contact with the vessels but it failed to do so. Three shore patrols were then sent out along both sides of the channel. The transport vessels were fired upon and did briefly return fire. But the Irregulars, uncertain whether the return fire had originated from the ships or one of their own patrols on the opposite bank, paused to re-assess

21. Tim Pat Coogan, *The Irish Civil war* (London, 2005), p.210.

22. Cork landing report (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers, P7a/50).

whether the ships were commercial vessels.²³ On belatedly realising the true situation, the Irregulars scuttled the *Owenacurra* and her sister ship, the *Owenabuee* in a bid to deny entry into the harbour. These two ships, known as “Republican Dreadnoughts,” had been taken over from the Cork Harbour Commissioners by the Irregular defenders for just this purpose. The channel to Cork was blocked and the planned landing at Ford’s Wharf was deemed impossible.

Faced with a gravely altered situation, the decision was made by Major General Dalton to land at Passage West and advance on Cork from that position. The *Owencurra* had been sunk so as to prevent access to Passage West but the troopships successfully manoeuvred past the wreck. The failure of the Irregular’s to mine or successfully block access to this wharf would cost them dearly.²⁴ After sending a small party ashore to find that the Irregular guards had fled, the main body of troops made their way ashore in good order. There was some delay in unloading the equipment as the smaller cranes available at Passage West proved incapable of lifting the armoured cars. These were of the “Peerless” type and were heavier than the “Whippets” used in earlier operations. Eventually, the vehicles were driven onto the wharf once the tide brought the deck level with the dock.

The advance towards Cork began on 9 August, with local support.²⁵ Clashes occurred around Rochestown as Irregular troops from Cork city attempted to hold the village. Armoured cars and artillery were used in a two hour battle for the village and surrounding woods. By this point, the river was cleared but according to Major General Dalton, the Welsh crews of the transports were not willing to sail into the city. Following another pitched battle for Douglas, Free State troops entered Cork city on 11 August.²⁶ Both ships sailed for Dublin to fetch further reinforcements. On their return, they succeeded in steering past the scuttled block ships and delivered troops to the city itself. Again, the Irregulars had proven quick to abandon the city, pausing only to engage in the traditional burning of military barracks.

23. ‘Letter from Cork’ in *An t-Óglach*, (Sep. 1923), p.4.

24. Tim Pat Coogan, *The Irish Civil war* (London, 2005), p.219.

25. Cork landing report (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers, P7a/50).

26. *ibid.*

Two more landings were organised, the *Margret* and *Mermaid* sailed from Limerick and landed troops in Kenmore Bay on 11 August. The Irregulars were once again caught unawares and no resistance was met.²⁷ However, on 9 September, Kenmare was retaken by Irregular troops. Some of the government garrison fled downriver in a stolen boat and were picked up by a British destroyer and transferred onto a ship bound for Cork.²⁸ The final landing came on 25 August when 150 Free Staters came ashore in Kinsale and expelled the Irregular garrison. In both cases, the seaborne assault would have proven safer than attempting to capture the town with those National Army troops already in theatre. They would have been forced to strip their garrisons elsewhere in the county and advance through Irregular-held territory. The fall of Kenmare, along with reports from British vessels offshore which are detailed later in the chapter, demonstrates that any Free State garrison incapable of defending itself against the more mobile Irregular columns could be overcome and that their forces could not afford to expend their strength seizing additional territory.

The Landings

The landings as a whole were successful despite being described by Michael Hayes, Speaker of the Dáil, as having broken ‘the rules of common sense and navigation and military science.’²⁹ Eoin O’Duffy, commanding officer of the Southwestern Command, based in Limerick, had opposed the idea, pointing out that the landing parties would be surrounded and captured in short order. GHQ had suggested to O’Duffy in the event of a failure to land troops at Westport, he might use the expedition to conduct amphibious operations along the Kerry coast, sparking his testy response.³⁰ Some of these fears were well-founded, as the success of the Fenit and Westport landings was a result of blind luck, not competent planning. The landing forces lacked good intelligence, fire support and in some cases, superior numbers. The Free State forces attacking Cork were outnumbered by Irregular forces in the area. The Irregulars did not realise this and

27. Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: The Irish Civil war* (Dublin, 1988), p.166.

28. Daire Brunnicardi, *The Seahound* (Cork, 2001), p.68.

29. Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: The Irish Civil war* (Dublin, 1988), p.163.

30. Niall C. Harrington, *Kerry Landing: August 1922* (Dublin, 1992), p.42.

retreated ahead of a force they outnumbered. The National Army also did not realise this and continued to advance headlong. It could be said that those who rely on luck should have plenty of it. It is clear to any student of the landings in this regard, the National Army was amply provisioned.

It must be said that efforts were made to gather intelligence prior to the landings in the cases of both Westport and Cork although the effort did not follow standard military practice. A Captain Kiely was sent to scout the Westport-Castlebar area immediately prior to the landing. Although enemy strength, positions and routes of approach to Castlebar were ascertained, the focus was largely on individual Irregular leaders and the likelihood that they would fight. The landing site itself was not surveyed which reflects the importance which was placed on the men they were to face rather than the terrain.³¹ In Cork, thought was given to smuggling arms into the city. The Free State agent in the city, Paddy O'Connell, was of the opinion that local sympathisers could be armed and act as a fifth column. As shipments of goods were still arriving into Cork from British ports, it was thought that arms could be hidden in empty furniture vans returning from London but the opportunity was not taken.³² A problem with the scheme was that the arms might be supplied to ex-British servicemen for use against the Irregulars and this could be interpreted as the use of ex-British troops by a foreign-backed government against Irish patriots.

The landing forces had an advantage over traditional naval forces as their use of civilian vessels allowed them to approach their targets without being fired upon. Admittedly, at the time, naval forces used merchant vessels as troopships; however they did not share the benefit of being unidentifiable as a naval asset. Free State landings could only be firmly recognised as such when the troops began to disembark. The Irregulars consistently failed to attack the Free State troops when they were at their most vulnerable, during the landing itself. Westport would be the best example of such a wasted opportunity where soldiers being ferried ashore would be easy targets. The poor

31. Report by Kiely, 21 Jul. 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers, P7/B/80).

32. O'Connell letter to Collins, 31 Jul. 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers, P7a/50).

performance of the Irregular garrisons can be attributed to the fact bulk of the Irregular faction's better troops were engaged south of Limerick and the ports were lightly held by recent recruits of poor quality and little training. Their garrisons were prone to withdrawing after the briefest of engagements.

Republican casualties were surprisingly light, due mainly to the nature of the fighting, but the loss of so many towns in rapid succession demoralised the Irregulars. Several Republican strongholds had fallen without a fight and large elements of the main Irregular forces abandoned their positions and made for their home areas in a bid to stem the Free State advance.³³ When the situation became clear, some withdrew to more suitable terrain to continue a guerrilla war while others deserted. These landings did not win the war but they ensured that the Irregulars could not challenge the authority of the Provisional Government by occupying urban areas in Munster and left them with no real hope of victory. But the return to tried and tested guerrilla tactics threatened to prolong the war and the Free State continued to see its naval forces as the best means of supplying and maintaining communications with its coastal outposts. The continuing utility of naval assets was the main factor that led to the establishment of a formal naval force.

Acquiring Vessels during the Early War

The newly-created naval force of the Free State was entirely lacking in the capacity to transport large numbers of men as its primary focus had been on the acquisition of supply ships and patrol boats. These ships were not true naval vessels but civilian craft; however, they were equal to the tasks required of them. The Free State needed to look elsewhere for large troop transports. Cross-channel ferries were requisitioned as troopships to ensure that the planned landings could be carried out. The *Arvonian*, *Lady Wicklow*, *Margret* and the *Minerva* all took part in the various sea-borne landings. Unlike the bulk of the ships requisitioned by the state, these vessels were returned promptly once the operations came to an end.

33. Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: The Irish Civil war* (Dublin, 1988), p.152.

Aside from these transports, patrol craft were also sourced for the National Army. Four Admiralty motor launches were purchased on 11 May 1922, these were former American submarine chasers built for the Royal Navy during the First World War.³⁴ Wooden hulled craft, the ships were roughly 110 feet in length and normally armed with depth charges, a Lewis machine gun and a three inch gun. The vessels purchased by the Irish government were equipped only with the machine gun. The London-based firm, Messrs Goad and Proctor, had approached the state in February, offering the motor launches. The ships were examined by a retired Royal Navy engineer captain and deemed acceptable. The total cost to the state was £4,400. They were designated as the *M-L 1*, *M-L 2*, *M-L 3* and *M-L 4*. A Commander J.E. Blay was commissioned to bring the ships to Cobh or Queenstown as it was then known. The journey was an eventful one. On the morning of 19 July, *M-L 2*'s engines began to fail due to water mixing with petrol and the vessel was towed for a time by *M-L 4*. The engines were repaired although it was noted that the boat appeared to be taking on water. The engine would fail again during the evening only to be restarted during the night. However, by the following morning, the engines had stopped entirely and the vessel was sinking rapidly. The crew were taken off by *M-L 4*, which made for the port of Bideford and put them ashore. *M-L 4* then caught fire as fumes from a leaking petrol tank ignited, gutting the vessel. Two telegrams were delivered to Portbello Barracks at 5pm on the 21 July 1922, informing the Irish authorities that *M-L 2* had been lost at sea and *M-L 4* damaged by fire.³⁵ But *M-L 4* was successfully refitted and the three surviving M-Ls supplemented the sea-going steamers of the early-war service. However, they were viewed as a stop-gap measure and the search for more suitable vessels continued. A letter from the Department of Economic Affairs' surveyor stated that 'they are not suitable for bad weather and if they should have to patrol singly not to wander too far from harbour. I am of opinion, that with slight alterations and repairs the M.L. would be serviceable and seaworthy in narrow waters but are unfit for constant work in exposed positions round dangerous coasts.'³⁶ They were later devoted to patrols in Irish rivers and estuaries in light of this.

34. 'Coastal and Marine Service' in *An t-Óglach*, (Oct. 1923), p.3.

35. Purchase of motor launches, 1922 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/154).

36. *ibid.*



Fig 3: World War I Submarine Chaser

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

Small launches were chartered after the capture of Limerick and stationed at the port. The six boats were manned by Irish-speakers from the Aran Islands who took this opportunity to fish the Shannon while on patrol. They gave the National Army the ability to patrol the Shannon and aid their attempts to prevent Irregulars in Connaught and Munster from travelling between their strongholds.³⁷

Various vessels were chartered by the Free State for the use of the Army during the course of the war as transports. In several cases, the owners, realising the urgent need for such craft attempted to extort higher charters from the Provisional Government. But the rules of business were set aside by the military authorities in the interests of military necessity and vessels were requisitioned without charters being signed.

Among the vessels taken over by the state, the *Saint Senan* operated off Westport, policing the many islands along the coastline that harboured Irregular forces and supplying Free State outposts.³⁸ *SS Slievenamon*, *Wheatland*, *Wheatvale* and *Wheatear* are other examples of merchant steamers used as supply ships, troop transports, patrol boats and prisoner transports as circumstances required. The companies from which these boats were chartered often suffered losses as a result. In the case of the Irish Cargo Steamship Company, their entire fleet of three ships, the *Mayfield*, *Slievenamon* and *Saint*

37. Claims in regard of boats commandeered, 1923 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/135).

38. Logs of the *Saint Senan*, 1923 (I.M.A., *Saint Senan*/14).

Senan were chartered. They were unable to fulfil their transport contracts with the Guinness brewery as a result. Their situation was not improved by the fact that the *Slievenamon* was returned in terrible condition, having been driven onto rocks in Ballycotton Bay on 12 February 1923. The other ships were also returned in poor condition. Repairs were costed as being in the region of £10,000. The state held that as the ship was not crewed by their personnel, but rather the original civilian crew, the damage was not their responsibility.³⁹

Irregular Activity at Sea

The Irregulars committed one major act of naval piracy, the boarding and looting of the *Upnor*, a British cargo vessel transporting arms from Haulbowline to Portsmouth. Tom Barry, a prominent guerrilla commander who had led a flying column in Munster during the War of Independence, commanded the operation in which a hijacked tug, the *Warrior*, delivered a boarding party to the *Upnor* at 6.30pm on 29 April 1922. The ship was thirty miles from Cork when it was approached by the tugboat. The British captain challenged the *Warrior* and was told that the King's Pilot was aboard with important dispatches from the Admiralty. A party of four men were sent to take these dispatches and were captured.⁴⁰ The captain grew suspicious when five strangers replaced his crewmen and began to make their way towards his ship. After attempting to evade his pursuers, the captain was forced to halt by the sight of Lewis guns trained on his bridge. The crew were confined to their quarters.⁴¹

The ship was brought into Ballycotton Bay at 12.30pm on the 30 April and the arms unloaded into eighty waiting lorries.⁴² It was midday before the British authorities at Cobh realised that the *Warrior* had left soon after the *Upnor* and in the same direction. The *HMS Strenuous* and *Heather* gave pursuit but arrived several hours too late to prevent the complete looting of the *Upnor*. The number of vehicles involved gives an idea of the volume of arms and ammunition captured, nearly 120 tons. This incident

39. Claim of Irish Cargo Steamship Ltd., 1923 (N.A.I., FIN 1/2956).

40. Matters concerning the tug Arron, 1923 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/156).

41. Report on taking of Upnor (B.N.A., ADM 178/100).

42. *ibid.*

along with the previous arms landing at Helvick certainly spurred the creation of a naval force to limit Irregular activities at sea.

The few examples of naval conflict during the war, if the term could be used to describe such one-sided encounters, generally involved Free State ships engaging Irregulars in currachs, the small canvas boat indigenous to the western coastal areas of the state. These clashes generally occurred when Irregulars were encountered travelling between islands. It also led to National Army personnel occasionally destroying these vessels when found beached, causing their owners great hardship as these boats were their livelihoods.⁴³ In most cases, the boats were simply towed into custody to ensure that they could not be used to transport arms or troops. Again, the loss of their only source of income caused great difficulties for the population of these islands and did nothing to reduce pro-Irregular sentiment. Most exchanges involving naval vessels did not involve seaborne combat but generally resulted from Irregulars ashore firing on the patrol boats.⁴⁴

The Irregulars did engage in piracy throughout the early stages of the conflict. As late as October 1922, a steamer carrying flour was seized in Clew Bay and unloaded in Newport, which was occupied by the Irregulars at the time and the home base of Michael Kilroy's column.⁴⁵ As travel by road and rail was dangerous, the war saw a massive increase in coastal shipping, the Irregulars took to hijacking fishing boats and using these to raid and loot Free State food convoys.⁴⁶ The Irregulars also sought to use water-borne transport to bypass the National Army's fixed posts and retain some mobility.⁴⁷ In several cases, the absence of naval support allowed bands of Irregulars led by the ubiquitous Kilroy to evade Free State pursuers as in the case of an Irregular column chased into north Galway which managed to slip away into north Mayo and Achill by boat.⁴⁸

43. Claim for compensation, 1923 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/144).

44. 28 Jul. cutting re: Tartar (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P7/B/73).

45. Cutting on western pirates, 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers, P7/B/74).

46. HMS reports, 1922 (B.N.A., ADM 178/159).

47. Letter to Chief of General Staff, 30 Sep. 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers, P7/B/74).

48. General report on operations in the west, Dec 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers, P7/B/74).

The Irregulars attempted to contest sea control in only one area, off the Sligo Coast. *The Rosses*, a ferry which serviced the Sligo-Rosses Point route was taken over.⁴⁹ Two prominent Irregulars from Sligo, Frank Carty and, once again, Michael Kilroy were responsible for this unusual action. They organised patrols along a route from Roonagh Point to Clare Island to Mulranny.⁵⁰ The *Tartar*, which had been taken over from the Sligo Steam Navigation Company, was the National Army's patrol boat in the region. It was the only vessel to be armoured, by installing iron shutters on the superstructure, obviously to ensure an advantage should the two vessels cross paths.⁵¹ There is no record of any other Free State vessel being improved in this manner and thus, it appears to be a response to the threat posed by *The Rosses*. The two vessels never encountered one another and it is assumed that *The Rosses* was eventually returned to her duties as a ferry.

The Royal Navy during the Civil War

The British were keen to avoid any suggestion that they were directly supporting the Free State and prevent any implication that British forces fought in support of Free State troops. This danger was reinforced by the flags used by both governments' vessels. All the vessels used by the National Army in their various operations flew British ensigns, namely the Red Ensign. This was a red flag with a Union Jack in the upper left hand corner. It was flown by British-registered merchant vessels. The White Ensign was the flag flown by the Royal Navy. It was similar, with white in place of red. The fact that National Army vessels sported the Red Ensign would allow the Irregulars to claim that British vessels were actively supporting the Provisional Government in their operations. On the other hand, it would be possible to point to the inaction of the *HMS Carysfort* during the landings at Cork as proof of a policy of non-intervention. The cruiser was present in Cork harbour during the landings but remained at anchor throughout.⁵²

49. Padraic O'Farrell, *Who's who in the Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 1997), p.192.

50. *ibid*, p.147

51. *ibid*, p.195.

52. HMS reports, 1922 (B.N.A., ADM 178/159).

An examination of British sources, on the other hand, indicated that Royal Navy vessels did provide support to Free State forces on a number of occasions. They transported troops, supplied ammunition and weapons from their ship's store, blockaded Irregular areas in support of sweeps by Free State troops. During a large Irregular attack on Bantry on 30 August 1922, *HMS Vanity* used its searchlights to assist the defenders and provided the garrison with .303 ammunition. On 18 September, *HMS Waterhen* fired a starshell to bring fighting to an end in Cahirciveen. *HMS Ettrick* fired a blank shell to break up an attack on the Free State garrison at Fenit on 23 September. *HMS Seawolf* was even more heavily involved in the defence of Cahirciveen from the 22-24 September, firing two blank shells, using searchlights and starshells to illuminate attackers and providing the garrison with two Lewis guns and 2000 rounds of .303 ammunition.⁵³

While Free State commanders could never officially request assistance, unofficially, it was made clear that should Royal Navy vessels be present at set points at certain times, their assistance would not be refused. During a drive in the Dingle peninsula, a code was established to allow Free State troops to coordinate their sweeps on land with British vessels off the coast. In December, the *HMS Volunteer* went so far as to transport Free State troops into position for attacks against Irregulars in the vicinity of Bantry.⁵⁴

The Royal Navy undertook patrols in Irish waters during the war and eight ships were assigned to the mission. Two minesweepers were deployed along the south coast, a destroyer at Berehaven, two destroyers patrolled between the Shannon estuary and Kenmare, two minesweepers between the Shannon estuary and Sligo, the last was a destroyer ordered to patrol the coast from Sligo to Lough Swilly. Their orders were to prevent the importation of arms, prevent the transport by sea of armed Republicans, assist Free State troops where possible, protection of civilians from outrage and delivery of mails from the GPO.⁵⁵ These patrols were eventually cancelled on 5 October 1922 due to lack of progress.⁵⁶

53. *ibid.*

54. *ibid.*

55. HMS Vanity report, 31 Aug 1922 (B.N.A., ADM 1/8632/173).

56. Anti-smuggling patrols, 1922 (B.N.A., ADM 1/8652/253).

The Irregulars for their part took every opportunity to harass Royal Navy vessels in coastal waters or rivers, in the hopes of provoking British intervention in the war and thus, legitimatise their cause in the eyes of the public. British vessels were under orders to reply heavily with all guns. However, as the captain of the *Vanity* pointed out, ‘as in these cases the sniper is probably behind a bush and the only apparent target is a cottage, some children and cows, it is a little hard.’⁵⁷

On March 31, 1923 the dockyard on Haulbowline was handed over to the National Army. The British had intended to sell the facility unless it was taken over by the Irish authorities.⁵⁸ The Irish Free State also inherited a deep sea tug, the *Dainty*. Despite the misleading name, this was the largest vessel in the fleet at 142 feet in length. She was later to be appointed “leader” or flagship of the Coast Patrol.⁵⁹ The British and Irish government were at odds over the equipment to be supplied with the dockyard. The Irish insisted that all equipment remain with the yard but would not commit to the continued use of the facility as a fully-functioning naval dockyard. The British insisted that they would only leave such equipment as was required by the facility as used by the Free State.⁶⁰ In the end, the matter was dropped by both sides, in view of renewing negotiations during the final settlement, and the facility was handed over largely intact.

Patrol Craft

The British withdrawal had left the Free State in possession of several harbour tenders, which were very small boats used within the confines of a port. The Provisional Government also inherited 109 coastguard stations and the drifters, *Inisherer* and *John S. Somers* which were taken over from the Congested Districts Board. They also commanded the armed yacht, *HMY Helga*, which was renamed the *Murichu* after the famed medieval annalist who recorded the ‘Life of Patrick’. In addition, the Provisional

57. Patrol orders 1922 (B.N.A., ADM 1/8632/173).

58. Naval provisions for settlement, 1922 (B.N.A., CAB 21/245).

59. ‘Coastal and Marine Service’ in *An t-Óglach*, (Oct. 1923), p.1.

60. Financial agreement between Irish Free State and British government, 1923 (N.A.I., DFA P646).

Government rapidly began to amass a small fleet, the word 'fleet' being used very loosely here to describe the ad-hoc collection of tramp steamers and drifters acquired by the Free State during the course of hostilities and the various vessels inherited or bought from the Royal Navy. It did represent the first Irish naval force since 1600, when the Confederation of Kilkenny had purchased a small number of French warships and even established an Irish Admiralty.⁶¹ Strictly speaking, it was less a coastal navy than the nautical arm of the National Army and its missions were linked to the needs of the army. The emphasis on amphibious operations over solely naval operations was simply due to the fact that the Irregulars had almost no naval capability at any time during or after the war.

The Free State favoured the use of armed trawlers as patrol boats as time went on. They were relatively cheap, capable of withstanding the conditions found off the west and south coasts in winter and more than a match for any vessel the Irregulars could muster. Over the course of the war, six *Mersey* class armed trawlers, the *John Dunn*, *John Dutton*, *William Honner*, *Christopher Dixon*, *Robert Murray* and *Thomas Thresher* were purchased from the British Admiralty at a cost of £57,000.⁶² These trawlers were 139 feet in length and aside from the wooden decks, made of steel. However, the vessels were in poor condition, the Irish officials had little experience in these matters and assumed the ships would be provided complete with equipment and armaments. They were not. The excess expenditure incurred in repairing and arming them left the civil service and naval officials at loggerheads and certainly generated some ill-will. Later, the fact that the *John S. Somers* had been overlooked and was lying idle at Cork while requests for more ships were made, did not aid matters.⁶³ The situation was aggravated by the refusal of the Minister for Defence to reply to the Department of Finance repeated requests for information as to the scope, role and future of the state's naval forces.⁶⁴

61. 'Coastal and Marine Service' in *An t-Óglach*, (Oct. 1923), p.1.

62. Sale of trawlers, 1923 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/151).

63. Tom McGinty, *The Irish navy* (Kerry, 1995), p.103.

64. Buildings for the use of Coastal and Marine Service, 1923 (N.A.I., FIN 1/1835).

Six *Canadian Castle* class armed trawlers were also acquired from the Admiralty for the sum of £30,000, these were the *TR24*, *TR25*, *TR27*, *TR29*, *TR30* and *TR31*.⁶⁵ They were smaller than the *Mersey* class trawlers at 125 feet and also made of steel. All twelve trawlers were equipped with one 12 pounder gun. All these vessels retained their British designations, only the *Helga* was renamed, most likely was due to her chequered history, she had been used against rebel positions in Dublin during the 1916 Rising. Most of these sales were conducted through the offices of the Ross Street Foundry and Engineering Company in Aberdeen.⁶⁶ This was as a result of political considerations; the Free State government feared the effects that overt British backing could have on their public support and the course of the war, being seen as a British cat's paw would have proven disastrous. The trawlers were intended to operate as an anti-smuggling service, specifically to prevent gun-running. It was intended that they would form the heart of a post-war revenue service.⁶⁷

Late War Tasks

Many isolated Free State posts owed their survival to the supplies of arms, ammunition and fresh troops landed by the ships of the soon to be Coastal and Marine Service. Attempting to transport supplies overland was fraught with peril. The main problems were the threat posed by roving columns of gunmen and the wide-spread destruction of bridges, roads and railroads. Nautical supply lines were largely immune to Republican interference. The vessels also gave the Free State the ability to launch raids against suspected Irregular camps in coastal areas or among the small islands along the coast. Prisoners could be transported to secure facilities in Dublin rather than drawing on the scarce resources available to Free State forces in the provinces.⁶⁸ Aside from transporting National Army personnel, the Coastal and Marine Service gave the Free

65. Sale of trawlers, 1923 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/151).

66. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr., 1973), p.104.

67. Memorandum on revenue protection vessels, 1923 (B.N.A., ADM 1/8652/253).

68. Pilotage on the West Coast, 1923 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/133).

State the ability to blockade islands and peninsulas to allow their troops to conduct sweeps for Irregulars who might otherwise slip away.⁶⁹

Throughout 1922, central control of the ships was limited and their orders generally came from local army commanders. In some cases, ships tended to operate autonomously for short periods. On 2 December 1922, the *Saint Senan*'s log records that due to lack of orders, they decided to undertake a patrol of the coast to the north. On approaching Mulranny, 26 km north of Westport, they were signalled by troops ashore. On making contact, they found Brigadier Keary leading a force of 250 soldiers, who were desperately short of provisions. They were ordered to fetch supplies in Westport. They would continue to supply this force until late January. It is explicitly stated in the log that 'The ship was loaded with provisions, coal and munitions for 'Mulranny' because there is no other way of getting supplies to them owing to the roads and railway being blocked.'⁷⁰

Transport duty was hazardous as the personnel of the National Army were notoriously ill-disciplined and on one occasion, engaged in widespread looting of their own ship during transit. Shots were fired in a bid to restore order and end the looting.⁷¹ In hindsight, leaving crates of cigarettes in the hold of a troop transport was not the wisest decision made by the authorities of the time. On another occasion, while transporting soldiers, the *Saint Senan* was moored for the night when the soldiers aboard managed to source some alcohol and got drunk. They then armed themselves and attempted to leave the ship for the purpose of "clearing out" the Irregulars in the nearby town. The captain of the *Saint Senan*, after attempting to reason with the ringleader, was forced to knock the man out and escort the remaining members of the mob below decks at gunpoint.⁷² This degree of unprofessionalism extended into other fields. Ships were commandeered, used and then abandoned. In Carrick-on-Shannon, two motor boats used to patrol the Shannon were left unsecured and drifted away during a flood. After a brief search, one badly damaged boat

69. General report on operations in the west, Dec. 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy Papers, P7/B/74).

70. Logs of the Saint Senan (I.M.A., Saint Senan/14).

71. Reports of looting on SS Luimneach, 1922, (I.M.A., 18/Marine/129).

72. Logs of the Saint Senan, 1923 (I.M.A., Saint Senan/14).

was found but eventually full compensation to the tune of £50 had to be paid. Actions like these left the state footing the bill for a series of missing and damaged vessels and did nothing to endear the service to the Department of Finance.⁷³

Many of the state's ships were manned by civilian crews as there was a distinct lack of suitably qualified recruits in the National Army. This led to repeated problems. These civilian crews proved unwilling to risk their lives in the name of the Free State. The Welsh crews of the cross-channel ferries were not pleased to be drawn into an Irish civil war, particularly as they did not believe the landings could be successful.⁷⁴ During the landings at Cork, the pilot of the *Arvonnia* claimed a river pilot was required to bring the vessel to shore and had to have a gun held to his head before he would bring his ship into harbour.⁷⁵ The Fenit landings also showed that local pilots had to be coerced into aiding the landing forces. The crew of the *Muirchu* refused to aid in the landing of troops after the advance party came under fire and were eventually replaced as a result. The fact that the same crew were believed to have been involved in the shelling of the GPO during the Easter Rising contributed to the speed with which they were dismissed and replaced.⁷⁶ At the time of the Rising, due to the First World War, the crew and ship had been placed under the command of the Royal Navy and the original crew numbers were trebled through the assignment of Royal Navy personnel. While it seems unfair to blame the crew for the actions of a temporary commander, the symbolism of their earlier actions ensured short shrift was given to their case.

The Coastal and Marine Service

The Coastal and Marine Service was established in May 1923 at the very end of the war. This was more a case of formalising the status of the existing naval assets of the state than the foundation of an entirely new service. It also is notable as being the only Irish naval force that has ever been equal to both the peace-time and war-time tasks demanded of it. Those duties were mainly to counter smuggling and maintain the Free State's

73. Claims relating to missing and damaged motorboats, 1923 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/138).

74. Tim Pat Coogan, *The Irish Civil War* (London, 2005), p.213.

75. Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 1988), p.163.

76. Reports relating to the *Muirchu*, 1922 (I.M.A., A/3325).

communication and supply lines. Generally, Irish naval forces have lacked the equipment and thus the ability to fulfil their stated wartime duties.

From the Free State's perspective, the situation had dramatically improved. They held the vast majority of the coastal towns and their ports. Irregular forces were now hemmed in and isolated. A guerrilla war was being fought by the Irregulars without the all-important factor of wide-spread public support, which limited action to staunchly Republican areas, and the Free State had proven more than willing to use harsh measures against those that continued to resist. The armed trawlers continued to patrol the coast in a bid to indict gun-runners. Their operations were limited largely to the south and west coasts as the combination of isolated landing sites and a sympathetic populace made these regions the only area in which arms could be landed with any measure of success.

The ships of the service were used to conduct raids on outlying islands to ensure that the Irregulars could not base themselves in such isolated sites. The service would deliver troops ashore and blockade the islands to ensure that the Irregulars could not flee to another safe haven.⁷⁷ The Athlone garrison also commandeered small boats to conduct such raids on the nearby lakes. One example was the attack on Quaker Island in Lough Ree, in which elements of the garrison landed under fire and captured ten Irregulars which had been camped on the island.⁷⁸

In Kerry, the Irregulars had forced the Free State to withdraw to their larger barracks and ambushed any troops moving along the roads. Communication could be maintained by sea, regardless of Irregular actions inland.⁷⁹ By late 1923, the naval situation was secure enough that M-L 1 could be briefly diverted to shark-hunting duty in response to an unusual rise in sightings along the west coast.⁸⁰ This assignment was most likely

77. Operational Orders Achill Raid, 1923, (I.M.A., Naval box 4).

78. Padraic O'Farrell, *Who's who in the Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 1989), p.177.

79. Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 1997), p.204.

80. 'Coastal and Marine Service' in *An t-Óglach* (Oct. 1923), p.4.

intended to satisfy the Department of Fisheries, who were increasingly strident in demanding the return of their cruiser, the *Muirchu*.

Along with the Coast Patrol, two new formations were established, the Coastal Infantry and the Marine Investigation Department. The Coastal Infantry was purely a signals corps, allowing the State to control patrolling ships through the use of coded flag signals from stations dotted around the coast. The Marine Investigation was to be the eyes of the CMS, monitoring shipping in coastal waters. The motor launches were placed under their command, for use as coastal patrol boats.

The CMS was commanded by Major General Joseph Vize and its headquarters were established in Portobello Barracks, Dublin. He had been a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the organisation responsible for the Easter Rising. In his professional life, he had served as a marine engineer with Clan Lines, who were based in Glasgow. After his ship was torpedoed in 1915, he returned to Dublin and joined in the Rising in 1916. After his release, he continued his activities. He was captured by the British in 1921 only to later escape. His credentials, both maritime and republican were impeccable. Superintendent Eamonn O'Connor, Master Mariner, commanded the Coastal Patrol.⁸¹

The personnel of the Patrol were, in the words of the superintendent, 'all ex-Merchant Navy.'⁸² The bulk of its personnel had no formal naval training and only the most basic military training. The military personnel retained army ranks, like Colonel, Captain and Commandant while the naval elements used Merchant Navy ranks, like Chief Officer, Superintendent and First Engineer. The combination of both forms of rank used neatly sums up the nature of the force. It was manned by civilians and commanded by the army. But there was another factor which most likely affected the service. The Department of Finance was vehemently opposed to any attempt to found an Irish navy and by avoiding the use of naval insignia and ranks, it might have been hoped to divert any suspicions that

81. 'Coastal and Marine Service' in *An t-Óglach*, (Oct. 1923), p.1.

82. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.105.

might have arisen. Finance was horrified by the cost of refitting and maintaining the fleet and the fact that unforeseen expenses continually arose no doubt deepened their hostility towards the service.⁸³

The wider government also felt a certain dissatisfaction at the service's performance with one TD describing 'the position of this service, so far as I have been able to learn, is that it is about the most unsatisfactory of many of the services, perhaps the most unsatisfactory of all the services that there are under the Ministry.'⁸⁴ The discipline and control required of a military force was gravely lacking. On the *Muirchu*, there were repeated clashes between the captain and a succession of engineer officers, which resulted in the departure of two officers before the captain was appointed to a shore position.⁸⁵ Lapses in judgements had also resulted in a series of accidents, the *Muirchu* and *Slievenamon* had run aground and several collisions had occurred requiring further repairs and adding to the cost of the service.

By August 1924, the state's naval strength was at a peak. The Coastal and Marine Service controlled twenty-six vessels of various sizes and the means to control them effectively through its signalling posts. The cost of maintaining the service was uneconomic and, despite its contribution to the government's victory, it was not viewed in a positive light. This bode ill for the future of the force as the military threat dissipated and the government began preparing to demobilise. A statement by the Minister for Defence to the Executive Council summarises the position.

'We would never have suggested purchasing twelve trawlers and setting up a Naval establishment such as we now have if it were not for the necessity and special circumstances of controlling the coast and dispatching troops by water to the different parts of the coast. [...] it would be a great mistake to keep on a costly service not very pointedly applied to definite and required work. It would be more satisfactory, and more administratively healthy to get rid of all these vessels, even if we had to start in two or three years time to rebuild the service. We

83. Tom McGinty, *The Irish navy* (Kerry, 1995), p.107.

84. Vol. 4, estimates for public services: Marine Service, 26 July 1923 (<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/en.toc.D.0004.19230726.html>) (Sep. 2009), 1510.

85. Daire Brunnicardi, *The Seahound* (Cork, 2001), p. 67.

would probably save much more in the meantime than would purchase boats for a well thought out service subsequently.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

The Civil War is normally presented in Irish naval history as a separate episode, unrelated to the period that follows. It should be clear that the experiences of the government in the one most definitely affected the actions of the government in the other. The attitudes and beliefs formed during the war amongst the various government departments and military authorities did not fade. In fact, they persisted into the Emergency period.

The ease with which a naval force was assembled may have led to a certain level of complacency among government officials. The government may have believed that a naval force could be assembled on short notice should the demand arise. The British were viewed as a reliable source of reasonably priced equipment and their pool of expertise was available to be drawn on. And in the years following the First World War, the government could not have foreseen that when the need for a naval force would become dire, their sole supply would be unavailable. The assumption was made that any situation requiring the creation of a naval force would be known well in advance and that the British could rapidly arm and train such a force.

The experiences of the Civil War and the years following also shaped the attitude of the Finance Department's officials towards naval affairs. They distrusted naval estimates of cost and were quick to dismiss any and all plans to create any form of naval force. While the South Irish Flotilla of the Royal Navy continued to defend Irish waters, they would not countenance the foundation of a naval force. They took the pragmatic view that the British would continue to defend the Free State as they could ill-afford to allow a hostile power to occupy the nation. And so they were willing to allow the Royal Navy to bear responsibility for sea defence and allow the British Exchequer to bear the costs.

86. Memorandum for Executive Council meeting, Sep. 1923 (N.A.I., TAOIS S 1980).

All these factors were to influence the later development of the Irish Naval Service and the composition of the Marine Service during the Emergency period. The assumptions which underlie the reasoning of the ministers and officials of the Civil War lived on through the inter-war period and arose during the Emergency.

Chapter 2

Between The Wars (1924-1938)

Following the end of the Civil War until immediately prior to the Emergency, there was a period during which the Free State maintained no naval force at all. It has not been studied to any extent; the few texts that deal with Irish naval history do examine the Civil War but prefer to jump immediately into the Emergency period while the interwar period is largely glossed over. This interwar period provides information as to the mindsets of the various governments during the period with regards to Irish defence policy in the aftermath of the Civil War and thus forms an backdrop to the Emergency period that is essential in understanding the reasoning behind the course taken by the authorities at the time and thus is an integral part of the history of the Service.

The fate of the Coastal and Marine Service is detailed. The service was disbanded shortly after the war and the logic behind this decision is worth examining as it influenced the later development of the Naval Service. Without a navy, the Free State faced certain difficulties imposing its writ at sea; the measures taken to fulfil the duties required of any state in their territorial waters were undertaken in a half-hearted manner. The attitude of the governments and military authorities to naval matters during the period will also be studied as it does appear to reflect the baseline of Irish naval policy when not influenced by external pressures or events. Anglo-Irish relations in the naval sphere are discussed

and highlight the willingness of the British to countenance an Irish naval force so long as it did not negatively affect the defence of the United Kingdom.

Successive Irish government had to balance their desire to maintain the greatest degree of sovereignty available to them under the terms of the Treaty with the very real need to cooperate with the British in such areas as anti-smuggling missions and fisheries protection. It also fell to the Department of Foreign Affairs to avoid committing the Irish to any involvement in the wider schemes of imperial defence without rescinding all claims to the surrounding waters. Indeed, many officials were in favour of expanding the Irish maritime sector but few could be found willing to fund such an effort. The compromise between idealistic rhetoric and staunchly pragmatic actions does mirror the conflicting tendencies of the post-revolution politicians.

Post-Civil War Demobilisation

The Civil War had seen a great deal of general naval activity, multiple amphibious operations and the creation of the state's first navy and associated infrastructure. But with the Civil War at an end, the Free State demobilised rapidly. The Department of Finance's main concern was to reduce the military budget to a more manageable level as the Irish Free State's military spending was well above what the nation could afford. During the fiscal year 1922-23, the Provisional Government had spent seven and a half million pounds on the war effort, which represented 27.8% of all government expenditure in that year. In 1923-24, this increased to ten million pounds and 29.9% of government expenditure.⁸⁷ It was quite obvious that a major reduction in spending would have to be made and that the process would need to begin rapidly to avoid further economic damage.

The Coastal and Marine Service was most likely to be targeted by such any such measure. Its vulnerability was increased by several factors. Diplomatically, its status was unclear. The Irish Free State was forbidden a navy under Article Six of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, reproduced below:

87. Fanning, Ronan (ed), *Documents on Irish foreign policy* (Dublin, 2000), p. 112.

'6. Until an arrangement has been made between the British and Irish Governments whereby the Irish Free State undertakes her own coastal defence, the defence by sea of Great Britain and Ireland shall be undertaken by His Majesty's Imperial Forces, but this shall not prevent the construction or maintenance by the Government of the Irish Free State of such vessels as are necessary for the protection of the Revenue or the Fisheries.⁸⁸

The cost of maintenance grew greater as time passed and further problems emerged, requiring yet more funds to maintain the fleet. Thus its cost-effectiveness, which was being brought into question from the very end of the civil war, combined with the fact that the Royal Navy was performing the same tasks that were required of the Irish force at no cost to the Free State was a major impediment to its survival. The cost of maintaining such large military formations was beyond the means of the state.

The reductions, once begun, saw the elimination of almost all Irish naval forces and their supporting arms. The Coastal Infantry were disbanded on 1 September 1923 and their duties transferred to the regular infantry formations in the coastal regions. This was a clear sign of things to come. The Marine Investigation Department followed suit on 1 December. Without these supporting arms, it would prove increasingly difficult for the Patrol to function. And finally on 31 March, 1924, the Coastal Patrol was disbanded and the Coastal and Marine Service was no more. It had lasted just under eleven months.⁸⁹

Major General Vize, head of the Service, proposed that a greatly reduced force be maintained, namely the *Dainty* and three Mersey class trawlers, however this plan was rejected.⁹⁰ The Department was unswerving in its decision to disband the naval forces of the state entirely. The vessels of the service were handed over to the Office of Public Works and all but the motor launches were sold. The motor launches themselves were

88. Text of the Anglo-Irish treaty, 1921 (N.A.I., DE 2/301/1).

89. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.105.

90. Tom McGinty, *The Irish navy* (Kerry, 1995), p.111.

eventually scrapped as no buyer could be found for the ships.⁹¹ These cuts as part of a wider demobilization reduced defence spending to 3 million pounds in 1924/25 and it continued to decline into the early thirties reaching a low of just over one million pounds in 1932/33.⁹² It would be fifteen years before the Irish state would command a naval force again.

Following the Civil War, the Department of Finance faced a series of claims from ship-owners, seeking compensation for damage incurred by their vessels while commandeered. In some cases, small boats had been misplaced and the cost of replacement was demanded. Many fishing boats had been smashed by the men of the Service along the western coast in a bid to prevent their use by Irregular forces and their owners demanded to be compensated for the loss of both boats and earnings. The Department of Defence continued to receive requests for compensation until 1925.⁹³ All these expenses must have soured the Department's hostile attitude further and ensured a lasting ill-will towards naval matters.

The *Muirchu*

The elimination of the Coastal and Marine Service left the Irish state with one vessel flying its flag. The *Muirchu*, the sole survivor of the cuts, was handed over to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to act as the state's fisheries cruiser.

91. Sale of ships by O.P.W., 1924 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/151).

92. John P. Duggan, *A history of the Irish Army* (Dublin, 1991), p.165.

93. Request for information on destroyed fishing boats, 1925 (I.M.A., 18/Marine/152).



Fig 4: *Muirchu* fisheries cruiser.
(Image: Irish Military Archives)

Under the terms of Articles 6 and 7 of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, the defence of Irish waters was the sole responsibility of the Royal Navy and the Free State was only permitted revenue and fisheries protection vessels. And with the South Irish Flotilla of the Royal Navy protecting her waters, the Free State was not overly concerned by the limitations set on its naval strength and was unwilling to spend the funds to create the service that the Treaty permitted it. And so, the *Muirchu* alone undertook the task of patrolling Irish territorial waters. The *Muirchu*'s history was a long one, which overlapped the early years of Irish naval history. She was built in 1907 as a fisheries cruiser and research vessel. Originally named HMY *Helga*, she was renamed during the Civil War. During the First World War, she had been pressed into service by the Royal Navy as a submarine chaser and was credited with one submarine kill. She had been the gunboat on the Liffey which shelled Liberty Hall during the 1916. Her efforts during the Irish Civil War have been discussed previously. She would go on to serve in the Irish Marine Service during the Emergency.

But in the 1920s, her ability to secure Irish waters was, to say the least, limited. She had over two thousand miles of coastline to protect and her ability to force compliance was

gravely compromised by her lack of armament. Initially, a boiler pipe was used as a fake gun to intimidate those trawlers fishing illegally but her unarmed status became widely known. The commands of her crew were routinely ignored and finally, following an incident in which an irate trawler captain attempted to ram the *Murichu* in Bantry Bay, permission was sought from the British Admiralty to mount a gun on the vessel. Permission was granted on the grounds that only solid shot be used.⁹⁴

Muirchu was not a naval vessel in the formal sense as the Department of Fisheries and Agriculture retained control of the vessel. As a fisheries vessel, the *Muirchu* did not face the restrictions imposed on naval vessels of the time. No diplomatic notification was required when visiting foreign ports. A fact which probably prevented some diplomatic scuffles as it was common for the *Murichu* to enter the waters of Northern Ireland and she was a regular visitor to Northern ports in the early period.⁹⁵ Germany abused this system in 1937 when they re-designated their naval vessels as service sailing ships to avoid the need to notify foreign governments of their movements.⁹⁶ These tactics on the part of the *Muirchu* do provide an example of how even a navy consisting of one ship can still engage in naval diplomacy and express the intentions of its government.

Though these actions, the Irish State was reinforcing its claim to all Irish waters despite its inability to patrol or protect the vast bulk of its claim. The Irish government held that while the Six Counties did not fall under their jurisdiction, the surrounding waters did. It was stated ‘that Northern Ireland consists of certain parliamentary counties and that the Free State consists of the rest of Ireland, so defined by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920; and you will remember that we have always contended that this definition gave the whole sea shore surrounding the country, together with loughs upon which both Northern Ireland and ourselves abutted.’ These patrols were seen as a means of reinforcing that claim should the matter be raised at a later date.⁹⁷

94. Thomas McKenna, ‘Thank god we're surrounded by water’ in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.107.

95. *ibid*, p.107.

96. German diplomatic note, 1937 (I.M.A., 2/51851).

97. Letter to W.T. Cosgrave from H. Kennedy, 1925 (U.C.D.A., P4/424).

Fishery Protection Duties

The Irish fishing industry had collapsed during the War of Independence and Civil War. Illegal fishing was rampant and the need to provide additional patrol boats was recognised by the Dáil but the Department of Finance would not sanction the expenditure required. The matter was initially raised in 1925 and would drag on for many years after.⁹⁸ It was not until 1938 that an additional vessel was sanctioned, the *Fort Rannoch*.

During the late 1920s and 1930s, most poaching by trawl was undertaken by British trawlers with French and Belgian vessels in the minority. An exception was the case of lobster and crayfish poaching, which was traced largely to small motor boats from Brittany. Generally the trawlers would enter Irish bays to shelter from weather and would use their time in calmer waters to fish rather than lie idle.⁹⁹

Fisheries protection was an area fraught with confusion. Before the passing of the Fisheries Act in 1933, the *Muirchu* and its crew had no power to arrest any vessel or skipper caught trawling within the three mile limit. Indeed, before the passing of the Act, the exact extent of Irish territorial waters was unclear and although the three mile limit was enforced from that point onwards, it was never expressly stated in the legislation. This ambiguity was likely due to the government's intentions to expand their claims at a later date.¹⁰⁰

The Garda Síochána did have powers of arrest and the *Muirchu* was required to effectively trick the skipper into being escorted to the nearest port where the Gardai could take the ship and crew into custody. In some cases, the Gardai used local boats to board suspect vessels. However, this could lead to interesting stand-offs as the Gardai were unarmed and occasionally outnumbered by the crew. In one case, a Fleetwood Steam Trawler was boarded off the Donegal coast and ordered into Buncrana Harbour.

98. Vol. 31 oral answers- poaching by foreign trawlers, 11 July 1929 (<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/en.toc.D.0031.19290711.html>) (Sep. 2009), 818.

99. Fishery patrols, 1945 (I.M.A., 2/92918).

100. Instructions to naval personnel, 1947-55 (I.M.A., 3/2468).

Following a six hour dispute, the skipper made for Stranraer during the night, carrying two Gardai with him on his journey home.¹⁰¹ The fact that there was only one fisheries protection vessel, coupled with the proliferation of wireless transmitters on fishing trawlers resulted in a situation whereby the movements of the *Muirchu* could be monitored by the poachers, an interesting reversal on the present-day situation.¹⁰²

Arms Smuggling and Subversive Activity

Although the Civil War had formally ended, not all had abandoned the struggle. It was crucial to the security of the state and its relation with the United Kingdom that measures be taken to prevent arms smuggling and other subversive activities.

The possibility of arms shipments from the United States to Ireland was of concern to the Irish Free State. The disbanding of the Coastal and Marine Service had left the Irish government with few options in this regard. As they were unable to physically intercept arms shipments, they sought other means to prevent them. Efforts were made to encourage the American authorities to prevent any such shipments from departing their ports. The main barrier to such efforts was the fact that in the United States at the time, there was no law against the export of arms to a friendly nation. Only if those arms were accompanied by men intending to use them was action possible as it could then be construed as an expeditionary force.¹⁰³ Despite the difficulty which this caused, this did not cause the government to reconsider its stance on naval forces. Arms could still be intercepted once they had entered Irish ports.

The Royal Navy, in common with the regulations governing fisheries protection, could only shadow suspect vessels in Irish waters. They had no right to halt or search any such vessel despite the fact that they suspected that Spanish trawlers were landing arms in the Berehaven area.¹⁰⁴ The *Muirchu*, from June 1933, was the only vessel legally permitted

101. Fishery protection, 1930 (B.N.A., DO 35/402/10).

102. Fishery patrols, 1945 (I.M.A., 2/92918).

103. Fanning, Ronan (ed), *Documents on Irish foreign policy* (Dublin, 2000), p. 91.

104. Landing of arms by spanish trawlers, 1933-35 (B.N.A., DO 35/473/13).

to conduct such searches. But as its crew were not police officers but rather civil servants, they could not legally conduct such searches.

Despite some pressure, the Irish Free State proved averse to extending the right to conduct searches to Royal Navy ships in Irish territorial waters. Although this might appear counter-productive, relations between both countries were marked by a certain level of distrust. Irish sovereignty was at stake in such matters. The British could prove equally distrustful, particularly in regard to the Treaty Ports. Destroyers were secretly stationed within 100 miles of Lough Swilly and Berehaven to assist in the event of attack. In both cases, the ships were not to enter Free State ports without specific orders or to be seen in Northern Irish ports on a regular basis to avoid raising any suspicion that these vessels were permanently deployed in the area. These orders were then passed by each commander to his relief.¹⁰⁵

Seaborne Trade

Prior to independence, the British Admiralty had been responsible for updating and producing charts for Irish ports, approaches and waters. Following the establishment of the Free State, this service was withdrawn. In the early 1930s, there was talk of the establishment of an Irish Hydrographic Service.¹⁰⁶ As sea-charts for the Irish coast were outdated, the lack of such a service resulting in a decline in nautical trade as captains were, rightly, unwilling to risk their vessels on the strength of inaccurate charts. Another factor was the desire to demonstrate Ireland's independence and reinforce their distinct status as being separate from the United Kingdom. However, inter-departmental feuding prevented any action being taken. Both the Department of Defence and the Department of Industry and Commerce viewed the matter as falling into the remit of the other.

It was 1937 before the proposal was reconsidered seriously and Irish authorities met with Rear Admiral Edgell, head of the British Hydrographic department to discuss the

105. Irish Free State territorial waters, 1933 (B.N.A., 167/1935).

106. Establishing a hydrographic service, 1930 (I.M.A., 2/45891).

purchase of a custom-built or converted survey vessel.¹⁰⁷ The British were quite willing to provide what assistance they could. The Dominions Office had brought the matter of outdated charts to the attention of the Free State government previously following the loss of the HMY *Roussalka* off the Irish coast. The vessel had struck the Pollack Shoal and sunk on August 25, 1933.¹⁰⁸ However, the outbreak of the Second World War put a halt to the scheme as the authorities turned their attention to acquiring purely military vessels.

The notion of an Irish Merchant Marine was mooted at times during the period. This initiative was ideological in nature as Irish merchant seamen were at the time, British-trained and the government and civil service would at the very least play lip service to the idea of reducing their links to Britain. The idea of developing an indigenous capacity to maintain seaborne trade also fed into their grand strategy of self-sufficiency. In 1927, enquiries were made by the Department of Foreign Affairs into the possibility of training Irish seamen in countries other than the United Kingdom. The Germans, Dutch, Danes, Americans and French were all approached on the matter. Having done this much, it was perhaps felt that their duties as patriots had been dispensed and the concept was quietly allowed to fade from official memories.¹⁰⁹

Diplomacy and Naval Affairs

The various governments of the interim period showed occasional flashes of interest in naval affairs but these can usually be attributed to ulterior motives. They wished to raise Ireland's profile and draw attention to their sovereignty.¹¹⁰ The Free State sent a delegation to the 1927 Geneva Naval Conference. As this was a Naval Disarmament Conference, a state possessing one unarmed vessel might not have been expected to fully participate in the stated goal of the summit. Their goals were simple, to highlight their sovereignty by attending the Conference with the full power to negotiate on their own

107. *ibid.*

108. Coastal surveys in Irish Free State waters, 1934 (B.N.A., DO 35/483/3).

109. Merchantile marine, 1927 (N.A.I., DFA GR 866).

110. Michael Kennedy and Joseph Morrison Skelly (eds), *Irish foreign policy: 1919-66* (Dublin, 2000), p.80.

behalf, separately from the United Kingdom and demonstrating that sovereignty on the international and domestic stage. The naval element was of no concern, only the diplomatic benefits which could be accrued. They attended both the Imperial Defence Conference and the Second Naval Conference in London, in 1930 and 1936 respectively. Again, their main concern was to ensure their sovereignty was not impinged on in their absence and to demonstrate their independence.

The British attitude towards the prospect of an Irish navy varied. Prior to the treaty, the case was often made that to allow Irish independence was to threaten the future security of Britain. Lloyd George stated that during the First World War: 'Ireland was a real peril. They were in touch with German submarines' and that to grant independence would be 'to hand over Ireland to be made a base of the submarine fleet and we are to trust to luck in the next war. Was there ever such lunacy proposed by anyone?'¹¹¹ Rumours of cooperation between remote Irish communities and U-boats had circulated in the First World War and would re-emerge in the Second World War, but no evidence can be found to confirm these allegations.

The British did intend to reduce the scope of their defences in the southern Treaty Ports at the first opportunity; however, no action could be taken prior to the 1927 Conference detailed in the Treaty. The Admiralty were careful to maintain technical occupation of all areas assigned to their care during the negotiations to avoid being left at any disadvantage at a later date.¹¹²

Greater trust was given once it became clear the provisions of the Treaty were being abided by although the British remained wary. They believed that although Ireland could never challenge British sea control that the purchase of submarines and minelayers should be prevented. Such a force would be relatively cheap but, based on their experience in the Great War, capable of great damage.¹¹³ It was held that the rights extended to other Dominions could not be extend to the Irish Free State as no other

111. Irish defence policy, 1927 (I.M.A.), p.5.

112. South Irish coast defences, 1927 (B.N.A., ADM 1/8723/303).

Dominion posed such a threat to the British Empire's trade routes and sea communications. As time went on, the British attempted to encourage the Irish to take a share in their own defence. However, the question of the Free State fielding submarines was one which they were entirely unwilling to consider.

By 1938, some small steps were being taken to consider the possibility of a conflict between the United Kingdom and an external power which would impact on the Free State. Informal discussions were held as to the nature and quantity of foodstuffs which would be imported and exported between both jurisdictions in war-time.¹¹⁴

Irish Defence Policy and the Sea

The Free State had realised in 1925 that there were three paths open to it with regard to defence policy. These were the assumption of total responsibility for its own defence, the creation of a force which would operate within the wider British Imperial forces or the total abandonment of defence to the British.¹¹⁵

The factors that influenced the development of navies in other nations were not present in the Free State. There was no external threat that would force the state to develop a naval force. The Royal Navy protected her territorial waters from any potential aggressor. The British could be relied on to defend the state as it was in their own self-interest. The Free State had no interest in maritime affairs outside the spheres of custom duties and fisheries protection. However, politically, any form of cooperation with British forces might not prove popular domestically.¹¹⁶ Indeed, as the very presence of British naval bases in Free State territory was seen by some as the greatest threat to Irish security. Their existence guaranteed Irish involvement in any Great Power conflict. Irish neutrality was impossible while the Royal Navy maintained bases on its territory.

113. Irish defence policy, 1927 (I.M.A.), p.7.

114. Food supplies during war, 1938 (I.M.A., S.49).

115. Memorandum of Council of Defence, 1925 (N.A.I., S4541), p.2.

116. Fanning, Ronan (ed), *Documents on Irish foreign policy* (Dublin, 2000), p. 58.

So they chose the course of assuming total responsibility for their own defence. Having chosen this course, they then took no action on the matter. They were agreed that independent defence was the preferred path but did not feel that such a force would have to be established immediately. It was agreed that the best start made be made by purchasing several trawlers for mine-sweeping and mine-laying operations. But in the absence of any efforts to found such a force, the result was that they were espousing one path while following the polar opposite.

In 1935, the Defence Forces published the “Fundamental Factors affecting Saorstát Defence Problem” memorandum.¹¹⁷ This paper identified the need for some form of military deterrent. It acknowledged that a force capable of repelling any external threat was far beyond the means of the state but that even a token force was better than no force at all. This was not a widely accepted view, particularly in the Department of Finance. It also was the first memorandum to clearly state that the defence of the Irish state was primarily a naval problem and that the question of the state’s seapower had to be addressed. The possibility of invasion was related to questions of seapower. It was not Irish resources or industry which would draw hostile attention but its ports and anchorages. They provided bases from which to operate in the North Eastern Atlantic and controlled the approaches to the Irish Sea and English Channel through which half the world’s maritime traffic passed at the time.¹¹⁸ It was acknowledged that the advent of aircraft and submarines in naval warfare made Irish facilities of greater benefit to any nation seeking to contest British sea-lanes.¹¹⁹

It was recommended that while security could not be assured, some form of naval force was required, whether to act as a deterrent or to reassure the British that they need not fear Irish facilities falling into the hands of their enemies. This suggestion was not acted on until 1939; however, the affair combined with the diplomatic situation in Europe did focus the attention of the government on the pressing need for some form of naval force, a need which they would later be forced to acknowledge.

117. Fundamental factors, 1935 (I.M.A., G2/0057).

118. *ibid*, p.7.

In 1938, during the Army Estimates debate, the position was put forward that ‘the defence of an island without a Navy was a joke, [...] and if we cannot have an adequate Navy or Army then the obvious thing is to make arrangements with a country that has a Navy.’ It was advocated by the Council of Defence that a policy of cooperation with the Royal Navy was the best choice available.¹²⁰ Indeed, there can be no doubt that militarily a policy of cooperation with the British against an external threat was the most logical option. But, politically, this option was no longer available as the unspoken Irish policy was now one of neutrality.

Free State Seapower

From the very beginning, the Irish government’s naval policy had one over-riding goal, the return of the Treaty Ports. In 1926, it was described as the most urgent matter in the development of Irish coastal defences.¹²¹ While they remained in British hands, they stated, no coastal defence force could be created. The Free State was thus quite hesitant to undermine its own position by creating a coastal defence force.

The Irish governments of the period did occasionally display a half-hearted interest in maritime affairs. The view was expressed during the early 1920s that the foundations of a force could be put in place in preparation for the time when the creation of a naval force was not as inconvenient diplomatically. The main thrust of the plan was to boost the state’s seapower by the strengthening of the Irish fishing industry and of the Irish Merchantile Marine. It was believed that with such an expansion, Irish dockyards would develop to the point where they would be capable of constructing such vessels as might be required.¹²² It is interesting to note that the government of the time had recognised the benefits which a strong fishing and maritime sector could provide for a later naval force. And as both initial goals were also likely to benefit the state economically, the idea was viewed with favour. But once more, the costs of such a project were deemed excessive.

119. *ibid*, p.6.

120. Memorandum on Defence Forces, 1944 (I.M.A., Appendix III), p.1.

121. Memorandum on coast defence, 1926 (N.A.I., S4978).

122. Memorandum of Council of Defence, 1925 (N.A.I., S4541), p.3.

The British have been alarmed to learn that the Irish government, from the very beginning viewed the deployment of submarines as a future objective. The Irish officials did not seem to recognise the difficulties which might result and the acquisition of submarines at an unspecified future date was often discussed.¹²³ In 1926, it was stated that ‘the most effective craft for our purposes would be the submarine and the ultimate acquisition of a few of the small type, known as “coastal” ones, should be kept in view.’¹²⁴

An informal conference was held at the British Admiralty in 1927 to discuss the matter of Free State Coastal Defence in advance of a formal Conference on the matter, as set out in the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Rear-Admiral Pound, the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff led the British delegation and Diarmuid O’Hegarty, Secretary of the Executive Council, led the Irish delegation. The Irish were eager to discuss the return of the Treaty Ports as the foundation of a scheme of coastal defence. The British made it clear that was not an option which might be discussed and that a more fruitful course would be to discuss the creation an Irish Coast Watching and Mine Sweeping Service. The British delegation indicated that they were expressly prohibited from discussing the ports.¹²⁵

It was indicated that the best means of creating a coastal defence force was to start with several minesweeping trawlers. This policy was identical to that developed by the Free State during their internal discussions on the establishment of a coastal defence force but no further progress was made as the Irish delegation insisted that the matter of the ports would need to be considered. As a result the main Conference was postponed indefinitely, with the result that no real pressure to create a force was to be applied. The British continued to protect Ireland’s coasts.

This was entirely counter to their intentions. It was hoped by the Admiralty that the Irish Free State would assist their efforts as far as possible within the limits of the Treaty. They

123. *ibid*, p.3.

124. Memorandum coast defence (sea) (N.A.I., DFA 205/122), p.1

hoped to incorporate an Irish customs reporting system into their Naval Intelligence Organisation. In effect, this would bring Irish customs officials into a British Isles wide intelligence organisation. They also sought to secure Irish assistance in the maintenance of their War Signals Stations on the Irish coast and the rebuilding of those destroyed during the conflict. Unsurprisingly, these suggestions were not met with approval by the Free State.¹²⁶

Enquiries were made about Italian type motor boats in 1934.¹²⁷ At the time, the Irish authorities viewed the Italian designs as the most advanced of their type. The government had considered these as a response to the grave need for the greater protection of Irish fisheries. After the use of motor boats was suggested during a Dáil debate, Deputy McMenamin responded.

‘Deputy Kissane says that he is going to have armed launches. I thought the Deputy came from Kerry. An armed launch would last about half an hour in a boiling, raging sea off the Donegal coast on a winter night. If she went out any distance she would never get back. If we are to have protection, it must be protection by gunboats or something of that kind that can go out to sea in any kind of weather and can stay there in any weather.’¹²⁸

Even after it was widely advised that these vessels would be entirely unsuited to the fishery protection duties which were to be demanded of them but the notion of using such craft as patrol boats survived into the Emergency period.

The Free State failure to create a coastal defence force was noted by the Irish diaspora and several approaches were made by individuals to the Irish Free State on the matter. It had periodically been rumoured that an Irish navy would be founded as early as 1935.¹²⁹ Generally, these rumours would spark a flurry of applications from various suitable and many entirely unsuitable personnel worldwide. An attempt was made in 1935 by an Irish

125. Informal conference, 1927 (N.A.I., S4978), p.3.

126. British naval policy regards dominions, 1923 (B.N.A., ADM 116/3416).

127. Enquiries on new Italian motorboat, 1934 (I.M.A., 2/37592).

128. Vol. 53, fisheries vote, 14 June 1934, (<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/en.toc.D.0053.19340614.html>) (Sep 2009), 351.

emigrant in the United States and a veteran of the War of Independence, Patrick Fitzgerald, to sell Prohibition-era rum-runners to the Free State.¹³⁰ The Greenwood Basin and Construction Company offered its Fleetwing Hammerhead Coastal Motor Boat in 1938. Although similar to the vessels later acquired during the Emergency, in this case, the design was felt to be more suited to riverine or inland sea operations.¹³¹

Despite military advice that this type of vessel was unsuited to the south and west coasts, the government continued to favour the acquisition of such boats, called coastal motor boats at the time but later known as motor torpedo boats, into the Emergency period. The logic was one that students of Irish military history will be familiar with. These vessels were relatively cheap and provided the appearance of a naval force. Technically, these vessels posed a threat to any capital ships in Irish waters. However, their effectiveness was dependent on a certain element of surprise and to a degree, a sufficient number of vessels to allow some to survive the attentions of escorting destroyers in the area and close on their targets. The force would be entirely unsuited to its role but as a force capable of fulfilling the roles required was beyond the means of the Free State, this token navy was seen as the next-best thing. The appearance of a naval force was deemed sufficient. Yet, not even this token force was created.

Private individuals in the United States had offered the Irish Department of Defence plans for a three man submarine in 1938; however this proposal was not acted on.¹³² More than likely, the design offered was obsolete and even a modern mini-submarine of that type would be of little use to an Irish navy. Even a relatively modern submarine would have had little military utility. Its use in defence of the State's waters would have been limited as any potential base would be within easy striking distance of British aircraft. And its deployment would have antagonised the British as such craft would pose a direct threat to their interests. And as the planned Irish ship-building industry had not

129. Applications for possible naval force, 1935-39 (I.M.A., 2/44613).

130. Offer to sell speedboats, 1935 (I.M.A., 2/43785).

131. MTB Greenport USA, 1938 (I.M.A., 2/54611).

132. Offer of submarine plans, 1938 (I.M.A., 2/54393).

materialised, there was no benefit in angering the state's sole supplier of military hardware.

Conclusion

It is odd that a government that insisted on the trappings of an independent state, such as a flag, anthem and passports, took no steps to secure a token naval force. A shortage of funds is the most obvious culprit but closer examination shows that the issue of coastal defence was closely entwined with the more thorny issue of Irish sovereignty.

The Irish government insisted that only when the Treaty Ports were returned, could they plan a coastal defence force. This political gambit resulted in an unwillingness to countenance the development of such a force while the ports remained in British hands. It could be suggested that the Irish used the British disinclination to discuss the return of the ports as a means of avoiding any discussion of a contribution being made by the Irish towards maintaining the South Irish Flotilla. This, in turn, was part of a wider effort to avoid any entanglement in the wider issue of contributing to Imperial defences.

The British would have welcomed a Coastal Defence Force as it would have eased the demands on its own naval forces. Even at the time of the Treaty, the British foresaw a time when the Irish would be permitted to field an anti-submarine force. As time drew on, they were increasingly willing to extend further rights to the Free State. A taskforce based on minesweepers and submarine hunters would not have been seen as a threat to British interests, yet the Free State was unwilling to consider the hefty expenditure required while its defence by sea was assured by British self-interest.

So while the Irish Free State maintained no naval force during the period from 1924 to 1938, the question of coastal defence and seapower were not entirely ignored. The various governments of the time were quite willing to discuss the type of naval force that might be required and to discuss the potential composition of such a force but they were unwilling to take any action on the matter.

On a smaller scale, if such exists in the realm of the hypothetical, no-one failed to recognise that further fishery protection vessels were required to adequately patrol Irish territorial waters and all concerned were quite willing to discuss the number desired but once again, the will to actually purchase vessels was absent.

Clearly the state of Irish finances also had an effect, there was very little capital available to expand the defence forces, let alone re-found an entire arm. As stated by Deputy Johnson in 1925, 'You may get a large number of men at a small cost. But you cannot get a great quantity of material at small cost.'¹³³ In matters of defence, the priority was always on increasing the size of the army to defend territory rather than attempting to contest the surrounding waters.

This led on into a second factor, since a force capable of defending Irish waters against all comers was far beyond the means of the state, it should be clear that successive ministers would have seen little point in establishing a naval service that would undoubtedly prove incapable of the duties required of it. The choice of statement over substance came very near to leaving the Irish Free State defenceless in the coming years of conflict. Indeed, as the early years of the Marine Service and the Irish Naval Service were to demonstrate, the lesson was not learnt by those controlling their development.

133. Vol. 11, army estimate, 14 May 1925, (<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/en.toc.D.0011.19250514.html>) (Sep. 2009), 1543.

Chapter 3

The Emergency Period (1938-1945)

The Second World War saw the Irish state with almost no ability to defend or secure its territorial waters. The period was marked by the failing efforts of the government to develop some manner of seaward defence from the resources available within the country and those supplies and vessels which the British, themselves locked in a battle for their very survival, could make available. The causes of this perilous situation were entirely of their own making as the Irish government had demanded unfettered control of its territorial waters without considering the responsibilities which would inevitably follow.

The measures taken, when the threat was recognised, to prepare to repel any intruders are documented where possible. These measures were altered as the situation changed on

continental Europe and in the Atlantic, to the degree possible when operating without suitable equipment or training. The motivation behind the foundation of the Coastwatching and Marine Service demonstrates the dangers faced by neutral states in areas of great strategic importance. The impact of the wider war, in particular the situation at sea, on Ireland was notable for its influence on Irish foreign policy and its relationship with Britain and the United States. The evolution and eventual fates of the various Services established during the war shall be detailed to demonstrate the difficulty of creating a wide-ranging military organization with a minimum of resources and support. The Marine and Coast Watching Service consisted of five distinct services, the Coast Watching Service, Patrol Service, Port Control and Examination Service, Mining Service and Maritime Inscription, each of which will be detailed in turn. On 17 July 1942, the Marine and Coast Watching Service was re-divided into its component parts, the Marine Service and Coast Watching Service. But despite the change in name, the individual services remained largely unchanged and so the former term will be used to signify the service as a whole while detailing the history of each component separately. Instances of Anglo-Irish cooperation during the war-years will also come under scrutiny as they shed a light on the underlying intentions and attitudes of the British and Irish government towards one another and the variations between the treatment of different elements of the Defence Forces by their British counterparts.

Prelude to War

The uncontrolled spending during the Civil War and the Army Mutiny had left elements of the civil service wary of attempts by the armed forces to better their position.¹³⁴ Any suggestion of increased spending was treated with suspicion. In some cases, highlighting the army's lack of power over spending decisions was an end in itself. Some politicians stated that as a suitable defence force was unaffordable that any spending on the defence forces was money wasted. The stance of pragmatic isolationism adopted and maintained by successive governments resulted in the fact that military expansion only occurred when imminent threats were impossible to ignore. The powerful combination of hostility

134. Peter Young, 'Defence and the Irish state' in *International Colloquium of Military History*, (1993), p.249.

to the idea of founding a navy from elected officials and civil servants was enough to prevent any real discussion of any such proposal.

Another factor dated back to 1921, Articles Six and Seven of the Anglo-Irish Treaty had limited Irish naval expansion. It was to be renegotiated after a period of five years but the Irish government had shown no real inclination to do so. This attitude of indifference had survived through the inter-war period; indeed it had grown in strength.¹³⁵ The strength of the Royal Navy insulated the Irish Free State's government from naval matters. The South Irish Flotilla of the Royal Navy continued to operate from Cobh and the level of defence its destroyers provided was many times in excess of anything which a domestic fleet could hope to approach. However, the handover of the Treaty Ports and claiming of territorial waters under the 1938 Constitution made the naval situation impossible to ignore and belatedly, the need to develop some force of coastguard force was acknowledged.

The Treaty Ports had been a sore point with Irish nationalists since the end of the Civil War. Once in power, the Fianna Fáil government of the time, under De Valera had pressed strongly for the British evacuation of the ports. The British government was inclined to acquiesce. The War Office was of the view that they were 'an awkward commitment' as they were considered to be vulnerable to attack from the landward side and could be the targets of some form of economic blockade. It was also felt that attempting to use the ports against Irish wishes would render the anchorages too insecure for any useful purpose.¹³⁶

A careful watch was maintained on the activities of British troops in the Treaty Ports by the Gardai at the request of the Government. Lists of personnel occupying the forts were maintained along with information on the identities of potential British intelligence officers and their movements off-base. The Irish government had noted that the British were not investing in the modernisation of the forts and took it as a sign that they were

135. Thomas McKenna, "Thank god we're surrounded by water" in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.105

not committed to their upkeep. The Department of Justice had intercepted letters in mid-1937 bound for the officer commanding the coastal defence which expressed that the likelihood of the forts being returned to the Irish was high.¹³⁷ The return of the ports was negotiated by 1938. In exchange for an understanding that the ports would be made available to the British in times of conflict, the last British holdings in southern Ireland were returned. Spike Harbour and the defences in Cork were handed over on 11 July 1938, the 17th anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Truce which brought the war of Independence to a close. Berehaven saw the final British troops depart on 30 September and Lough Swilly was transferred to the Irish on 3 October.¹³⁸ Interestingly, the British sergeant who hauled down the Union Jack during the final handover at Lough Swilly was a brother-in-law of the Irish sergeant who hoisted the Tricolour in the same ceremony.¹³⁹ With the handover of Treaty Ports, several British personnel were temporarily seconded to the Irish Defence Forces to train soldiers in the upkeep and use of the coastal defence artillery.¹⁴⁰ These defences were to be retained but to ensure their effectiveness, a naval force was required.

In January of 1938, the Army submitted a proposal with the intention of replacing the departing British naval force with an Irish counterpart. The fleet suggested was a large one, including 36 torpedo boats intended as a sea-going strike force to complement the coastal fortifications. Six patrol boats, supported by a larger force of twenty trawlers leased to naval reservists who could be called up in times of crisis, were to strengthen Irish coastal patrol capabilities.¹⁴¹ This was rejected and preparations were made to create a much smaller fleet. In May, two motor torpedo boats were ordered from J.I. Thornycroft. These were to be designated *M1* and *M2*.¹⁴²

136. Fisk, Robert, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality* (London, 1983), p.26.

137. British activities on the Irish coast, 1933-38 (N.A.I., JUS 8/434).

138. Fisk, Robert, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality* (London, 1983), pp 44-47.

139. *The Times*, 4 Oct. 1938.

140. Details of pay and leave of British training cadres, 1938 (I.M.A., 2/55590).

141. Daire Brunnicardi, *The Seahound* (Cork, 2001), p.114.

142. Purchasing of torpedo boats and minesweeping equipment, 1938-39 (I.M.A., 2/55103).



Fig 5: MTB *M1* at full throttle.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The craft displaced 32 tons, were 72 feet in length and powered by three Isotta-Fraschini engines. However, these Italian-designed and built engines were unavailable for installation in the later models and were replaced by an inferior version produced by Thornycroft themselves limiting their top speed to 28 rather than 40 knots.¹⁴³ The MTBs were equipped with machine guns to provide some measure of anti-air defence but their main weapons were the torpedoes they carried. Unlike late-war vessels of this type which had launchers on deck mounts amidships, the torpedoes were launched from troughs in the stern of the vessel. Once the torpedo was in the water, the MTB would then have to veer out of the path of its own weapon.¹⁴⁴

143. Angus Konstam, *British motor torpedo boat 1939-45* (Oxford, 2003), p.23.

144. *ibid*, p.210.

In February of 1939, it was decided to form a Coast Watching Service to monitor Irish coastal waters. Preparations began to develop some form of naval defence. On 29 August of the same year, an army cadre was established at the new headquarters of the Coast Watching Service in Portobello Barracks. The order was given to man the eight existing lookout posts on the south coast, by war's end; this had been expanded to a network of 88 lookout posts, spaced every eight to ten miles along the coast.

Outbreak of War

On 3 September 1939, war broke out in Europe as France and Britain declared war on Germany. International laws now required an Irish navy to secure their territorial waters. Section XIII of the Hague Convention of 1907 detailed the rights and duties of neutral powers in naval war. Article 25 of that section stated that: 'A neutral Power is bound to exercise such surveillance as the means at its disposal allow to prevent any violation of the provisions of the above Articles occurring in its ports [...] or in its waters.'¹⁴⁵ Among other duties, which will be detailed later, this meant that the Irish government had to ensure that its waters were not used by any belligerent power to re-supply their vessels. Without any means of surveillance, the state was immediately failing to abide by the Convention. In such a situation, belligerent powers had the right to operate in the state's water in defence of their own interests. Had the British taken such action, Irish neutrality would have been seriously compromised. The official records of British War Cabinet meetings do briefly mention that German prisoners taken from a U-Boat captured in September 1939 had admitted being ashore in Ireland and were in possession of Irish cigarettes. However, the accusation was not repeated and appeared to have slipped further notice. As the First Lord of the Admiralty was campaigning vigorously for the re-occupation of the Treaty Ports at the time, it is possible that this was intended to encourage the Cabinet to take a hard line with the Irish.¹⁴⁶

The British eventually chose to attempt to gradually draw concessions from the Irish over time and De Valera's government did take steps to demonstrate their goodwill. Irish

145. Full text of the Hague Convention of 1907 (www.ircr.org/ihl.nsf) (12 Aug. 2009).

146. War cabinet meeting, Sep. 15 1939, (B.N.A., CAB 65/1/16).

neutrality could be described as benign towards the Allied cause. Arrangements were made to immediately inform the British when submarines were sighted by Irish forces and unofficially British surface craft were to be permitted to pursue and destroy German submarines in Irish waters. These measures alleviated British concerns that Irish waters would provide a refuge for German U-boats. A naval attaché was appointed to monitor the Coast Watching network and reassure the British as to its effectiveness and thus the reliability of Irish reports on activity in their waters. Admiralty rescue tugs were permitted to operate from Cobh and Berehaven. British aircraft were also permitted to move through Irish airspace without comment.¹⁴⁷ This level of cooperation while deeply un-neutral, did reduce the British fears as to the security of Irish waters.

American cable-laying vessels with British escorts were known to call into Irish ports for periods of no greater than 24 hours. Generally, their captains would plead distress due to poor weather and remain no longer than the time allowed to belligerent warships under international law. Lough Foyle is mentioned in Department of Foreign Affairs memorandum relating to the habit as hosting between 10 and 30 such ships at all times. Their concern was with possible German air attack on these targets which might strike Irish towns along the lough and that protesting such actions might be difficult when the legitimate targets were in Irish territorial waters. British crews also would come ashore in civilian clothes and make their way to and from Derry, in British territory.¹⁴⁸ Again, a blind eye was turned to such activity in the interests of maintaining cordial relations with the British.

The Coast Watching Service was renamed the “Marine and Coast Watching Service” on 5 September 1939, having completed the establishment of a naval force, the government then set about acquiring ships to create the “Marine” portion of the service. Two days later, the Department of Defence wrote to the Department of Industry and Commerce requesting that they prevent sale of seven trawlers pending their possible purchase by the state, the number of motor torpedo boats ordered was increased by four and two trawlers

147. Letter from JL Maffey to Anthony Eden, Oct. 25 1939, (B.N.A., DO 35/1008/11).

148. Incidents involving belligerent vessels in Irish waters, 1941-45 (N.A.I., DFA A/22).

for conversion to minesweepers were sought in Britain. The British Admiralty refused to allow the sale of the trawlers but the expanded motor torpedo boat order was approved. Oddly, following the failure to purchase British trawlers, no further attention was given to the possible purchase of suitable ships within the state, an unusual act in light of their later efforts to acquire trawlers from the British.¹⁴⁹

The start of the Second World War saw the Irish state completely exposed at sea. It had no naval force although plans to establish such a force were at an advanced state. At the beginning of the Emergency period, the Irish state's potential naval force consisted of two fishery cruisers, lacking the speed or armaments to counter a true naval vessel. Even when armed, they were deemed inferior to the average defensively armed merchantman of the time.¹⁵⁰ Although the government was maintaining a neutral position, the risk of invasion was considered to be high and the likelihood of forced belligerency was increased by their inability to prevent the use of their coastal waters.

The Marine Service was established and immediately amalgamated into the Marine and Coast Watching Service on 6 September. On 7 December, the wartime establishment of the Marine and Coast Watching Service was announced, it was intended that this would bring the state in compliance with the 13th Schedule of the 1907 Hague Convention: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War. These duties included:

- a) The control of the use of territorial waters and ports by belligerent warships;
- b) The control of the use of territorial waters and ports by merchant shipping;
- c) Mine laying, minesweeping and the notification and destruction of mines;
- d) Protection of the country's fishing limits;
- e) Escort duties;
- f) Protection of navigational aids and rescue work.¹⁵¹

149. Daire Brunicardi, *The Seahound* (Cork, 2001), p.115.

150. General report on Army, appendix e, 1940/41 (I.M.A.), pp.2-3.

151. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.108.

These tasks were divided amongst the various components of the service with a heavy emphasis on the control of the use of Irish waters.

The Coast Watching Service

The Coast Watching Service manned the numerous look out posts established along the Irish coast. The force was distributed over eighteen districts. Each district was commanded by a District Officer, who held the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. Each district was also assigned a Sub-Depot Commanding Officer and a Quarter-Master whose ranks varied depending on the size of the district.¹⁵² There were between three to eight look out posts in each district. Each post was manned by a corporal and seven men.

The personnel of the look out posts were originally unarmed and it was feared that, in the event of an invasion, subversive elements could overpower the men and prevent any warning reaching GHQ. It was suggested that the Thompson submachine guns issued to the Civic Guards be recalled and distributed to the various districts to arm the men of the service. As they were likely to be the first to encounter any invading force, it was deemed necessary that they could provide, at least, minimal resistance. However, nothing came of this suggestion and the matter appears to have been quietly dropped. The fact that the force was unarmed did nothing to boost the status of the service within the Defence Forces and they were not seen as “real” soldiers by the general public or the troops.¹⁵³ Their military training was basic and providing more advanced training proved difficult as they could not be withdrawn from their posts without placing an excessive strain on the remaining personnel.

During the early years, most look out posts had no communication equipment and the nearest telephone could be between three to six miles away. GHQ’s rule of thumb was that, roughly speaking, the more important the look out post, the more difficult it was to maintain communications inland.¹⁵⁴ From 1941, every post was equipped with a

152. Employment of Coast Watching Service, 1940 (I.M.A., EDP/1).

153. Donal MacCarron, *Step Together* (Dublin, 1999), p.66.

154. Employment of Coast Watching Service, 1940 (I.M.A., EDP/1).

telephone and it became possible to remain in constant contact with each look out post.¹⁵⁵ The service itself was deemed one of the more effective branches of the Marine and Coast Watching Service, supplying vital information as to the movements of ships and aircraft in Irish territorial waters, informing GHQ of any attacks which occurred within those waters and reporting the locations of mines which had drifted free of their moorings.

In 1943, the words Eire and an individual number were painted next to each of the lookout posts.¹⁵⁶ Ostensibly, this was to warn belligerent aircraft that they were in Irish airspace. If this were the case, the words Eire alone would have sufficed. It appears that the numbers were intended to aid Allied aircraft in their navigation by allowing them to deduce their exact position and avoid further crashes in Irish territory.

The Coast Watching Service assisted survivors of the war at sea when they came up on Irish beaches and retrieved those corpses washed onto the shores. Another duty undertaken was that of salvage. In particular, large amounts of rubber were retrieved, a commodity in extremely short supply and made more valuable by the importance of the bicycle as the main method of travel. Bales stored on the decks of merchant ships were washed away in storms only to be salvaged by the men of the service. Over five hundred tons of rubber was supplied to Dunlop's factory in Cork by the beachcombers.¹⁵⁷

The Patrol Service

The ships and men which went to sea were known as the Patrol Service. Its beginnings can be traced to 11 November 1939, when the *Fort Rannoch* was taken over from the Department of Fisheries. The *Murichu* was taken over the following month on 12 December. Both ships were considered entirely obsolete. *Muirchu* was to patrol from Cahore Point to Knockadoon Head and *Fort Rannoch* was ordered to patrol the waters between Cape Clear and Loop Head. These patrol routes remained largely unaltered through the war despite the fact that it was clearly inadequate. Even in 1940, it was

155. General Army report, 1941/42 (I.M.A.).

156. General report on Army, 1943/44 (I.M.A.), p.46.

recognised that ten such vessels would be required to maintain a continuous presence on the Irish coast.¹⁵⁸ Generally, each ship spent four days at sea and one day re-fitting for its next patrol.¹⁵⁹ This pattern was maintained to the end of the war, barring those occasions when the ships underwent lengthier repairs.

By the end of December, the course of the war in Europe, which was known as the so-called phoney war, had resulted in a return to complacency amongst the government. Finance officials encouraged the government to slash proposed defence funding and cut the number of men under arms in a bid to reduce the costs of mobilisation.¹⁶⁰ On 15 January 1940, both *Fort Rannoch* and *Murichu* were formally commissioned as Public Armed Ships. Three days later, *M1* was handed over to the Irish. Interestingly, this was not one of the two boats ordered in early 1939. It had been built in Britain for the Estonian navy, by Thornycrofts, but with the Soviet annexation of the state, the vessel was supplied to the Marine and Coast Watching Service. The vessel was formally commissioned on 29 January.¹⁶¹

A special Flag Signal Code for the service was developed. It was intended to allow the motor torpedo boats to carry out simple manoeuvring and tactical exercises once they were delivered.¹⁶² Its incorporation into the training regime did not proceed smoothly. An unsupervised batch of forty recruits were issued with flags and sent to Phoenix Park to practice the code. After some time, most of the group wandered off to visit the zoological gardens. The efforts of the three remaining recruits attracted the attention of the police and they found themselves arrested as suspected spies.¹⁶³

157. Donal MacCarron, *Step Together* (Dublin, 1999.), p.68.

158. General report on Army, appendix e, 1940/41 (I.M.A.), p.47.

159. Marine branch sailing orders, 1940 (I.M.A., EDP 20/2).

160. Finance department limiting purchases, 1939 (I.M.A., 2/59681).

161. Commissioning notice, 1940, (I.M.A., EDP 20/1).

162. General report on Army, appendix c, 1940 (I.M.A.), p.1.

163. Donal MacCarron, *Step Together* (Dublin, 1999.), p.58.

The month of March 1940 also saw the formal proposal to establish a naval force of four patrol boats and six torpedo boats put before the Dáil.¹⁶⁴ Authorization to open portions of Haulbowline dockyard to act as a naval base was also included. This was a vastly reduced version of the 1938 proposal which itself was gravely inadequate. The total cost of the four patrol boats and the six torpedo boats was £269,822. Each patrol vessel was to be manned by a complement of three officers and twenty men, and each torpedo boat crewed by two officers and eight men. But, even this token force was never created in full. Only two patrol boats were ever used by the Service, although all six motor torpedo boats were commissioned. The government sought to have half the proposed fleet in service by the end of 1940 and they surpassed this with the deployment of four torpedo boats and two patrol boats by December of that year.

The utility of the Service was questioned in the Dáil, as one TD, Professor O'Sullivan, acidly questioned the ability of three torpedo boats to cope with the British or German navies. The patrol boats were less contentious as it had been noted that they could equally perform fisheries protection duties. It had been suggested that the withdrawal of the *Muirchu* and *Fort Rannoch* had seen an increase in poaching.¹⁶⁵

Some thought was put into the selection of a suitable base for the force. Local businesses understood the benefits that a naval dockyard would bring, especially in the prevailing poor economic conditions.¹⁶⁶ Passage West was put forward as a suitable location. But the old naval base at Haulbowline was the obvious choice.¹⁶⁷ There were some security concerns with Haulbowline as a depot; as a result the defence forces gathered information on the loyalties of the island's civilian residents. Some were suspected of pro-British tendencies and others of anti-British leanings. One family of German Jews was obviously assumed to be staunchly anti-German.¹⁶⁸ It was feared that some residents might engage

164. Vol. 79, Vote 65- army, 5 Mar. 1940, (<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/en.toc.D.0079.19400305.html>) (Sep. 2009), 44.

165. Vol. 79, foreign trawlers operation, 10 Apr. 1940, (<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/en.toc.D.0079.19400410.html>) (Sep. 2009), 1071.

166. Suitability of Passage West as naval dockyard, 1938-40 (I.M.A., 2/54952).

167. Debates on use of Haulbowline as naval base, 1938-40 (I.M.A., 2/54412).

168. Intelligence reports on Haulbowline residents, 1940-46 (I.M.A., 51/157).

in un-neutral activities. With this in mind, the population of just over a hundred residents was evacuated to ensure the security of the base.

And so it was decided the former naval base at Haulbowline was eventually to be commandeered to provide suitable facilities for such a force. On 7 July, Haulbowline was formally re-occupied and Commandant N.C. Harrington was appointed CO of the dockyard/naval base. However, after years of neglect and vandalism, the condition of the facility was quite poor, both patrol vessels could be maintained relatively easily, but the more temperamental motor torpedo boats required constant maintenance and the equipment required was not available.¹⁶⁹ The debate over whether or not a naval surveyor should be attached to the Service dated back to 1938 and continued to war's end without resolution.¹⁷⁰ Smaller supply bases were established at Berehaven, Valentia, Fenit and Foynes.

The duties of the Marine and Coast Watching Service were detailed by Lt-General Domhnaill MacCionnaith, the Irish Chief of Staff, as:

- (i) Coast watching duties.
- (ii) Patrolling our territorial waters.
- (iii) Defence by sea against attack or invasion.
- (iv) The control of the principal ports and anchorages.
- (v) The examination and search of shipping entering our Ports.
- (vi) Mine laying.
- (vii) Destruction and rendering safe of mines in our territorial waters.
- (viii) The organisation of local maritime resources.¹⁷¹

The fledgling service lacked some of the most basic tools of its trade, such things as navigation maps and sea charts.¹⁷² It faced grave shortages in both suitably trained personnel and the supplies required to maintain the force. The motor torpedo boats were very expensive to run and even the cheaper coal-powered patrol vessels suffered fuel shortages.

169. Daire Brunnicardi, *The Seahound* (Cork, 2001), pp.127-128.

170. Repair details and naval debate, 1938-45 (I.M.A., 2/55015).

171. General report on Army, appendix e, 1940/41 (I.M.A.), p.46.

The French surrender in June 1940 caused ripples of alarm among the Irish leaders as the threat of a direct invasion grew as the Germans now gained the use of the French ports. A State of Emergency was formally declared on 7 June, thus beginning the Emergency. The following day, *M2* arrived in Cobh, doubling the offensive strength of the Marine Service. Again, this was not one of the vessels initially ordered. This MTB had been built for the Latvian armed forces. As this nation had also suffered the fate of Estonia, the vessel was made available to the Marine and Coast Watching Service.

One bizarre incident occurred prior to the commissioning of the *M2*. While undergoing sea trials, the vessel was commandeered by the Royal Navy for use in the Dunkirk evacuation. One of the two Irish officers, Lt Billy Richardson, standing by to take custody of the vessel volunteered to join in the operation and travelled to Dover with the ship. As it happened the *M2* was not called into service, remaining at Dover throughout the evacuation and the problems which could have resulted from such un-neutral actions by an Irish officer never arose.¹⁷³

On 25 July, *M3* was handed over; it was commissioned the day after and left for Ireland the very next day. The haste with which it was despatched compares favourably with the leisurely acquisition of *M1* and *M2*. It serves to illustrate the real alarm and fear that existed at the time. However, the effort was wasted as *M3* was attacked by German aircraft while in transit and was escorted to Portland for repairs. Further trials awaited the crew. It finally arrived in Haulbowline on 1 August where it was mistakenly fired on by the coastal batteries.¹⁷⁴

172. Supply of navigation maps/charts, 1938-44 (I.M.A., 2/56006).

173. Daire Brunicardi, *The Seahound* (Cork, 2001), p.124.

174. *ibid*, p.125.

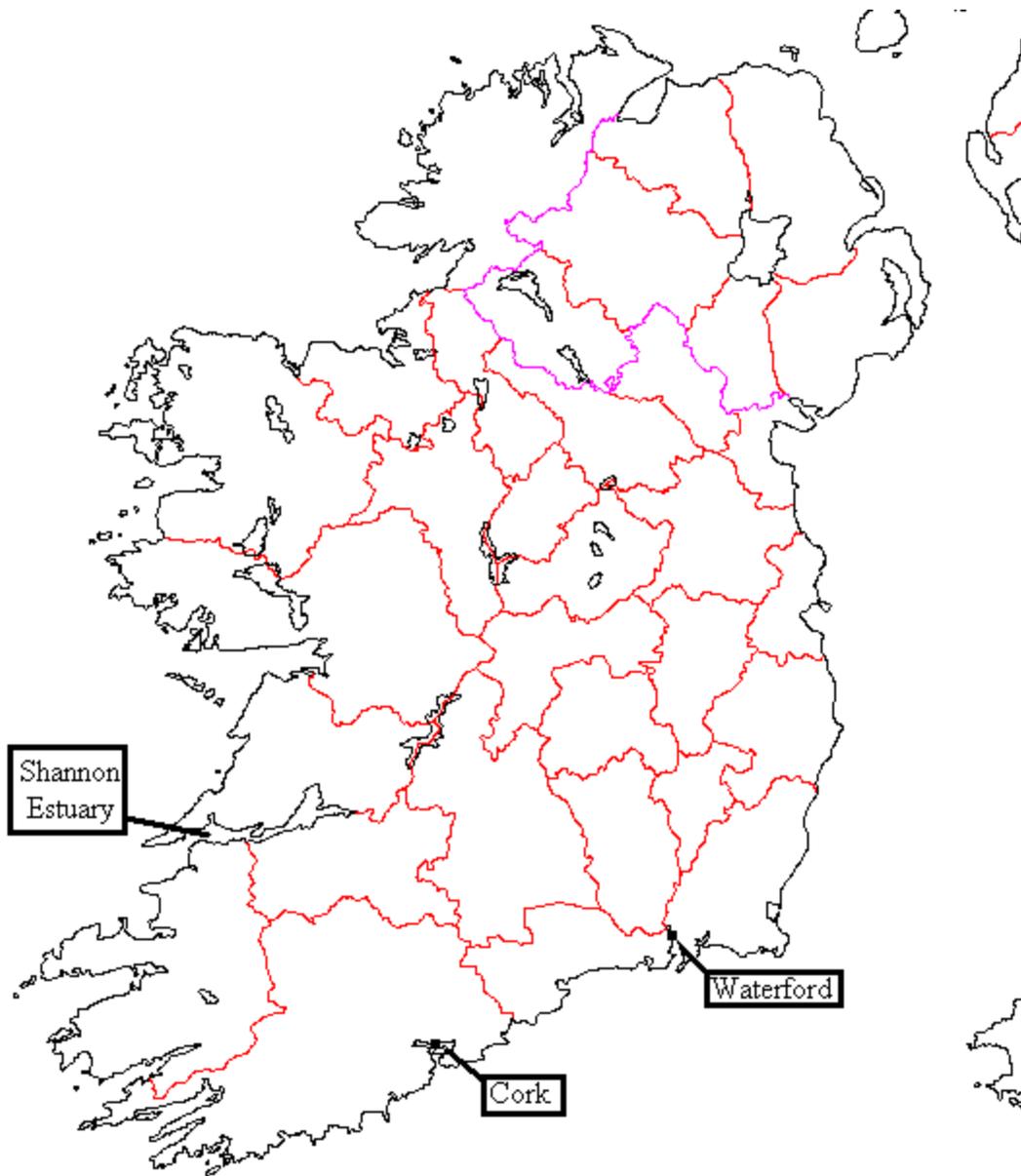


Fig 6: MTB early war patrol areas.

The three ships were assigned to protect Cork, Waterford and the Shannon estuary, respectively. The vessels made poor patrol craft. Their sea keeping capabilities were woeful and they proved very expensive to run. Their ability to secure the large patrol areas assigned to them can be called into question. Eventually, these duties were deemed an inefficient use of the only true naval craft the state possessed. The three motor torpedo boats were brought together in Cork and designated as the 1st Flotilla Division under

Lieutenant H. Good.¹⁷⁵ In December of the same year, *M4* was commissioned, followed in rapid succession by *M5* and *M6*, the following January and February 1941, respectively. These three ships would form the 2nd Flotilla Division.¹⁷⁶



Fig 7: MTBs in formation during exercise.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

Their effectiveness declined during the course of the war due to a shortage of spare parts. The British Admiralty considered the design to be obsolescent and indeed, were laying up and scrapping those boats of the class which they had acquired. The decision had been taken on political grounds to limit military supplies to the Irish to the bare minimum necessary to provide a modicum of defensive capability. Although the Admiralty was

175. Vessels in commission, 1942 (I.M.A., EDP 20/3).

176. Operation order 4 – Marine Service annex, 1941 (I.M.A., S/215).

willing to supply parts, the idea was rejected at Cabinet level and until no spare parts were delivered until 1943, two years after the initial order.¹⁷⁷

The problem of maintenance without spare parts and the cost of providing the MTBs with aviation fuel, coupled with the severe lack of seaworthy patrol craft caused the Assistant Chief of Staff, Colonel Archer to press the British to trade *M4*, *M5* and *M6* for three trawlers. The British felt that as 18" torpedoes were already in short supply and the vessels were known to be unreliable that no such arrangement should be made.¹⁷⁸

Invasion Scares

In December 1940, there was an invasion alert and the various vessels were placed in a state of readiness.¹⁷⁹ However, it proved to be a false alarm. The danger of invasion was present for much of the war. Both the Axis and Allied powers were considered a potential threat to Irish sovereignty. The motives for a German intervention were varied. With the annexation of Norway in the summer of 1940, Germany had tightened the noose on the United Kingdom. Their economic blockade would prove more effective if bases Ireland could be used to threaten the western approaches. Lough Foyle was an area of some concern as its waters were divided between Irish and British control. Throughout the war, the lough harboured between 10 to 30 allied ships at any given time. British vessels involved in anti-submarine work, would often dock in Moville pleading distress. British crewmen would come ashore in civilian clothes and travel to and from Derry city. The presence of these legitimate targets in Irish waters might have easily provoked an air attack on Irish towns along the lough which De Valera's government would find difficult to protest.¹⁸⁰

Bases in Ireland would also have proven useful in bombing raids on the northern industrial areas. An invasion could take place as a wider invasion of the British Isles,

177. Irish motor torpedo boat discussion, 1942 (B.N.A., ADM 1/13333).

178. Anglo-Irish cooperation, 1942 (B.N.A., ADM 116/1642).

179. Daire Brunnicardi, *The Seahound* (Cork, 2001), p.125.

180. Belligerent vessels in Irish waters, 1941-45 (N.A.I., DFA A/22).

with the intention of eliminating the garrison in Northern Ireland.¹⁸¹ This was considered quite likely after the fall of France. Another likely scenario was a landing in response to a British effort to secure Irish ports to ease pressure on her Atlantic supply lines. While it was possible they might concentrate on securing the harbours alone and defending the surrounding, it was more logical to occupy the entire island to avoid leaving Irish formations intact to harass their troops.¹⁸² Aside from the motive detailed above, British intervention was also expected if a German invasion was launched. Despite the initial insistence of the Admiralty on the importance of regaining the Treaty Ports, British views slowly shifted towards acceptance. It was felt that any action against the Irish would alienate the American public and it was thought that the military benefit gained from the ports would be counteracted by the need to bolster Irish air defences to prevent German retaliation.¹⁸³

The Irish military authorities believed that during the German invasion of Holland, seaplanes had been used to transport troops into the Dutch rear areas. No evidence could be found suggesting such operations but the Irish were concerned and feared similar tactics could be used during an invasion of the Republic.¹⁸⁴ They believed that Ireland could be easily divided by seizing certain waterways, cutting the nation into segments. The Shannon, the Westmeath lake system, the Southern river system and the Corrib, Mask and Conn lakes were all considered likely landing areas. It was suggested that navigation lights be extinguished and ambush sites prepared by local defence forces. It was recognised that the Germans currently lacked the numbers of seaplanes required but it was considered likely that the Germans were capable of producing sufficient planes if required. While the threat never materialised, nor is it clear that it ever could have, it was treated seriously by the Irish military and was prominent in their defence planning during 1940.

181. Summary of defence situation, 1941 (I.M.A., EDP/1).

182. Defence of the forts, 1940 (I.M.A., EDP/2).

183. Political situation in southern Ireland, 1943 (B.N.A., DO 35/2062).

184. GHQ operation orders and instructions, 1940 (I.M.A., EDP/1).

Initial planning called for the motor torpedo boats to be based in Cork, from where they would sortie against any invasion fleet. However, as Cork was likely to be a primary objective for any invasion, it was realised that German aircraft would undoubtedly strike against Cork and that the motor torpedo boats ran the risk of being sunk before they could go into action. Several alternate sites were considered. Berehaven was dismissed as it too would be a target. They settled on Baltimore, as its pier was suitable only for small vessels. The motor torpedo boats would be capable of berthing but the Germans would not be seeking to seize the harbour as their troops transports, expected to consist of large cargo vessels and fast passenger liners, could not dock. It was suggested that fuel and spare torpedoes be moved to the location in advance. The patrol vessels were to remain in Cork harbour and act as guard ships as their armaments limited their utility.¹⁸⁵

GHQ expected amphibious landings at Cork and Limerick. It considered that the main thrust would come against one with a large diversionary landing against the other. Smaller ports like Waterford and Fenit was also considered as possible landing sites. A more risky strategy could see a landing at Killybegs, which would prevent British forces in Northern Ireland from moving south immediately. GHQ estimated, based on their knowledge of the number of German transport planes, that the Germans could transport 20,000 men by air and had sufficient ships available on the French coasts to transport in the region of 150,000 men. Any invasion force was expected to be roughly 30-40,000 strong.¹⁸⁶ Plan Green, the German invasion plan puts the invasion at 50,000 soldiers but is otherwise similar. Fenit was dismissed as a target due to the natural barrier of the Kerry Mountains inland. The overarching German concern was to penetrate through the mountainous Irish exterior into the interior as rapidly as possible.¹⁸⁷

185. Marine Service annex, 1941 (I.M.A., EDP 1/7/1).

186. *ibid.*

187. Robert Fisk, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality* (London, 1983), p.222-231.

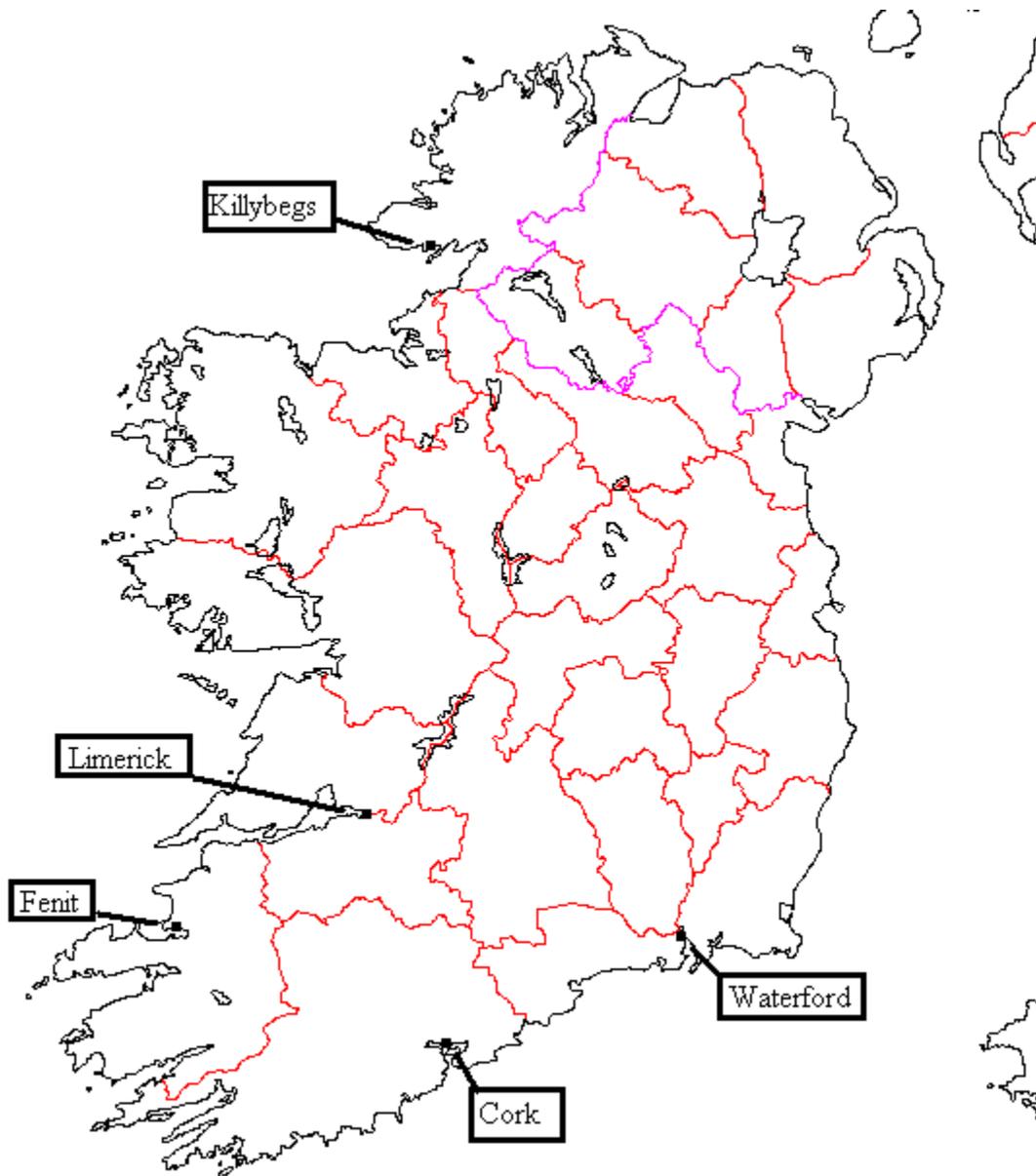


Fig 8: Suspected German invasion targets.

GHQ were under no illusions as to the capabilities of their troops and did not expect Irish forces to withstand any German formation that would be fielded against them. Their goal was to delay the invaders until such time as British forces could aid in the defence of the Republic. The airborne invasion of Crete in May 1941 alarmed Irish planners who could easily envision a similar situation. The ability of German airpower to deliver an invasion force was recognised but the need for naval landings to support such an attack was also noted by defence planners.

It was the intention of the Irish general staff to use the limiting striking power of the Marine Service to greatest effect by attacking with the motor torpedo flotillas while landings were underway or earlier if possible. The Irish defence forces lacked the ability to fully patrol their waters and maintain a watch for any invasion force. There were not enough ships to maintain a maritime patrol or enough aircraft to maintain an air patrol.¹⁸⁸ The Irish state had no radar installations to provide early warning of approaching craft. They were dependent on the Allies for any advance warning. The British had made it clear that they might not be able to intercept any invasion fleet operating in foggy weather or at night.

The authorities prepared for the worst. In Cork, the *Owencurra* and *Owenabuee* were chartered as block ships from Cork Harbour Commissioners. Both had been used for the same purpose previously in the Civil War. In fact, both the *Owencurra* and her sister ships had been partially scuttled during the Cork landings. The gambit had failed then but as any invasion force would lack a pilot and Irish charts were chronically out of date, perhaps it was felt that the results would be better on the second attempt.

It was believed that the Germans would attempt to strike each target port simultaneously and use the cover of darkness to the greatest extent possible. It was also assumed that the fleet would be kept together as far as possible to reduce the chances of discovery by British patrols. With these factors in mind, the military authorities believed that the point at which the fleet would split would be in the region of Latitude 51' N, Longitude 11' W.¹⁸⁹ It was intended that the motor torpedo boats would wait in the vicinity and strike under the cover of darkness.

Coastal Defence Artillery

The military authorities greatly expanded and altered the coastal forts during the war. Construction work was undertaken at Fort Lenan and Fort Dunree, overlooking Lough

188. Aidan McIvor, *A History of the Irish Naval Service* (Dublin, 1994), p.89.

189. General correspondence, 1940, (I.M.A., EDP 20/3).

Swilly. The other forts at Berehaven, Spike Island and Templebreedy also saw similar reconstruction. In the face of the threat presented by a modern military, weaknesses in the design of the forts were of great concern. In some cases, guns were entirely unprotected from air attack and had to be re-sited in more suitable location. In other cases, such as the fortification on Bere Island, all available guns were overlooking the examination anchorage and needed to be moved to fulfil their coastal defence roles.¹⁹⁰

Later in the war, the threat of attack by land, either by the IRA or British troops meant precautions were taken to ensure the forts could be defended from ground attacks. This involved the construction of Blockhouses at each of the forts as similar measures were being taken at the various aerodromes. As anti-aircraft guns became available, they were emplaced at the forts but for much of the war, passive anti-aircraft defences were minimal. By 1942, there were only twelve anti-aircraft guns between the five forts.¹⁹¹

Training was undertaken on an annual basis to avoid depleting the stocks of ammunition, as shipments from the British were irregular. Towards the end of 1943, a discrepancy in efficiency between the northern and southern forts was recognised. This variation was traced to the effect on morale of serving in the northern installations. These forts were extremely isolated and far quieter. To resolve this, the personnel of the garrisons were rotated on a regular basis.

In addition to the existing installations, a new fort was constructed to protect the Shannon Estuary. The works were delayed by a lack of suitable guns. Material on order from the British was often delayed for months and without the 6" guns, the fort was effectively useless. Similar problems plagued the construction of installations at Galway and Sligo harbours. The weapons ordered, British 4.7" guns, arrived so late in the war that the need had passed and construction had been postponed. These forts were never completed.¹⁹² This can be traced to the British policy of extending no privileges to the Irish unless it involved the strengthening of areas of concern to the British, an example being the

190. Defence of fortified harbours, 1940 (I.M.A., EDP 1/1).

191. General Army report, 1941/42 (I.M.A.), p.16.

refusal to provide mines for the defence of Dublin and Waterford. This tactic did backfire to a minor degree during the negotiations for guns for the Shannon forts as De Valera threatened to relocate the guns at Berehaven to the Shannon forts, forcing the British to provide an alternative and avoid the stripping of defences at the former site. ¹⁹³

Port Control and Examination Service

The Port Control and Examination Service was established on 1 July as an auxiliary service to the Marine and Coast Watching Service. Competent Port Authorities were appointed to oversee the service in the various harbours. Generally, these powers were vested in the Harbourmaster or an official with maritime connections. The Service initially covered Dublin, Cork, Dundalk, Drogheda, Limerick, Waterford, Lough Swilly and Bantry Bay. In the latter two defended anchorages, the Artillery Officer of the coastal batteries was appointed CPA. The service expanded to cover Rosslare, Shannon Estuary, Fenit, Sligo and Galway in the following weeks.¹⁹⁴ Under the terms of the Emergency Powers Order 1941 (Passenger Traffic Restrictions), passengers were forbidden from landing at a seaport other than those protected anchorages or defended harbours. Any ship approaching the port was halted at the examination anchorage and a port control vessel sent to put a party aboard. The vessel was searched and its wireless and any weapons put out of use to ensure compliance with international laws.

The vessels used by the service were acquired from various sources. Initially, Air Corps vessels were taken over as to serve as port control vessels at various ports.¹⁹⁵ As the number of ports expanded, more tenders were purchased. In some cases, lifeboats which had washed ashore were pressed into service. The strangest acquisition was a tank landing craft which was found drifting off the Aran Islands in 1943.¹⁹⁶

192. General report on Defence Forces, 1943-44 (I.M.A.), p.15.

193. Anglo-Irish cooperation, 1942 (B.N.A., ADM 116/1642).

194. General report on Army, appendix c, 1940 (I.M.A.), p2.

195. *ibid*, p.1.

196. General report on defence forces, 1942/43 (I.M.A.), p.31.

The men of the service largely underwent Army training which proved of little relevance to the tasks demanded of them. One veteran, Patrick Campbell, later recorded his impression of the experience.

'There is no sensation in all the world like standing in a boiler suit three sizes too small for in the middle of a barracks square in very, very heavy rain and having someone shout an order at you in a language you do not understand, knowing at the same time that if you do not obey promptly you will be put on a charge and fined twelve shillings and 6 pence therefore losing fifty per cent of your weekly emolument. And particularly when you're supposed to be at sea, looking like Jack Hawkins on the bridge, peering down the river Liffey for U-boats.'¹⁹⁷

The Service suffered the only losses experienced by the Marine and Coast Watching Service on the night of 12 December 1942, in Cork Harbour, when an examination boat sank with the loss of four lives after it became entangled in the propeller of the *Irish Beech*.¹⁹⁸

Maritime Inscription

The Maritime Inscription was founded in Dublin in September 1940. The Cork unit was established the following month. The Cork unit then expanded its area of control to cover Cobh, Crosshaven and Monkstown.¹⁹⁹ The organisation rapidly expanded to cover the southern half of the island. Initially, a total of twelve companies were established, each of 100 men. Their distribution was based on the distribution of Coast Watching sub depots from which their supplies were drawn. Two additional companies were established in 1943, bringing the strength of the force to 1,400 men.

They worked in conjunction with the Port Control and Examination Service. Their tasks included harbour and bay patrols by land and sea, ship inspections and Maritime Inscription ratings generally provided the manpower required by Competent Port

197. *Sunday Times*, 18 Aug. 1970.

198. General report on defence forces, 1942/43 (I.M.A.), p.53.

199. Blue Peter, 'Ireland's Volunteer Marine' in *An Cosantóir*, (July 1941), p.19.

Authorities to undertake their missions. Their duties in the event of invasion included the blocking of channels, eclipsing of navigation lights and removal of navigation aids.

It was hoped that the training provided to the members of the Maritime Inscription would be of use, after the war, in developing the Irish Merchant Marine.²⁰⁰ The schooner *Issalt* was bought to act as a training vessel. However, the vessel proved unreliable and spent much of the war under repair. To provide the shore companies with the equipment required, lifeboats were distributed as they became available. Training continued throughout the war but generally only those shore companies based in or near large towns would gain the full benefits. Those in the smaller towns were not provided with the same level, due to shortages of equipment, accommodation and instructors.²⁰¹

Recruiting for the Maritime Inscription was suspended on November 23, 1944 due to grave uncertainty over the post-war position of the Marine Service. The men of the service were viewed with favour by the military authorities despite the problems experienced in supplying the shore companies. The high morale of the force was made evident as it was the only branch of the Defence Forces did not suffer a large drop in strength as the war drew to an end.²⁰²

Mining Service

On 8 October 1940, the trawler *Shark* was purchased to act as a mine-layer. In early 1941, minefields were laid at Cork and Waterford. The mines used had been produced within the state and were of the simple observation type. They could only be detonated by an observer on shore. The government continued to attempt to secure British contact and ground mines to supplement their own products. The ground mines were intended for use in waters too shallow to lay observation mines. This was seen one of the few effective defensive measures available to the Irish armed forces and great efforts were made to

200. *ibid*, p.20.

201. General report on defence forces, 1943/44 (I.M.A.), p.17.

202. General report on defence forces, 1944/45 (I.M.A.), p.12.

ensure all threatened harbours were mined. However, the mines proved unsatisfactory and tended to break from their moorings and drift free.²⁰³

The British were not able to spare contact mines until later in the war, however, they did provide officers to assist the mine laying operation. British troops were also used in the mining operations and care was taken to ensure any British vessels used were not overtly identifiable as warships.²⁰⁴ The British also sought to control the deployment of mines indirectly by only providing mines for mining operations in regions of concern to their defence planning. The approved sites were Cork, Berehaven, the Shannon Estuary and Lough Swilly. There were also less benign factors at play. In the event of a decision being made to seize the Treaty Ports, the British authorities were quite eager to ensure they had accurate intelligence as to the scope and location of the defensive minefields. In fact, the provision of maps of the fields was a prerequisite to the supply of mines to the Republic.²⁰⁵

It proved difficult to purchase mines from the British and efforts were made to create them locally. Explosive material was in short supply and the Research Bureau was forced to develop methods of extracting the Amtol filling from washed up mines to produce marine mines. Over 15.5 tons of the material was accumulated by 1943. Steel was also in short supply in the early years as imports had come to a sharp halt.²⁰⁶

All attempts to purchase a minesweeping vessel failed and generally any floating mines encountered were destroyed by gunfire. The lack of such a vessel meant that any belligerent could seal Irish ports with mines and the state would be unable to clear the obstruction.²⁰⁷ This was amply demonstrated by an incident early in the war. Two German magnetic mines were dropped in Dungarvan Harbour, Co. Waterford on August

203. General Army report, 1942/43 (I.M.A.).

204. Anglo-Irish cooperation, 1942 (B.N.A., ADM 116/1642).

205. *ibid.*

206. General Army report, 1943/44 (I.M.A.).

207. General Army report, 1941/42 (I.M.A.).

8, 1940. It was two days before the mines were cleared by gunfire from the shore and the port could be reopened.²⁰⁸

Irish Shipping Limited

The Irish state suffered from the effects of British shipping losses as the Battle of the Atlantic raged. Only 5 per cent of its needs could be met by Irish-flagged ships. The economic hardship caused by the war at sea opened the government's eyes to the need to develop an independent Irish mercantile marine. The Irish state was almost entirely dependent on British shipping to supply its needs.²⁰⁹ As the war drew on, the combination of resentment of Irish neutrality and dire British shipping losses resulted in a sharp drop in imports. As American shipping was barred from entering the war zone, all cargoes from the United States were left in Lisbon. The Irish state needed ships to bring those supplies to Irish ports. Irish Shipping Ltd was established as a result of this situation on 21 March 1941.²¹⁰

Finding suitable ships proved difficult as prices had sky-rocketed and any cargo vessels which became available were quickly bought, regardless of price. Nonetheless, fifteen ships were purchased or leased during the course of the war. These were the *Irish Alder*, *Irish Ash*, *Irish Beech*, *Irish Cedar*, *Irish Elm*, *Irish Fir*, *Irish Hazel*, *Irish Larch*, *Irish Oak*, *Irish Pine*, *Irish Plane*, *Irish Poplar*, *Irish Rose*, *Irish Spruce* and *Irish Willow*. Two were sunk during the course of the war, the *Irish Oak* and *Irish Pine*. The *Irish Pine* was due to arrive in Boston on 17 November 1942. She failed to do so and was presumed lost with her crew of 33 men. The *Irish Oak* was torpedoed on 15 May 1943, presumably by a German submarine. Her crew was rescued by the *Irish Plane*. As no conclusive proof of German involvement existed, while condemning the attack, the state did not issue a formal protest to the German government.²¹¹

208. 12th meeting of Defence Conference, 1940 (U.C.D.A., Frank Aiken papers, P104/3534).

209. Shipping difficulties, 1939 (N.A.I., EHR/3/16).

210. Sean McDonagh, 'Irish Shipping Limited 1939-45' (M.A. thesis, N.U.I.M., 2000), p.10.

One of those ships, the *Irish Beech*, was a Yugoslav vessel, the *s.s. Cervrti*, salvaged by the Marine Service in December 1940. While investigating reports of a crashed aircraft in the vicinity of Dingle Bay, the *Fort Rannoch* under Lieutenant Hollingsworth sighted an abandoned ship drifting free on 4 December. The lifeboats were missing and the vessel bore signs of air attack with damage to the bridge. Despite the atrocious weather conditions, the crew took charge of the vessel and succeeded in restarting her engines, conducting repairs in the partially flooded compartments below deck. The salvage crew, escorted by the *Fort Rannoch* shepherded the damaged ship into Valentia harbour.²¹² She was then sold to Irish Shipping Ltd for repairs and became the third vessel of the new founded Irish mercantile marine.²¹³

Their status as neutrals caused some resentment towards the ships and crews. One Canadian newspaper describes the situation.

‘Ducks in death valley would be no more out of place than are Eire freighters here, their fresh coat of paint and blazing deck light looking at least three years outdated beside the dirty grey, blacked out merchant ships of the united nations. [...] Once outside the harbour gates, they are shunned by the shipping of the united nations.’²¹⁴

Specific shipping lanes were assigned to neutral ships, to avoid the possibility of being mistaken for Allied vessels which had lost their convoys. These were often longer routes, causing great delays.

Even with the vessels of Irish Shipping Ltd bringing much needed supplies, fuel was in short supply. The Army was relying on turf and wood to replace coal as a heating fuel but even then, there was still a grave shortage. Coal stockpiles continued to shrink even after all remaining supplies were reserved for the Patrol Service and Army workshops. Patrols and training were cut to the bare minimum to preserve the stockpile. Even with consumption minimised, by the end of the war, the coal stockpile had been almost

211. *ibid*, p.31.

212. Salvage of *ss Cervrti* (I.M.A., 2/67184).

213. Frank Forde, *The long watch* (Dublin, 1981), pp 60-61.

exhausted.²¹⁵ Without the shipments delivered from the United States by the vessels of Irish Shipping Limited, it would have proven nigh on impossible for the ships of the Patrol Service to put to sea at all.

Receding Threat

The German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 eased the fears of the Irish commanders; the longer Operation Barbarossa drew on, the likelihood of a German invasion was reduced with each passing day. America's entry into the war damaged the position of the Irish state. Now, greater pressure was applied on the government to join with the Allies. Certain warrants and navicerts were required by Irish mercantile marine vessels to pass through Allied waters and enter Allied ports. These were used as an economic weapon, the warrants and navicerts were often withheld, preventing shipments from reaching Ireland.²¹⁶

This could be interpreted as a bid to force the Irish government to join with the Allies, by starving the state into submission. To add to their woes, with the outbreak of war in the Pacific, trade with Japan came to an end. The supply situation continued to grow yet more desperate.²¹⁷ While the Battle of the Atlantic raged, great pressure was maintained on the Irish state by diplomatic and economic means. Only in late 1943 as the submarine threat receded and the need for Irish ports was reduced, did this pressure ease.

But it was with the successful Allied landings in Normandy in June 1944, that the threat of a German invasion finally ended. There was a brief spike in German U-boat activity in Irish waters for a time after the fall of France.²¹⁸ This was most likely a result of the loss of U-boat bases on the French coast. As the submarines were now operating from Germany itself, their shortened range would have encouraged operations closer to British waters. In light of increasingly effective Allied anti-submarine measures, Irish waters

214. Extract from Daily Star of 16 Jan 1943, (N.A.I., DFA 306/1).

215. General report on the Defence Forces, 1943-44 (I.M.A.), p.28.

216. Sean McDonagh, 'Irish Shipping Limited 1939-45' (M.A. thesis, N.U.I.M., 2000), p.11.

217. General Army report, 1941/42 (I.M.A.), p.1.

were relatively safe transit areas. On 7 May 1945, the war in Europe came to a conclusion. The government lost little time in eliminating and reducing the various services. Recruiting for the Marine and Coast Watching Service had been halted on 23 November 1944, excluding the filling of vacancies in the various look out posts.



Fig 9: Marine Service on parade.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The military authorities had grave concerns about the continued utility of the forces, which had proven unsatisfactory. The discipline and military efficiency of the Service was brought into question and it was recommended that the Service not be continued in its current form. The general report on the army for the year 1945 stated that 'A general looseness of control and lack of responsibility among the officers, and in particular among the senior officers, has resulted in the whole service being unreliable. The internal

organisation and training are of a low standard.²¹⁹ The lack of suitable officers was the bane of every effort to improve the condition of the service.

Relations between the Chief of Staff, Domhnall MacCionnaith and the Director of the Service, Commander Seamus Ó Múiris were quite poor. The Director's many comments on the need for a permanent defence force did not fall on deaf ears as the government had recognised the need for such a force and steps were being taken to create one. But offence was taken at his continuing attempts to influence government policy. The Chief of Staff stated in a letter to Commander Ó Múiris that 'no good purpose is served by lengthy submissions on defence policy, particularly in regard to matters that were not in dispute.'²²⁰ It was suggested that his efforts were better spent on improving the existing service than demanding sweeping changes.

It is interesting to note that some naval officers were suspected of informing the Chief of Staff of the problems within the Service. The exact term used was that a 'Gestapo' had been created by the Chief of Staff for this purpose.²²¹ This was roundly denied and it was strongly suggested that accusations of this nature, claiming that certain naval officers were secretly reporting on the state of the service, be rapidly quashed to prevent any embarrassment for the officers concerned. Perhaps some of the inter-service hostility could be traced to the fact that the director's submission proposed that any naval service established be independent of the army command and its commander answer only to the Minister of Defence.

The Port Control and Examination Service was the first to go as shipping was no longer restricted. On 9 October, the Coast Watching Service followed and discharges were offered to all Marine Service personnel. The Maritime Inscription was not disbanded but with the loss of the Coast Watching sub depots and the Port Control command structures, the organisation was effectively crippled as training was impossible without the supplies provided by the latter and the instructors provided by the former. However, the need for a

219. General report on the Defence Forces, 1944-45 (I.M.A.), p.35.

220. Marine branch correspondence, 1944, (I.M.A., EDP 20/3).

permanent naval force had been recognised and in March 1946, the Marine Service was made a permanent component of the Defence Forces and the Maritime Inscription was re-organised to act as a reserve force for the Naval Service and was renamed An Sluagh Muirí.²²²

Conclusion

The state had been caught unprepared and left vulnerable by its neglect of maritime affairs. The longstanding goal of achieving true neutrality and full independence had been achieved but no thought had been given to the possible consequences. The Irish government was not the only state to be caught out in this regard. One need only look to Norway as another fine example of a nation caught off-guard by the rapidly altered international situation and led astray by ingrained assumptions about British sea control as a total and reliable defence. The consequences of Ireland's errors were vastly less severe.

A small naval force was established to give the impression of fulfilling the international duties required of the Irish state, even though it lacked the means to do so. It is clear the Irish government was slow to recognise problems and unwilling to countenance expensive solutions. Reckless cost-cutting had endangered the security of the state but few seemed willing to remedy this. It had been made quite clear that although some manner of army could be assembled on short notice, capable naval seamen and officers took years to train even when a naval service had long been in existence. The Defence Force's attempts to train such men while simultaneously creating the service in they were to serve proved entirely impossible.

It must be said that it was the British need for ports and airbases in southern Ireland which were the motivation behind the pressures applied to the Irish state. Even if the Irish had developed a navy capable of the defence of its territorial waters, that need would still exist and the course of Anglo-Irish relations during the war would remain unchanged.

221. Marine branch general correspondence, 1945 (I.M.A., EDP 20/3).

222. Naval Service memorandum, 1967 (N.A.I., S/615), p.6.

Only the entry of an Irish state, with a naval force capable of securing its waters against German aggression, into the war on the Allied side would have satisfied British demands and ensured Irish security against British invasion. It would have simultaneously left Ireland at the mercy of the Germans as without an air force capable of stemming the Luftwaffe's reprisal, the state's urban areas would suffer greatly.

It is unsurprising that the most effective elements of the Coastwatching and Marine Service were those based firmly on land and cooperating closely with the Army. Fortunately, on this occasion, the half measures taken by the government proved to be enough to secure the sovereignty of the state. But credit should go to the victors of the Battle of the Atlantic rather than the Council of Defence. The state, oblivious to the danger represented by the absence of a credible naval force, could have suffered a British invasion and forced belligerency in the Second World War. Their rapid development of a naval force indicates that they were very aware of the risks to which the absence of seaward defence policy had exposed the state.

Foundation of the Service (1945-1950)

Although the Irish Naval Service was formally established in 1946, its origins can be traced to the decision of the 1938 government which resulted in the creation of a Coast Watching and Marine Service. The experience of creating and operating that service was influential when the time came to create a permanent naval force. The formal foundation of the Naval Service occurred in 1946 shortly after the end of the Emergency and the demobilisation of the various services of that period. The demobilisation was both a problem in terms of the drain in manpower that resulted and an opportunity in that it allowed the authorities to choose only those men who could benefit the service.

The end of the Second World War resulted in a glut of naval vessels on the global market and the rationale behind the choice of the corvettes as the mainstay of an Irish Naval Service is worth examining as it demonstrates the limits of the enthusiasm with which the service was viewed. Despite the widespread support the foundation of the service received, there was a lingering unwillingness to devote too much effort to the project.

Certain manning problems were faced, some as a result of the lack of any prior true naval force in the state and others as a result of the presence of a pseudo-naval force of dubious quality. There were constant problems faced in manning the service and great difficulties encountered during the arduous process of training and equipping the force. The problems were compounded by the efforts which were made to convert the Emergency-era Maritime Inscription into the *Sluagh Muirí*. The difficulties which impacted on the regular fulltime service were multiplied in the case of the reserve service. But the demobilisation of large numbers of Commonwealth naval officers provided the backbone required to build upon a service which used contemporary British ships, received British training and operated along British lines.

This reliance on the British model was to have benefits with regards to their relations with the Admiralty but the transplantation of British officers into the higher ranks of the

service did result in internal tensions. The inheritance of elements of the Marine Service was also damaging to effort to establish a functioning naval service.

The Demobilisation

With the war at an end, a large proportion of the state's seaward defences were no longer required. The Port Control Service was the first service to disband on 1 June, 1945 following the lifting of restriction on incoming merchants vessels. The small craft commanded by the service were returned to their various owners, namely the Air Corps and Department of Industry and Commerce.²²³ The Coast Watching Service followed suit on 19 October as the state was no longer required to monitor its coastal waters.

Morale in the Marine Service plummeted as demobilisation began. The personnel were all durationists and faced a quick return to civilian life. Recruiting had halted in all services, apart from the Coast Watching branch and the Maritime Inscription, on 23 November, 1944.²²⁴ The General Staff had not been satisfied with the condition of the Marine Service. Discipline was described as lax, organisation and training was poor and the service was described as unreliable. The need for drastic changes in personnel was highlighted towards the war's end.²²⁵ However, the mood in the service did recover as some officers and ratings were offered the opportunity to volunteer for permanent service.²²⁶

The Maritime Inscription remained quite highly motivated with no decline in their numbers. It was noted as the only branch of the defence forces which did not see such a decline towards the end of the war.²²⁷ However, with the closure of the Coast Watching depots, which had supplied the Inscription with military supplies, training areas and

223. Defence Forces general report, 1945-46 (I.M.A.), p.21.

224. Army general report, 1944-45 (I.M.A.), p.2.

225. *ibid*, p.35.

226. Defence Forces general report, 1945-46 (I.M.A.), p.33.

227. Army general report, 1944-45 (I.M.A.), p.12.

instructors, training the Maritime Inscription proved more difficult and numbers began to drop immediately after the war.

Ireland's Strategic Position

Although the war was at an end, it was recognised that the underlying strategic situation had not changed. Ireland still lay across Great Britain's lines of trade and communications with most of the world. It was felt that while a strong naval force was no guarantee of security against invasion, no more than a strong air force could prevent bombing raids against cities, it was vital that any force created would be as strong and as well equipped as Irish resources could make them.²²⁸

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had created great uncertainty in political circles. While some believed that large ground, sea and air forces were no longer useful, others held that that little had changed. The Irish General Staff noted that although they did not have the information required to make an informed decision, the United States, which presumably did have such information, was maintaining its ground, sea and air forces at a high level.²²⁹

The military authorities noted that in general most nations, whether weak or strong, were not demobilising but rather seeking to maintain their strength at the highest level possible, within their resources. They felt that a new balance of power and the resulting stable conditions would not be reached for some time. It was agreed that no decision could be made as to the position of Ireland in any new strategic situation.

However, it was noted that the notion of a small permanent army bolstered by reserves had proven impractical during the war and recommended a larger permanent force.²³⁰ It was recognised that until the American and British government made their post-war policies and armament programs public, no lasting decisions could be made.

228. Defence Forces general report, 1945-46 (I.M.A.), p.1.

229. *ibid*, p.1.

Government Recognition of Naval Requirement

The Emergency had shown the Irish government that some form of naval force was required to protect Irish sovereignty. It was now widely accepted that if Ireland could not provide adequate protection for her territory that some other state would invade to ensure their own security, whether Britain alone or some manner of Western alliance. As part of this new scheme, it was agreed that the Marine Service would be replaced or converted into a Naval Service and that the Maritime Inscription would form the basis of a new naval reserve.

The government appeared willing to make the funds available to create a reasonably large force. It was acknowledged that no better opportunity to found a navy could be hoped for. The main and, practically, sole supplier available to the Irish was the British Government. It held a vast amount of surplus vessels and so it would prove relatively inexpensive to create a naval service.

Until a decision was reached on the naval question, the state's defence by sea rested on the two patrol boats, *Fort Rannoch* and *Muirchu*. They were to be disposed of once their replacements had arrived. Additionally, the various motor torpedo boats remained in action. It was intended to keep these craft, as the torpedo boats were believed to be well suited to the inshore defence of Irish ports, a task which required light, fast craft. The only concern was their high running costs. It was hoped to replace their expensive and complex petrol engines with diesels. The motor torpedo boats were also expected to be quite useful for training purposes and were intended for the use of the Maritime Inscription.²³¹

The Foundation of the Naval Service

The first steps were taken when in the Memorandum on the Defence Forces of 23 August 1945; the recommendation was formally made that a small Naval Service be founded.²³² Their expected wartime duties were to patrol Irish coastal waters with the object of

230. *ibid*, p.1.

231. Memorandum on Defence Forces, addendum 2, 1945 (I.M.A.), p.3.

preventing their use by belligerent craft and also with the object of destroying belligerent mines; to sweep harbors and their approaches in order to keep open routes to and from the country; to undertake the laying and operation of defensive minefields for the protection of Irish harbours; to conduct port control duties and the surveillance and examination of shipping entering or using Irish ports; including the operation of port war signal stations.

In the event of attempted invasion, they were to engage in offensive action in co-operation with coast artillery, land and air forces against hostile surface attempting to land in the vicinity of Irish defended harbours and in certain eventualities, to organize the convoying of Irish shipping.

Their proposed peacetime tasks included fishery protection duties; the hydrographic survey of Irish harbours and their approaches in order to enable Ordnance Survey to revise the charts; the operation of transport services for the coast defence forts and Haulbowline; target towing for coast defence artillery and provide an air-sea rescue service during Air Corps firing practices.

It was also intended that the Naval Service would be responsible for the servicing of lighthouses and buoys in Irish waters in the event of the Irish Government taking over responsibility from the British Government for that service. In this eventuality special vessels, such as now used by the Irish Lights Service, would have to be acquired. However the Irish Government choose to leave matters as they were.²³³

Several classes of ship were considered. The largest were ships of the destroyer type but their speed and offensive capabilities were deemed excessive to the requirements. The cost of crewing and maintaining such vessels was uneconomical in respect to the peacetime duties required. The possibility of acquiring frigates was also dismissed as it was felt that their performance was similar to that of a corvette at twice the cost. Having

232. *ibid*, p.1.

233. Observations on memorandum on Defence Forces, 1949 (I.M.A.), p.1.

finally learnt from their experiences of the motor torpedo boats, the purchase of motor launches was dismissed out of hand as it was recognised that the vessels were incapable of patrolling in normal weather.²³⁴

The corvettes were only capable of removing moored mines and thus unable to fulfil the minesweeping role mentioned above, but they were capable of patrolling Irish waters and most importantly in the eyes of the Irish government, they were the cheapest anti-submarine force available.²³⁵ During the Emergency, the widely-held belief that German U-boats had been sheltering along the west coast had caused problems for the government.²³⁶ In the event of another war, the potential diplomatic difficulties which would be caused by a failure to secure Irish waters were to be prevented. The corvettes could go to sea in all weather, could cruise for extended periods and were quick enough to overhaul trawlers. The decision was made to purchase corvettes of the most modern type. As the corvette as a class had just re-merged in the Second World War, this was not overly difficult. However, that lofty rhetoric contrasted with their actions.

The Flower Class Corvettes

The Flower class corvette was designed as a coastal convoy escort. The class name originates from the naming of the ships after types of flowers. The vessel was derived from a class of whale catcher. Although intended for a coastal patrol role, the demand for escorts in the Atlantic forced their use as ocean escorts. 267 of the class were produced for the Royal Navy and Royal Canadian Navy during the war, 64 of which were of a superior revised 1940 design. Despite their stated desire to purchase the most modern design, the Irish corvettes were entirely of the pre-1940 vintage.

The vessels were sea-worthy if uncomfortable. They proved perpetually damp, quite cramped and were prone to severe rolling due to the design's broad beam relative to length. The author Nicholas Monsarrat, who served on a Flower class corvette during the

234. *ibid*, p.1.

235. Memorandum on Defence Forces, addendum, 1949 (I.M.A.), p.3.

236. Robert Fisk, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality* (London,1983), pp 127-129.

Battle of the Atlantic described the vessels as capable of rolling on wet grass. An additional benefit was that they had been designed with ease of upkeep in mind. Any workshop with basic marine equipment could fulfill their maintenance needs.²³⁷



Fig 9: Emergency-era MTB *M4* alongside LE *Cliona*.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

It was intended that two corvettes be purchased initially with an additional purchase each year until the full fleet of six corvettes was acquired. However, this was changed to a purchase of three corvettes initially with a fourth the following year. But the fourth vessel was never sanctioned.²³⁸ The grave shortage of engineer officers was cited as the reasoning behind this decision as it was intended to purchase a hydrographic survey vessel and the service did not have the manpower for both. As it happens, the ship was never sanctioned and the service received neither the survey ship nor an additional

237. Sale of Flower corvettes to Mexico, 1945 (B.N.A., ADM 1/18317).

corvette. The state had the opportunity to solve this shortage of engineer officers in 1946. The Military Archives contain letters detailing the potential employment of Poles with maritime qualifications who would not return to a Poland under Soviet occupation. They included engineers, seaman, engine room technicians and the entire teaching staffs of the Polish Naval College and Merchant Marine School. The main difficulty as pointed out by the Department of Industry and Commerce was the provision of jobs intended for Irish men to Poles and the electoral damage which would result.²³⁹

While originally favouring the corvette, the Service was to make a bid towards the end of the decade to acquire Algerine class minesweepers as a better match for their requirements. But this was dismissed as overly expensive.²⁴⁰

The three corvettes acquired were the *HMS Oxlip*, *HMS Bellwort* and the *HMS Borage* at a total cost of £210,000.²⁴¹ These were renamed the *LE Maev*, *LE Cliona* and *LE Macha*, respectively. The names Banba, Fola and Gráinne were intended for the next three corvettes but as they never arrived, the names were reserved for the next three vessels commissioned. The *LE Macha* was commissioned on 15 November 1946, followed by the *LE Maeve* on 20 December and finally, the *LE Cliona* on 3 February, the following year. The corvettes were roughly 200 feet in length and armed with a four inch main gun, a two inch anti-aircraft gun and two 20mm Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns. They also were equipped for anti-submarine warfare with depth charges and the Hedgehog system, which fired a spray of contact bombs ahead of the vessel. The vessels had been bought quickly without full surveys and although the equipment (ASDIC, radio, radar, gyro compass, echo sounder, etc.) was in excellent condition, the engines and hull were not. They had been operated by reserve personnel during the war and badly neglected.²⁴²

238. Memorandum on Defence Force, addendum, 1949 (I.M.A.), p.2.

239. Employment of Poles, 1946 (I.M.A., 3/4588).

240. Memorandum on Defence Force, addendum, 1949 (I.M.A.), p.3.

241. Commissioning of corvettes, 1947 (I.M.A., 2/96757).

242. Fourth corvette discussion, 1947 (I.M.A., 3/2415).

Once the three corvettes were in Irish hands, the *Muirchu* and *Fort Rannoch* were then disposed of. The former had an eventful retirement. Initially, the Naval Service attempted to hand her back to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. They were unwilling to do so unless she was repaired. This was deemed economical and she was sold for scrap to Hammond Lane Metal Company for £1,440.²⁴³ En route to the scrap yard, the *Muirchu* began taking on water and the crew were taken off by a passing trawler. She then sank off the Saltees with no loss of life.²⁴⁴

The Men of the Service

Finding officers and NCOs for the new service was problematic. The military authorities were keen to source personnel who were capable naval administrators and would be capable of directing training along modern lines.²⁴⁵ The General Staff were not overly impressed with the material available to them. It was baldly stated that there was no officer in the service of the standard required and that only seven were within the age limits set out by the incoming regulations. However, several of the junior officers were considered suitable for further training with the intention of filling senior positions. But this did not solve the immediate problem. It was hoped to find three suitable candidates amongst those retiring from the Royal Navy. The first was to be given the rank of Captain and appointed Director of the Service.

Another candidate was to be appointed Commander and given responsibility for the Marine Base at Haulbowline, and lastly an Engineer Commander, which had to be an engineer officer to oversee the workshops, general maintenance and the training of new engineers.²⁴⁶ Some juggling of responsibilities ensued as the authorities sought to make the best use of the candidates which had come forward. In the end, a former Royal Navy Instructor was selected to oversee training with the rank of Lieutenant Commander and a former engineer officer of the Royal Indian Navy, Cheb Forde, filled the position of

243. Survey of *Muirchu*, 1947 (I.M.A., 2/96862).

244. Brunocard, Daire, *The Seahound* (Cork, 2001), pp 146-148.

245. Defence Forces general report, 1945-46 (I.M.A.), p.47.

246. Memorandum on Defence Forces, addendum 2, 1945 (I.M.A.), p.5.

Engineer Commander with the rank of commander.²⁴⁷ Acting Lieutenant Tom McKenna was promoted to Lieutenant Commander and appointed as the head of the Marine Depot at Haulbowline.



Fig 10: Aerial shot of Haulbowline.

(Image: Collection of Frank Troy)

The man chosen to head the new Service was Henry Seville Jerome, a Royal Navy Commander who was due to be retired. He been loaned to the South African navy during the war and had commanded a flotilla of minesweepers. He was granted a five year contract and commissioned as a Captain. British personnel were loaned with the corvettes to provide the initial training cadres. Initially, they were to be seconded to the Irish for four weeks but as this was to prove overly optimistic, particularly in the case of electric

247. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.112.

artificers and signallers, the deployment was extended to six months on the request of the Irish naval authorities.²⁴⁸

Examinations were held in the hopes of finding twelve naval cadets who were to undergo training at the Military College and Marine School before been sent abroad for further training.²⁴⁹ Of the eight applicants, four were accepted with an additional two transfers from the Army Cadets.²⁵⁰ But shortages still remained and it was decided to issue temporary commissions to officers outside the age limits.²⁵¹ De-mobilised Royal Navy personnel of Irish extraction were also recruited to make up the shortfall. Even with these inducted officers providing a backbone of experience, the standard of technical training in the service was low. It was hoped to remedy this quickly by training abroad and naval personnel attended a wide range of course in Britain, including anti-submarine warfare, wireless telegraphy, visual signalling, ASDIC, damage control gunnery and electrician courses.²⁵²

By 1949, there were thirty one officers in the service, but of these only fourteen held regular commissions. Three were on loan from the Army and another five transferred to fill administrative posts. In addition, there were nine officers on temporary commissions. There were four cadets in training at the time.²⁵³

The Marine Depot also processed large numbers of naval recruits; the main limitation in their case was not a shortage of suitable candidates but of accommodation and training facilities. Some naval ratings were also sent abroad for training in electrical, radar and communications duties.²⁵⁴ In 1948, the service remained 20 per cent under establishment strength. The main problem was that once trained, technical personnel of

248. Acquisition of corvettes, 1947 (I.M.A., 2/94491).

249. Defence Forces general report, 1945-46 (I.M.A.), p.47.

250. Defence Forces general report, 1946-47 (I.M.A.), p.10.

251. Memorandum on Defence Forces, addendum 2, 1945 (I.M.A.), p.6.

252. Defence Forces general report, 1946-47 (I.M.A.), p.52.

253. Observation on addendum 2, memorandum on Defence Forces 1945, 1949 (I.M.A.), p.6.

254. Defence Forces general report, 1947-48 (I.M.A.), p.72.

the type required could fetch better wages in private employment and thus the pool of qualified ratings and officers tended to empty as quickly as it was filled.

An interesting coda which demonstrates the difficulty of establishing a naval service in an army-dominated environment relates to the training of cooks for naval vessels. Where possible, the Army sought to have naval personnel trained in Army Schools. This resulted in naval cooks being trained to army standards with resulting difficulties aboard ship. Army cooks were trained to provide three square meals a day and the naval cooks were likewise taught to do the same. However, aboard ship, their duty was to provide four smaller meals along with refreshments for the various watches. This resulted in discontent amongst the ratings as to the quality of their food and cooks were sent abroad to receive instruction from the Royal Navy.²⁵⁵

Political maneuvering and diplomatic spats often brought serious consequences for the military and the Naval Service. On 19 May 1949, the attendance of Irish officers on British training courses was suspended for three months. This action was felt by British to be in response to pressure within the Dáil on the sitting government. It was believed to be considered inappropriate for Irish soldiers to train alongside what were seen as occupation forces in Northern Ireland. Although it did affect Irish army officers, no naval officers were due to attend courses within the time period and the ban expired before it would have impacted on their training.²⁵⁶

Although, the ban was not maintained, the short notice with which it had been implemented enraged elements in the British military. The Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff expressed the opinion that a great of assistance had been rendered to the Irish in recent years, in the form of arms, equipment and training. It was felt that as the Irish were unwilling to align themselves with the British and as the courses were heavily over-subscribed, to the point where British allies could not secure places, that the favoritism shown to the Irish was unwarranted and of no real military value. From a

255. Training naval cooks, 1948 (I.M.A., 3/3453).

256. Irish officers on training courses, 1949 (B.N.A., WO 258/112).

purely operational point of view, it was felt that a case could be made to refuse the Irish further vacancies on such courses.²⁵⁷

The Duties of the Service

Throughout the period, the service continued to be employed on fishery protection duties. The motor torpedo boats were unsuited to this and were used for general training, air-sea rescue work during Air Corps exercises and to aid the Special Investigation Department of the Customs in preventing smuggling, in particular, gold smuggling.²⁵⁸ Another unusual operation and one of the earliest tasks assigned to the new service was the dumping at sea of the contaminated remains of 84,226 grenades produced by the ever-prolific Research Bureau during the Emergency.²⁵⁹

The use of nuclear weapons had led some to question what would result from an atomic attack on the principal Irish ports. It was noted that the loss of the main harbours would effectively cut Ireland off from seaborne trade and communications. It now became quite important to identify the resources available to the state. A survey of the ports and anchorages of the Irish Republic was undertaken. In the case of the anchorages, it was expected that the report could be developed in the course of training and regular duties. The long-planned coastal survey was also finally begun. The government was unable to make the funds available to purchase a survey vessel but the Royal Navy was able to provide one along with a training cadre to aid the Irish in their efforts.

The Atlantic Pact (NATO) confirmed the fears of the Irish that an East-West war was highly likely and they began preparing for the worse. Potential sites for minefield were examined and plans drawn up for that eventuality.²⁶⁰ Supplies from the British ceased in 1948, with only miniscule amounts making their way into Irish stores.²⁶¹ As during the

257. *ibid.*

258. Defence Forces general report, 1947-48 (I.M.A.), p.73.

259. General report on Defence Forces, 1946-47 (I.M.A.), p.62.

260. Defence Forces annual report, 1949-50 (I.M.A.), p.6.

261. Defence Forces annual report, 1950-51 (I.M.A.), p.6.

Emergency, the lack of ammunition made training less effective and a shortage of spare parts likewise had a negative effect on efforts to maintain the vessels.

LE Macha was given the honour of transporting Eamonn De Valera, then Irish President, on a round-Ireland cruise, stopping at islands along the coast, including an interlude in the Isle of Man.²⁶²



Fig 11: De Valera on round-Ireland trip.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The Naval Service undertook their first overseas mission in 1948. The *LE Cliona* was dispatched to Nice in June to recover the remains of W.B. Yeats. He had died in exile in France during the Second World War and consequently, it proven impossible to bring his remains to his home county. After receiving the body from its French honour guard, the

262. *Irish Times*, 23 July 1947.

LE Cliona undertook the seventeen day journey to Sligo Bay. Captain Jerome was quite eager to see further overseas cruises, stating that 'I regard it as most desirable that the personnel of our fleet should feel that they are sea-going and no longer only a Coastal Service. At present they feel inferior even to Merchant Seamen.'²⁶³

An Sluagh Muirí

In 1946, the figures for the Maritime Inscription stood at 1,134 all ranks. But this declined rapidly in the following years.²⁶⁴ Equipment was unavailable and all instructors were being used to train the permanent force. But the service had not been forgotten. On the 17 February 1947, the Maritime Inscription were reorganised as the Sluagh Muirí, which roughly translates as Sea Host. It boasted exactly 260 men, all ranks. In 1948, the Sluagh Muirí was reformed into five Shore Companies, consolidating the widely scattered local units into larger units based on those locations with the required facilities and sufficient interest. These were the ports of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford. From then and through 1949, the Sluagh Muirí's procedures were altered to bring it into line with the Naval Service as a whole. Previously, their organisation had been based on Emergency practises.²⁶⁵ It should be noted that the consolidation of the Sluagh Muirí into five larger units was the direct results of the problems encountered when converting the Emergency-era Local Defence Force into the Forsa Cosanta Áitíuil, an army reserve force. In the case of the FCA, the units were transferred as they stood rather than consolidated and the result was multiple under strength battalions. The FCA did benefit from being the adjunct to a long established force whereas the Sluagh Muirí was attached to a service which had yet to organise its own training programs and was in no position to detach instructors.²⁶⁶

Re-Organisation of the Service

The 1947 Defence Forces (Temporary Provisions) Act formally altered the Marine Service name to the Naval Service. A formal system of naval ranks was also brought in to

263. Letter from OCNS to Chief of Staff, 13 Oct. 1947 (I.M.A., 3/3584).

264. Defence Forces general report, 1945-46 (I.M.A.), p.16.

265. Defence Forces annual report, 1949-50 (I.M.A.), p.9.

266. Sluagh Muirí organisation, 1948 (I.M.A., 3/2753).

replace the more informal situation which existed previously. A major change in organisation was also undertaken. It was decided that the Air Corps and Naval Service would form separate commands alongside the territorial army commands and regulations were rewritten to reflect this.²⁶⁷ This meant that naval officers would now be in a position to directly address the decision-makers with the Defence Forces. There were some skirmishes with Department of Finance officials as the new service took on greater administration duties. The importance of accurate records of all decisions was highlighted by repeated efforts to draw funds from Finance officials. Without suitable paperwork and as a result of their inexperience with naval matters, officials in the Department were hesitant to approve even the simplest requests without seeking clarification from their superiors, imposing delays on the day to day administration of the service.²⁶⁸

Reorganisation was undertaken in 1948 to reflect the current circumstances of the Naval Service.²⁶⁹ Training staff for An Sluagh Muirí were assigned and the provision for six corvettes was changed to three and likewise, the provision for six torpedo boats was changed from six to two.²⁷⁰ Four of the torpedo boats had been cannibalised for parts in the years immediately following the war to keep the remainder running and in 1947, they were disposed off.

Conclusion

The post-war period saw the Defence Forces and government go to great effort to create a modern and professional naval force. Their experience during the Emergency convinced them of the importance of recruiting trained naval officers to supplement the force, indeed to command it, and thus ensure the development of the force along the lines desired. However, despite the initial enthusiasm, funds were not forthcoming for the program laid out in 1945 and it was half-abandoned. Once a token service was in place and no direct threat could be seen, government interest waned and the service began to suffer from the neglect. However, the fact that even this small force had been created and

267. Defence Forces general report, 1947-48 (I.M.A.), p.15.

268. Finance decisions, 1947 (I.M.A., 3/5588).

269. Defence Forces annual report, 1948-49 (I.M.A.), p.1.

270. *ibid*, p.2.

the need for a permanent naval component in the defence force acknowledged was a large step forward on the pre-war situation. It could have so easily followed the precedent of the post-Civil War demobilisation. Similarities exist in that an undisciplined, disorganised temporary naval force with little political clout found itself without any function other than fisheries protection, a task for which it was not designed and ill-suited. A return to a fisheries protection service without a naval component could not be suggested as unlikely.

The reason for the successful foundation can be traced to the reduction of one of the factors which hobbled its previous incarnation. The funds available were, for the only time, equal to the demands made upon them. The ready supply of British officers, ships, stores and training compensated for the failure to fully fund the project. The sheer surplus of cheap materiel and available manpower meant that even the lesser sums involved would allow the creation of a larger force than would have been feasible at any other time since independence. The Cabinet's willingness to accede to the Admiralty's advice and head the service with formerly British officers rather than more politically acceptable but poorly trained Irish officers was to pay dividends in creating a service which weathered the succeeding decades of neglect.

Chapter 5

A False Dawn (1950-1959)

The previous three years had seen the Naval Service newly established and thriving in a relatively favorable climate of government support. However, by the end of the forties, economic necessity had forced the curtailment of the more ambitious elements of the state's naval policy and there had been reductions in spending on the Naval Service. The original plan had been for a fleet roughly twice the size of that which was actually assembled. Neither the three additional corvettes nor the hydrographic survey vessel, proposed under the 1946 scheme, had been supplied.

The new decade would see the Naval Service continue its attempts to develop along the lines laid out during the post-war period despite various alterations in defence policy and an increasing unwillingness on the part of the British to supply a nation which showed no intention of joining NATO and aligning itself with the Western Bloc. As the Irish nation continued to attempt to break away from its British legacy through changes in government form, the Naval Service was to run counter to the general trend.²⁷¹ They would begin to adopt a more uniquely Irish identity but for the most part, they moved closer to the Admiralty rather than apart. They continued to see it as a source of advice, support and supplies.

In effect, the decade would see the service simply maintain its position with regards to equipment, by comparison to the large capital expenditures undertaken immediately after the war. The focus was largely on increasing domestic training capacities and to a degree, weaning the service's training program away from the Admiralty, in particular, cadet training. This unconscious severing of links could be traced to Britain's increased focus on NATO and anti-Soviet operations. The common threat of German invasion during the war had resulted in a situation whereby both Irish and British naval planners had the same goal of territorial defence in mind. British priorities were now quite different and

271. Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London, 1988), pp 570-571.

the Irish were more insular and concerned with developing an efficient administration and training structure within their new navy.

Revising Irish Defence Policy

The annual report for 1950 indicated that in the event of a war between NATO and the Soviet Bloc, continental Europe would be overrun within seventy days and Ireland would likely undergo air attack and airborne invasion.²⁷² Thus the military authorities looked on the Air Corps as the most likely defender of Irish sovereignty. As the resources available to the Defence Forces were growing scarcer, this damaged the chances of further naval expansion and undermined the development of the service. On May 4, 1951, discussions were held by the Defence Minister as to the future of the Naval Service and it was confirmed that the Service was still viewed as a necessary component of the Defence Forces.²⁷³

A delegation was sent to the Admiralty in February 1952 to discuss the best course of action which could be taken by the Naval Service to fulfill its peacetime and wartime roles. The Admiralty indicated that the Irish would be best served by a focus on seaward defence of their ports. The delegation placed orders for training equipment and organised the training of Irish personnel in Admiralty schools. Unusually, the British could not make ships of the types they had recommended available, in this case minesweepers and seaward defence boats. However, they indicated that they could provide specifications and naval equipment to allow such vessels to be constructed in Ireland. They also indicated that vessels suitable for conversion could be purchased from commercial ship brokers. However the Department of Finance rejected any possibility of acquiring or building further vessels.²⁷⁴

In January 1955, the Council of Defence received new appointments and defence policy was reviewed. Once again it was stated that any invasion was far more likely to be airborne in nature. The importance of seaward defence of Irish ports was highlighted (as

272. Annual report, 1950 (I.M.A.), p.1.

273. Annual report, 1951, (I.M.A.), p.3.

recommended previously by the British Admiralty) and deemed to be central to Irish naval defence and it was proposed to establish a Seaward Defence School.²⁷⁵ There was broad agreement on the materiel required to undertake these tasks. These included small craft for patrol protection and examination duties, quick-firing guns to cover narrow channels and entrances, 6 inch guns to cover examination anchorages, low flying aircraft for patrol and protection duties, static detection apparatus to detect frogmen, submarines and fast attack craft. But nothing came of the rhetoric, no progress was made in acquiring any of the vessels needed to undertake such a mission, in fact, due to delay in acquiring new armaments for the corvettes and ammunition shortages, no firing practice was undertaken during the year.²⁷⁶

Manpower and Vessels

The Defence Estimates for 1950 saw a slight increase in funding for the Naval Service but also saw a shortfall of 208 personnel in its establishment strength; a figure roughly equivalent to two corvette crews. This lack of available crews made the intended purchase of additional naval vessels appear less desirable.²⁷⁷ Having been laid up during the cutbacks in 1948, the *LE Cliona* was brought back into service. As fully crewing the corvette was impossible, she returned to active duty as a fishery protection vessel rather than a fully commissioned naval vessel. The last of the Emergency-era vessels were disposed as the two surviving MTBs were sold to a Colonel James Fitzmaurice (famed as a participant in the first successful East to West trans-Atlantic flight) who intended to convert them into houseboats on the Shannon to provide accommodation for workers at what was then Rineanna, now known as Shannon airport.²⁷⁸ This eliminated the last vestiges of an Irish seaward defence force.

There was an incident of note during the early 1950s. After sailing from Haulbowline to investigate reports of a derelict floating in the Irish Sea, the *LE Maev* encountered the

274. Annual report part I, 1953 (I.M.A.), p.6.

275. John P. Duggan, *A history of the Irish Army* (Dublin, 1991), p.237.

276. Annual report, 1955 (I.M.A.), p.19.

277. Annual report, 1950-51 (I.M.A.), p.7.

278. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr.. 1973), p.114.

stricken craft on December 2 1951. The Irish Lights vessel *Granuaile* was standing by to warm off merchant shipping. It was deemed impossible to tow the vessel and the decision was made to sink it. Initially the 4 inch and two pounder guns were used. But they appeared to have no effect and worsening weather forced the operation to be postponed until the next morning. The following day, it was decided to attempt to sink the craft with a depth charge. A trial run was undertaken successfully and the first depth charge fired successfully sank the derelict. The incident represented the only use of depth charges by an Irish vessel outside of training exercises.²⁷⁹



Fig 12: Full complement of corvettes.

(Image: Collection of Frank Troy)

Captain Jerome was offered a five year extension on his contract. It was felt that Commander McKenna and the younger officers within the service, although eager and

279. Derelict encounter, 1951 (I.M.A., 3/11860), p.1.

willing, were not yet prepared for the responsibility of command. There were some difficulties within the service as a result of the various types of officers within the services. They could be divided into three rough categories. The first were an older group of five Lieutenant Commanders, who had been recruited during the Emergency, two from the Fisheries Service and three from the Merchant Service. They had been refused permanent commissions on the establishment of the Naval Service and were retained on temporary commissions. Captain Jerome stated that 'it was obvious from the start that on a temporary basis, their moral would remain low and their usefulness to the service be limited.'²⁸⁰ They had received no formal training and their expertise was in the command of a single ship, which although crucial during the Emergency was less valuable in peacetime where their lack of military and administrative training impacted on their effectiveness. As they were on temporary commissions, training them in communications, gunnery or anti-Submarine warfare was felt to be wasteful although they were given a severely abridged course in anti-submarine Warfare to allow them a grasp on the function of the vessels under their command.

There was a second group of permanent officers, one Commander and five Lieutenants, all ex-Merchant Service who had trained with the Royal Navy although not to the same extent as later classes. The more energetic and motivated amongst this group were being groomed to replace their superior officers on temporary commissions. The third group was the ensigns, eight of whom were undergoing training. There was a fear that serving under senior officers, although rich in sea-going experience, lacked any naval experience, might impact on the effort to establish along proper naval lines.²⁸¹

In 1952, the chronic crewing shortage was temporarily alleviated by boiler problems aboard the *LE Cliona* which saw her being handed over to civilian contractors to undergo repairs. A recruitment drive was undertaken to try and secure enough crew to bring all three corvettes to establishment strength. This did not succeed but it did compensate for the excessive wastage of experienced personnel for a time. In particular, the service

280. Personnel difficulties, 1950 (I.M.A., S/475).

281. *ibid.*

continued to seek Engineering Branch officers from sources outside the military. Royal Navy personnel were known to express such interests.²⁸²

In 1953, following the initial refusal to countenance the purchase of further vessels, the Naval Service was sanctioned to explore the possibility of purchasing two seaward defence boats and one minesweeper. The British Admiralty offered to act as agent for the Naval Service in this regard.²⁸³

The British identified suitable vessels and Capt Jerome and various officials flew to England several times over the summer of 1954 to examine the seaward defence boats. However, due to an increase in the expected costs of £20,000, sanction to purchase the craft was withdrawn by the Department of Finance in January 1955. This caused a certain amount of anger on the part of Captain Jerome who felt that the British Admiralty had made great efforts to aid them in these purchases and would undoubtedly be less likely to provide the same level of support in future.²⁸⁴ In particular, twelve Irish officers had been enrolled in Seaward Defence course during 1954 and their training could not now be put into practice.

During 1954, Captain Jerome, head of the service, expressed his growing unease at the condition of the vessels and the deterioration of the service. Having been forced to cancel the order for an additional three corvettes due to a lack of crew, he continued to exhort the government on the dangers of failing to adequately maintain the vessels under his command stating 'I do not want to wake up one morning to find that one third of our navy has drowned, the bottom having fallen out of one of our corvettes.'²⁸⁵

In December 1956, Tom McKenna was promoted Captain and Director of the Naval Service.²⁸⁶ He had held the post of Officer Commanding the naval base at Haulbowline

282. Overseas applications, 1953 (N.A.I., DFA 410/15/145).

283. Annual report part II, 1953 (I.M.A.), p.6.

284. Correspondence between ministers of Finance and Defence, 1954 (I.M.A., 3/3911).

285. Major overhaul/refits corvette, 1955-59 (I.M.A., 3/20293).

286. Thomas McKenna, 'Editorial' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.101.

since 1946. He served as Second Officer of the *Muirchu* until 1936 before working in the Merchant Service. Immediately prior to enlisting in the Marine Service, he was Second Officer on the *SS Alresford* during the evacuation of France. During the Emergency, he had variously served as the commander of *Isaalt*, MTB *M5* and held the position of Chief Examination Officer for Dublin port. His appointment as head of the Service represented the culmination of the post-war effort to train suitable domestic candidates to take charge of the Service.

The problem of insufficient manpower was not limited to the Naval Service, the Army was suffering similar difficulties. The Minister of Defence, Sean McEoin, former Free State commander, took the drastic step of making a public appeal by radio for volunteers on 15 June 1956. He stressed the importance of national service even in times of relative security. When no clear danger appeared to present itself, his warning that ‘when the storm breaks is not the time to meet it’ had little impact in the face of post-war apathy.²⁸⁷

By the beginning of 1959, both the *LE Maev* and *Macha* were employed on fisheries duties, having undergone their refits. An attempt had been made to improve quality of life on the vessels which had initially been built with functionality and speed of construction in mind. However the obsolete main weapons which were replaced by more modern designs for which spares and ammunition could be provided remained in place due to the failure to purchase the armaments. The radio equipment aboard all three corvettes and at the Naval Base was long overdue for replacements. Although one set had been ordered in 1954, none had been delivered.

Maintaining the Corvettes

In 1952, it was suggested that overhauls were now crucial as the three corvettes had not undergone a survey or refit of any significance since coming into service. This lack of maintenance during their time under the Irish flag and the fact they had previously seen hard service during the war left the vessels in a relatively poor condition.

287. Sean McEoin address, 1956 (I.M.A., 3/24479).

At this point, the vessels were on average 12 years old, having spent the first six years of their life under war condition where repairs and maintenance were kept to the very minimum consistent with wartime requirements. During their time with the Naval Service, maintenance and repairs were also kept to a minimum, reflecting the financial situation of the service and the facilities available at Haulbowline.²⁸⁸



Fig 13: ASDIC operators aboard Flower corvettes.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The vessels of the Department of Defence Transport Fleet, a ferry service which operated around Haulbowline, did benefit from a level of annual expenditure on maintenance completely out of proportion to their relative importance. This can be traced to the fact that they were obliged to meet the standards of the Department of Industry and Commerce as ferries. Whereas the corvettes, which actually put to sea, were immune to

288. Vessel survey, 1952 (I.M.A., 3/2226).

such legislation and thus did not have to reach the safety standards set out for their own ferry service.²⁸⁹

The *LE Cliona* and *LE Maev* were to bear the brunt of the fisheries protection duties in 1956 as the *LE Macha* underwent a major survey in preparation for her refit the following year.²⁹⁰ A major overhaul was carried out on the *LE Macha* in September 1957 at a cost of £53,000 which was intended to extend its working life to May 1966.²⁹¹ A major overhaul was carried out on the *LE Cliona* in October 1958 at a cost of £50,000. The Marine Surveyor reported that the ship's estimated life would expire on January 1966.²⁹² As the *Maev* was out of commission, this meant that for a large portion of the year, *LE Macha* was the only ship in service. Captain McKenna was to later praise the crew for their efforts which saw them operate continuously without leave until October of the same year.

The danger posed by the obsolete and unsuitable armaments on the corvettes was highlighted by an incident on June 20, 1954. The *LE Maev* encountered the British trawler, *East Coates*, fishing in Irish waters. When a boarding party was dispatched, the trawler cut its lines and attempted to flee the area. The *LE Maev* pursued and began firing warning shots in a bid to force the trawler to come to a stop. However, the inaccuracy of the weapons made the effort overly dangerous to the trawler's crew and the Captain of the *Maev* had no choice but to allow it to escape.²⁹³

As ammunition for the 4" guns was impossible to procure, it was proposed to replace them with more modern Mark 23 4" guns on all corvettes. The process was to take six years.²⁹⁴

Legacy of War

289. *ibid.*

290. Annual report, 1956 (I.M.A.), p.13.

291. Memorandum on the Naval Service, 1967 (N.A.I., S/615), p.9.

292. *ibid.*

293. *East Coates* report, 1954 (I.M.A., 3/2444), p.2.

A legacy of the British minefields in the Irish Sea and German air-dropped mine attacks was a considerable amount of free-floating mines appearing in Irish waters throughout the 1950s. The corvettes were diverted on several occasions to investigate reports of mines. This was a case of political expedience overriding military necessity. The naval authorities railed against such operations, pointing to the extremely low likelihood of a corvette actually locating the offending mine and the extremely high likelihood that the “mine” would in fact be a discarded oil drum. The Department of Industry and Commerce acknowledged these concerns but countered that a failure to be seen to act would upset public opinion in the fishing communities and local shipping.²⁹⁵

Another legacy of the war was the *Shark*, originally bought as a mine layer, but which served as a stores ship for its time in the Service was disposed of in 1952.²⁹⁶ It had been intended to replace her with a stores and training vessel in 1953 and funds were made available by the Department of Finance for the purchase, however shortly afterwards the project was dropped for reasons of economic necessity. The true problem was in the nature of the vessel. The Naval Service demanded a vessel considerably larger than the *Shark* to allow it to operate in all conditions; the Department of Finance on the other hand, sought to encourage the Naval Service to compromise and accept a vessel of intermediate size, falling between the *Shark* and its ideal replacement. Irish Shipping Ltd had been consulted on the project repeatedly and the constant vacillating of the military authorities left them rather hostile towards the notion of providing similar aid in the future.²⁹⁷

Emergency Port Planning

The Defence Forces began their long-mooted coastal survey during 1950 with work being completed on the South coast by September and their efforts on the southwest and west coasts were at an advanced stage.²⁹⁸ The British provided assistance in the form of

294. Estimate for Defence, 1954/55 (I.M.A., 3/19415).

295. Procedures for demining, 1955 (I.M.A., 2/66491).

296. Replacement for Shark, 1954 (I.M.A., 3/3911).

297. *ibid.*

298. Annual report, 1950 (I.M.A.), p.4.

technical advisers, helicopter support and survey launches but this was kept as low-key as possible. Equipment and personnel were returned to England as quickly as possible.²⁹⁹ Rumours had circulated of a secret pact between the new government and their British counterparts and any overt Anglo-Irish cooperation in the military sphere was to be avoided.³⁰⁰ In 1952, the coastal survey effort saw work on the north coast and a portion of the east coast completed. In all areas, a delay in procuring aerial photographs slowed progress to a near-crawl.

As a further development of the coastal survey it was decided to undertake and study the question of Emergency Port Planning on a similar basis to that undertaken in Great Britain, with the technical assistance of retired experts from the British Emergency Port Planning Staff. The goal of the study is to ascertain the potential capacity of all Irish ports in order to ascertain how far war time requirements could be met in the event of the destruction of major ports by atomic or air attack.³⁰¹ It was completed by September 1954 and supplied to the Departments of Defence, Industry and Commerce. By 1957, the naval authorities found that their Port Survey had been largely ignored at the Cabinet level despite its conclusion that in the event of an attack on the port of Dublin, the remaining ports could not hope maintain imports at the level required to sustain the Irish population.³⁰²

Supply Shortfall

In 1950, there were great difficulties in acquiring warlike stores of any kind. The Minister for Defence stated the problem quite baldly.

‘We are isolated here. The world is formed up into two mighty combinations with appendages. We are not either in one combination or the other, and we are not an appendage to one combination or another. Both of those mighty combinations are busily arming and producing arms for all that are inside of the combination, and, after that, the

299. *ibid*, p.5.

300. Vol. 120, Vote 56- defence, 18 Apr. 1950 (<http://www.oireachtas-debates.gov.ie/en.toc.D.0120.19500418.html>) (Sep. 2009), 591.

301. Annual report part I, 1953 (I.M.A.), p.4.

302. Annual report, 1957 (I.M.A.), p.3.

appendages. We are not living in a world in which we can order arms as in the past from Czechoslovakia, from France, from Germany, from America, from Britain. We are not living in a world in which these countries will even accept our orders. Since the end of the last war, we have been getting dribbles of supplies from one country, and one country only up to date, that is, Great Britain.³⁰³

Efforts were made to procure supplies from France, Sweden and Switzerland but in every case, the amounts were negligible or the equipment offered was obsolete. In the case of the United States, the British had quietly convinced the Americans not to provide the Irish with military equipment. Their grounds for this action was that there was no real risk of an invasion of Ireland, that any improvement in Irish military strength could cause greater unrest in the North (whether by unsettling the Unionist element or emboldening the Republicans) and that it would reduce the chances that the Irish would join NATO.³⁰⁴ They, in turn, were unwilling to provide the Irish with military stores for similar reasons but also as the Irish were seen in Whitehall as a low priority. However, this unwillingness did not apply to naval supplies as the British Admiralty was quite favorable to an increase in Irish naval strength as evidenced by their various offers of technical assistance, training and vessels during the period.³⁰⁵

The Training Program

During 1950, while the cadets continued to undergo their training at Dartmouth, the situation as regards recruits was less favourable. seamanship, engine room and communications training were all undertaken successfully. Their level of gunnery, radar plotting and anti-submarine training however was deemed unsatisfactory. As for ASDIC and radar training, this could not be undertaken at all due to a lack of equipment.³⁰⁶

303. Vol. 120, Vote 56- defence, 18 Apr. 1950 (<http://www.oireachtas-debates.gov.ie/en.toc.D.0120.19500418.html>) (Sep. 2009), 589.

304. Eunan O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland* (Oxford, 1999), p.266.

305. John P. Duggan, *A history of the Irish Army* (Dublin, 1991), p.235.

306. Annual report, 1950 (I.M.A.), p.31.



Fig 14: Naval recruits undergoing instruction.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The Admiralty was quite willing to provide vacancies on their courses for Irish officers. The Irish military would forward their requests on a quarterly basis to the Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Dublin, who would then in turn correspond with the War Office to secure spaces. This cooperation did not extend beyond the military sphere as no such mechanism was put into place to allow Irish personnel to attend civil defence courses. The distinction being that, in the case of military courses, these would develop valuable and desirable links between both militaries, allowing informal lines of communication to be opened and maintained.³⁰⁷

For the first time in the Service's history, training cruises to continental Europe were undertaken in 1950. The maiden excursion was to France as the *LE Macha* travelled to

Cherbourg.³⁰⁸ Following its initial journey to Cherbourg the previous year, the *LE Macha* undertook additional training cruises to Brest and Vigo in September 1951.

By 1954, there had been a real improvement and the Service had now developed the capability to fully train its own lower grade specialists at the Naval Depot. Previously, these personnel would have been trained aboard.³⁰⁹ In 1957, there were some changes to training methods. The intended goal was to bring the land training element of the service into line with that of the Defence Forces as a whole. Naval officers were to undergo training at the Military College and naval NCOs were to attend course at the Curragh. With morale in the force at a low, perhaps it was felt that it was essential to ensure that standards of military discipline were maintained and that there would be no repeat of the lapses which occurred during the Emergency. It also would have the benefit of bringing the naval cadets under the control of the Army for a period of their training and thus, adopting the ethos of the Army as opposed to any more independent view which might take root if training was conducted solely under naval officers at Haulbowline. It was also agreed that any program which saw officers being trained in Britain might result in those officers growing accustomed to equipment and weapons unavailable to the Naval Service. The military staff also feared an ideological contamination of their cadets as it was stated that exposure to British history as taught by the British could result in cadets acquiring 'a bias on foreign and domestic matters which is not in keeping with our policies and traditions'.³¹⁰ But with all training conducted in Ireland, their minds would be moulded along proper lines. In 1958, early steps were taken towards founding the proposed Seaward Defence School with the purchase of equipment to the value of £16,000. It was initially intended to base the school at Dun Laoghaire but the final decision was to establish the facility near the Shannon Estuary.

307. Military air and naval cooperation with Irish authorities, 1950-51 (B.N.A., DO 130/116).

308. Training cruise, 1950 (I.M.A., 3/11335).

309. Annual report, 1954 (I.M.A.), p..21.

310. Cadetships in the naval service, 1957 (I.M.A., 3/801)

Conclusion

As the fifties drew on, the age of the vessels of the Service began to impact heavily on the capabilities of the Service. The chronic crew shortages combined with constant breakdowns and the major refits which had to be undertaken towards the end of the period resulted in curtailed activity and a constant drain on the finances made available by the state. These often unexpected expenses would certainly have provided partial justification for the Department of Finance's cutbacks. While naval planning was undertaken and often, the required actions identified and approved, inevitably, the funds would not be provided or provided and later withdrawn. In some cases, some funds would be spent before a decision was made to abandon the project resulting in greater waste.

As the ships began to show their age, the land-based elements of the service could be said to have matured. Although a shortage of suitable manpower was hampering efforts to bring the service to full strength, the capability to train any suitable candidate which might appear was on the increase. Domestically trained officers which had progressed through the ranks, rather than being imported, were now in the majority as the appointment of Thomas McKenna as OCNS highlighted. This would grant the service a certain confidence as it was no longer entirely reliant on external actors to provide the higher level leadership required to steer and advance the Naval Service.

All these factors contributed to a situation whereby there was a massive gulf between policy and practice in Irish defence planning. Planned purchases were almost never cancelled, merely deferred to some unspecified future date. It is clear that the military authorities were aware of the scope of the threats to Irish sovereignty and the limitations of their forces. However, their ambitious schemes combined with excessive inference by Finance officials in matters beyond the scope of their experience combined to gravely weaken the state defence by sea.

Chapter 6

The Decline of the Service (1960-1969)

Although, the service had continued to progress during the 1950s, particularly with regard to the training of recruits and cadets, it was running on the legacy of the post-war years. The unusual combination of a Irish government willing to invest in a naval forces due to the experiences of the Emergency and an abundance of cheap vessels and stores in the British inventory, which the Admiralty were eager to dispose of, were no longer in effect. Any spending beyond the minimum required to maintain a semblance of a fisheries protection force was unacceptable. As non-essential maintenance was reduced, the age of the vessels began to tell as they suffered increased mechanical difficulties and longer periods out of services. The period saw some efforts by the Naval Service to branch out into new fields, in cooperation with the Department of Transport, Department of Agriculture and the Irish Merchant Marine with varying degrees of success. This was a bid to acquire additional funding by providing additional services.

As will be shown, this policy was not successful; the underlying lack of suitable manpower would hamstring tactics which might have earned the Service greater influence in policy-making and a greater share of defence funding. The lack of clarity in defence policy saw a gradual switch from planning for seaward defence to planning for fisheries protection without any actual progress been made to acquire the platforms required for either tasking. Just as they had run counter to the prevailing current in the 1950s, the Naval Service was grow more insular in the 1960s as Ireland began to open to the wider world and engage in economic modernization.³¹¹ This may not have been by choice but rather a necessity brought about by the slow decline of the service. The service can be seen to stagger from proposed purchase to revised schemes in haphazard manner but the common underlying goal on the part of the Naval Service was the procurement of

311. Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p..581.

new ships. Even unsuitable vessels were better than none and the over the course of the decade, the service was faced with that possibility on several occasions.

Refitting the Corvettes

The 1960s saw the Naval Service almost extinguished entirely as a functioning navy. The vessels were operating well beyond their life expectancy and a series of refits did little more than keep one vessel in commission at any given moment. Some efforts were made over the course of the decade to modernize the corvettes in any way possible. Just as her sister vessels had in previous years, the *LE Maev* underwent an overhaul in May 1960 which was intended to prolong her lifespan to May, 1967.³¹² The naval service began pushing for the installation of Decca navigators on all its vessels from 1960. Ostensibly, this was to allow the officers to pinpoint their location and prevent debates with foreign skippers in court as to the exact location of fishing boats intercepted in Irish water. However, the official record shows that this defence rarely proved successful and so it is possible that the matter was simply a clever way of acquiring new equipment.³¹³

The shortage of vessels was so acute that no corvette could be provided to attend the Cork Regatta as in previous years. Only one corvette was available and it could not be drawn from its fisheries protection duties.³¹⁴ The International Maritime Week and Cobh Tostal were also disappointed as there traditionally had been a naval vessel at anchor during the celebrations in previous years.³¹⁵ Again, all corvettes were on patrol or berthed without their crews. Captain McKenna goes on to state that any corvette berthed in Cork would be not be visible from the area of the regatta and thus, 'might as well be in Killybegs'.³¹⁶

All three corvettes had been equipped with degaussing systems during the war and it decided in 1960 to undertake an adjustment of the systems. These were electro-magnetic

312. Memorandum on the Naval Service, 1967 (N.A.I., S/615), p..9.

313. Installation of Decca navigators, 1960 (I.M.A., 3/32777).

314. Cork regatta, 1960 (I.M.A., 3/33730).

315. Cobh Tostal and International Maritime Week, 1959-60 (I.M.A., 3/30352).

316. Cork regatta, 1960 (I.M.A., 3/33730).

coils which acted to reduce the magnetic field of a ship's hull, providing some degree of protection against magnetic mines. Their work on the *LE Maev* and *Cliona* was found to be quite straight forward as they were carrying modified "M" Coils. However, *LE Macha* was found to be sporting some manner of unidentifiable, probably experimental, system and sanction was sought to purchase standard type equipment.³¹⁷

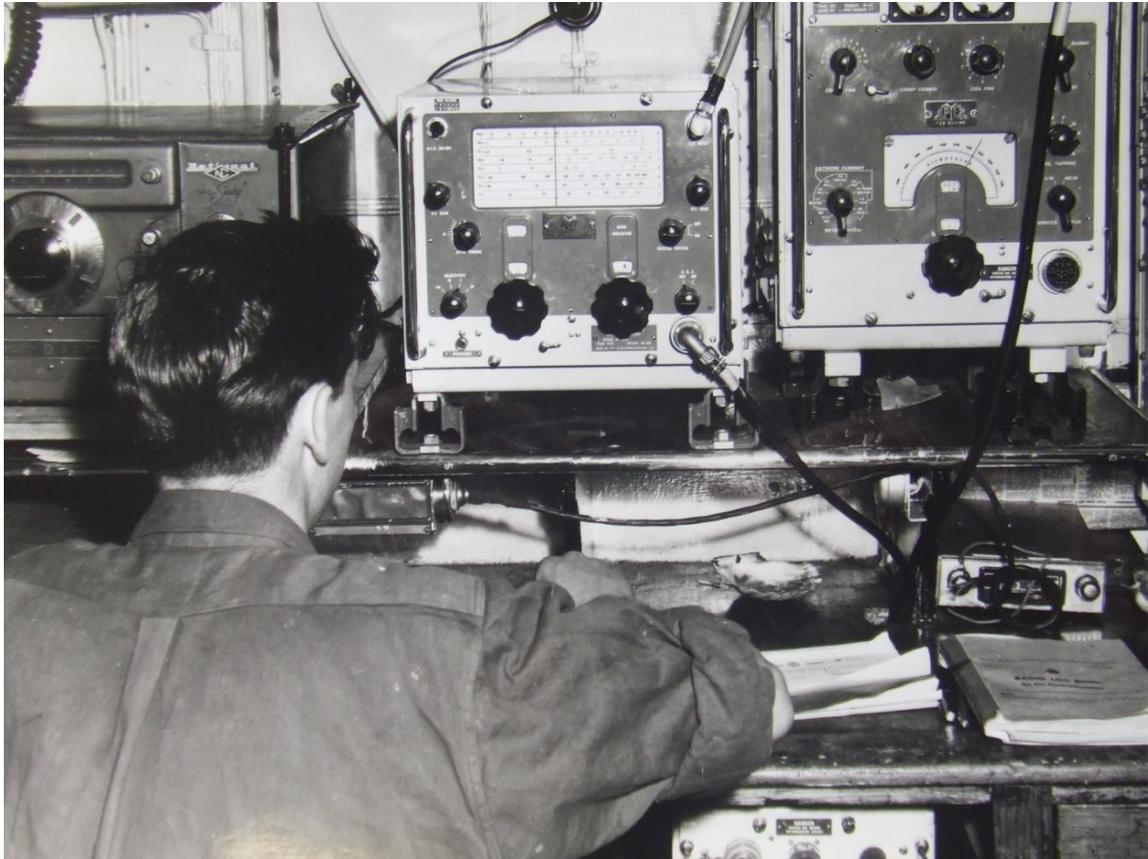


Fig 15: Radio operator at work.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The same year also saw the new Mark 19 4" inch guns installed on the corvettes.³¹⁸ The order had initially been for Mark 23 4" guns however the Irish had chosen the cheaper option. The main armaments being replaced were of the Mark 9 type, a breech loading gun with no anti-aircraft capability. The new weapons were quick-firing with fixed ammunition, that is to say pre-loaded magazines. Under the advice of the British, it was

317. Vessels- naval, 1960, (I.M.A., 3/4989).

decided to also install additional Bofors anti-aircraft guns on the corvettes. It was made quite clear by the Admiralty that any naval vessel which lacked anti-air defence had no business putting to sea in wartime. The newer 4" ammunition was distinctly different to the prior ammunition and the corvettes were modified to compensate for this. The decks around the gun mountings were re-arranged and stiffened to compensate for the additional weight and the magazines were altered in turn.³¹⁹

By May 1967, all three corvettes had reached the end of their lifespan, which had been extended by major overhauls in the late 1950s. A preliminary survey by a marine surveyor suggested that the vessels could last an additional four years provided they were correctly maintained but the military authorities considered the vessels of no naval value or defence potential. The vessels were given additional overhauls at a cost of £15,500 per vessel to enable them to provide an additional two years of fishery protection service.³²⁰

The government had sanctioned the purchase of an anti-submarine corvette and one all-weather fishery protection vessel in December, 1968 but such sanction was no guarantee that the ships would be provided.³²¹ The corvette was expected to cost in the region of £1.4 million and the fishery protection vessel an additional £0.4 million. However, these prices were based on 1966 quotes and would likely have to be revised upwards. The Department of Finance could then choose to withdraw their sanction and bring the matter to an end.

By December 1969, the state saw several distinct options open to them at this point. The first was the purchase of a frigate built at Yarrow in the United Kingdom in 1966 for Ghana. The purchase had fallen through. The vessel had been inspected by officers of the service and her purchase was recommended despite the vessel's large size. This factor

318. Re-armament of corvettes, 1960 (I.M.A., 3/19768).

319. *ibid.*

320. Memorandum on the Naval Service, 1967, (N.A.I., S/615), p.2.

321. Memorandum for government re: vessels for naval service, 1969 (N.A.I., TAOIS 2000/6/216).

would see a corresponding increase in fuel consumption and manning requirements for little gain in its fisheries protection capabilities.³²²

A Mark III Vosper's corvette was on the table as one could be delivered within 18 months of the initial order with a second following within three months. But the newer corvettes were felt to be too small to fulfill the task of patrolling offshore in all weather conditions. The United States was approached several times but could only offer vessels of a similar age to the corvettes.³²³

The construction of a naval vessel to Irish specifications in Britain was rejected on grounds of cost but the government looked favourably on the idea of constructing a fishery protection vessel with little or no naval defence potential. The *NORNEN* class Norwegian fisheries protection vessel was of great interest to the Irish and a delegation was sent to inspect the design in December 1969.³²⁴

Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre

The duties of marine rescue coordination were formally transferred from the Department of Transport and Power to the Department of Defence on April 1, 1960. Previously, all dissemination of distress messages and coordination of search and rescue efforts had been the responsibility of the office of the Inspector of the Coast Life Saving Service. The traditional infrastructure which existed below this office remained in place, with messages being immediately relayed to the life saving representatives in the area concerned, generally the local Coast Life Saving Service Superintendent, Life Boat Station and Coast Life Saving Service Station.³²⁵ A Marine Rescue Coordination Centre was formally established at Haulbowline and operated by the Naval Service on a 24-hour basis. The establishment of this office placed greater pressure on the manpower of the service as three officers were required to man the centre. A shift in the centre largely

322. *ibid.*

323. Memorandum for government re: vessels for naval service, 1969 (N.A.I., TAOIS 2000/6/216).

324. *ibid.*

325. Files relating to marine notice no.2, 1960 (N.A.I., DFA 429/9).

involved contacting various lifeboat stations around the coast and directing their searches. However, matters could escalate without warning and the duty officer could find themselves coordinating the efforts of the Air Corps, Gardai, RNLI, Coast-Watching Service, Red Cross, harbour authorities, merchant shipping, radio stations, Royal Navy and RAF.³²⁶



Fig 16: Naval Service personnel rescuing drifting sailors.

(Image: Collection of Frank Troy)

Due to the increasing shortage of officers and ever-increasing scope of the operations, the centre rapidly outran the resources available to the Naval Service. Responsibility was handed back to the Department of Transport who assigned the duties of the MRCC to Air Traffic Control at Shannon, which created the Shannon Rescue Coordination Centre. This was not ideal in that air traffic controllers were not qualified to coordinate maritime

326. Memorandum on the Naval Service, (N.A.I., S/615), p. 8

search and rescue operations and had some difficulty in adapting to the situations. The importance of assigning specific grids to specific vessels and various methods which would improve the efficiency of the search were initially lost on the non-seafaring civilians who had now inherited the responsibilities involved.³²⁷

Administrative Changes

At the beginning of the decade, the Naval Service was under-strength by three Lieutenant Commanders, nine Lieutenants, one Warrant Officer, five Chief Petty Officers, forty Petty Officers, forty four Leading Seamen and forty six Seamen. This left the service at roughly 60% of its establishment strength with the greatest shortfall in the petty officer, leading seaman and lieutenant brackets. It would only worsen over time.

Since the re-organisation of the Sluagh Muirí, the Naval First Line Reserve had gradually been increasing in strength. The First Line Reserve were naval personnel who had departed the service, but still reported for annual training. They were expected to provide additional crew in event of the corvettes being forced to meet their wartime establishment strength. As the Sluagh Muirí, who had been assigned this task, was no longer required for this purpose, their functions were re-examined in a bid to decide the future of the organisation.

It was decided to devolve responsibility for certain aspects of the seaward defence of Irish ports to the Sluagh Muirí. They were to supply crews for the Examination boats in times of war, provide boarding parties for examination anchorages, given responsibility for shore and mine watching along with port signals.³²⁸ As these duties would have to be conducted on a 24 hour basis, the various detachments were divided into three watches.

In Sept 1963, the anomaly of separate naval regulations regarding disciplinary matters was resolved as the Naval Service was brought under wider regulations for the entire

327. Interview with Capt Patrick O'Donnell (retd) of Carrigaline, County Cork (4 Feb. 2009).

328. Sluagh Muirí organisation, 1960 (I.M.A., 3/17571).

defence forces.³²⁹ This had been partially due to the fact that the regulations predated the Naval Service and that Captain Jerome, former head of the service, had based his service on the South African model.



Fig 17: Naval Service recruits train with signal flags.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

In 1964, the working of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS I) resulted in changes to the long established 3 mile limit. The Irish territorial sea would now extend out to a 12 mile limit extending the area to be secured by the Naval Service

329. Regulations altered (I.M.A., 3/11385).

four fold.³³⁰ The corvettes, which were already suffering from the sporadic nature of their upkeep and their age, were now been called on to conduct fisheries patrols further into the Atlantic at a greater cost to their lifespan.

The period saw the Naval Service conduct training course for civilians. The earliest, in 1964, was a course for boy fishermen on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. This was a temporary measure until the Department could establish its school. The Fisheries school was opened in March 1968 in Co. Donegal.³³¹ The more militaristic example was the Defence of Merchant Ships Course, which began in October 1966 and ran twice weekly. By 1973, more than 125 Irish Merchant Service Officers had completed the course, from Superintendents to Masters to Deck Officers to Engineer-Officers.³³² Just with the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, the Service was seeking to justify a greater share of the military budget by providing services previously outside its remit. But as the Service was still under-funded and under-manned, these were to simply result in an additional strain being placed on an over-stretched organisation.

The severity of the personnel shortfall also impacted on training with subsequent consequences for further recruiting. If the service could not spare the corvettes for tasks unrelated to their day to day duties, the lure of foreign shores could not be used to entice recruits. The position was described by the Chief of Staff in a letter to the Minister of Defence.

‘[...] it was envisaged that the foreign cruises would be carried out in one of our corvettes. There is no possibility of this taking place since we can only put one corvette to sea on account of the personnel position, especially in Engineering and Engine Room ranks.’³³³

Overseas training cruises had been seen as crucial as both an element of cadet training and a means of boosting morale. However, with increased demands on the corvettes,

330. J.J. Kavanagh, 'The NS fishery protection role' in *An Cosantóir*, (Feb. 1986), p.6.

331. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.117.

332. *ibid.*

333. Letter from chief of staff, 1960 (I.M.A., 3/34046).

foreign cruises had been eliminated from the curriculum as no ship could be spared to undertake them. In this case, the decision was not due to the condition of the ships but rather traced to a critical shortage of Engineers and Engine Room Artificers. It was still extremely desirable that Irish officers gain watch-keeping experience in waters outside Ireland and the decision was made to assign cadets to Irish Shipping Ltd. Vessels for their instructional cruises.³³⁴ The 1st Cadet Class of 1960 travelled with the *Irish Elm* from August 22 to October 14, 1960. Although Irish Shipping Ltd. is no longer a going concern, Irish naval cadets still spend time with merchant vessels as part of their training.

Overseas cruises were still undertaken but only under conditions of the greatest necessity. In May and June 1961, the *LE Cliona* visited Antwerp to collect FN rifles for use by the Irish troops in the Congo.³³⁵ The vessels of the service continued in this role when Irish peacekeepers were deployed to Cyprus and the Lebanon. The Naval Service to this day is often used to transport ammunition and supplies for Irish troops in service on UN missions as it allows the service to garner a small measure of the prestige and goodwill which accrues to the Army as a result of their peace keeping duties.

Although, not a training cruise as such, naval personnel were sent overseas for a unusual mission in July 1961. The *Asgard*, which had earned its place in Irish republican mythology when she delivered arms to the Irish volunteers in 1914, was located in the south of England in 1961. She was purchased by the government and a naval crew assigned to sail her into Howth harbour on the 47th anniversary of the original landing. The landing was then re-acted with some of the guns from the original cargo. With the ceremony at an end, the *Asgard* was handed over to the Naval Service for use as a Sluagh Muirí training vessel. She was stored ashore until 1967 when public outcry pressed for the vessel to be put to better use. By 1967, she was declared a national monument and put into the care of the Office of Public Works. She could be seen for years afterwards in

334. Training cruises, 1960 (I.M.A., 34046).

335. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.117.

Irish ports in her new role as a sail training vessel for teenagers, conducting short cruises around the Irish coast and to the continent.³³⁶

Tuskar Rock Disaster

The problems faced by the Naval Service towards the end of the decade were made clear during the Tuskar air disaster. Aer Lingus Flight 712, the *St Phelim*, crashed in the sea near Tuskar Rock on the 28 March 1968 with the loss of all 61 people aboard. None of the Naval Service's ships were available to aid in the recovery of bodies. The only active ship, *LE Macha*, was in Killybegs, the furthest port from the area of the crash. *LE Cliona* was in Haulbowline without her crew and *LE Maev* was undergoing repairs and it took several hours to assemble the crew. The *Macha* made for the area as quickly as possible and took over as search controller. A combined Anglo-Irish force, called Task Force Rosslare, began recovering wreckage from the area. Captain McKenna was detailed as Search and Recovery Coordinator and commanded an operation which drew on the resources of the RAF and Air Corps. Lifeboats from Arklow, Rosslare and Kilmore assisted in the search along with local fishing boats.³³⁷ The search for the wreck went on seven days before the Navy's hydrographer evaluated the possible drift of the wreck through tidal experiments. The trawler *Glendalough* brought aircraft wreckage aboard at midday on 5 June. The wreck had been located 1.72 miles SE of Tuskar Rock and recovery operations continued until the 22 August with Royal Navy assistance. The Naval Service continued the operation without their help until 4 October. In total, 56% of the wreck was recovered.³³⁸

The Long Decline

The refits had extended the lifespan of the corvettes as intended, the shortage of crews and various mechanical difficulties had forced them to remain in port for longer periods of time, but by the end of the decade the corvettes were at the end of their lifespan and further repairs were considered economically unviable. *LE Macha* was decommissioned in December 1968 and *LE Cliona* followed in July 1969. This left the navy with one very

336. *ibid.*

337. *Irish Times*, 30 Mar.. 1968.

elderly ship attempting to secure all Irish territorial waters. To try and somehow counter the shortfall in protection vessels, the state's research vessel, *Cú Feasa*, was drafted as a patrol vessel and a single naval officer, was issued a pistol and placed aboard to provide it with modicum of authority.³³⁹

The replacement of the corvettes had been the subject of a great deal of speculation throughout the 1960s. Time and again, the idea of deploying smaller, faster craft at bases supported by a larger maritime air patrol around the coast was raised and rejected.³⁴⁰ In theory, the ability to respond quickly to any incursions was tempting to a service of such limited numbers. But Irish coastal weather would prevent any such efficiency if the force was created. Poachers could easily operate in weather which would ground the maritime air patrol and confine the patrol launches to base. The Naval Service continued to regard sea-keeping ability, rather than firepower or speed as the single most important element in any fisheries protection force.

The seaward defence boats which the service had attempted to procure through the 1950s continued to elude them. An attempt to begin construction in 1960 was brought to a halt by the anger of Irish ship-builders who were disgusted to see the contract for conversion go to British shipyards. The logic behind the decision was simple, the boats were to be fitted with equipment which the Admiralty wished to remain secret and installation could only be undertaken at approved shipyards in England. The Department of Finance withdrew its sanction and began delaying all decisions on the matter by referring them to the Minister for Finance, causing great frustration on the part of the Naval Service.³⁴¹ It is unclear when the decision was made to end efforts to develop a seaward defence force but it can be assumed that it was simply overshadowed by the increasing need to maintain a fisheries protection force.

338. Thomas McKenna, 'Thank god we're surrounded by water' in *An Cosantóir*, (Apr. 1973), p.119.

339. Tom McGinty, *The Irish navy* (Tralee, 1995), p.162.

340. *Irish Times*, 10 Mar.. 1965.

341. Decision on seaward defence boats, 1960 (I.M.A., 3/17571).

In June 1966, the Naval Service was deployed to prevent disorder at sea off the south east coast. The newly imposed twelve mile limit did allow fishing rights, for a decade, up to a limit of six miles from the Irish coast to those nations who had habitually fished the area prior to the change in limits. In what can be seen as a precursor to similar problems in the 1970s, there were clashes between fishing boats operating from the Republic and those operating from Northern Ireland in the waters of Dunmore East. The northern fishermen felt they were within the law while the southern fishermen claimed that the volume of fishing by northern vessels in Irish territorial waters had increased significantly after the imposition of the limits. Attacks on Northern Irish ships berthed in Dunmore were reported along with harassment at sea in which fishing boats from the Republic would attempt to foul the lines of their northern brethren. This involved the near-collision of the vessels involved. In light of the risk to life posed by these tactics, the Naval Service was deployed to the area to maintain order.³⁴²

The situation became sufficiently serious to justify the manning and dispatch of the LE Cliona to operate alongside the LE Maeve from 29 April, 1966. The presence of a second patrol vessel appeared to deter further unrest by demonstrating the government's willingness to prevent such actions and the matter was taken to the High Courts for resolution. Assembling a full complement for a second corvette had drained the manpower of the service entirely and the additional patrol was brought to an end as quickly as possible to allow the crew to return to their shore functions.³⁴³

Conclusion

The Naval Service of the 1960s was a service in continual decline. Poor morale and a continual bleeding of manpower combined with outdated and unreliable vessels resulted in the corvettes spending increasing amounts of time tied up in the dockyard. The experience was frustrating for crews and commanders alike as in many cases; they were literally watching their ships fall to pieces around them. The naval budget was cut to the bare minimum that would allow occasional repairs. An unfortunately timed bid for the

342. *Irish Times*, 26 Apr. 1966.

343. *ibid*, 29 Apr. 1966.

Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre saw the Naval Service gain new responsibilities only to lose them within a short period of time.

It is possible that the various examples of cooperation with other government bodies was an attempt to justify greater funding for a declining service by seizing more responsibility in the hopes of ensuring support within official circles. This attempt to develop some level of influence in those bodies which could influence procurement and policy decisions was overdue. This did run counter to the long-running military maxim which warned against the perils of volunteering. In the defence forces as in many areas overseen by the Department of Finance, increased responsibilities did not guarantee increased funding.

Any increased funding for the Defence Forces was most likely to go to the Army. The Army was facing two challenges, both of which would be of greater concern than seaward defence to an Irish government. The IRA was conducting a cross-border campaign and the Irish government remained quite sensitive to any potential increase in subversion within the state. The Army had also begun to participate in UN peacekeeping missions, which were seen as a crucial element of the Irish government's new UN-based international profile, which was intended to expand Irish foreign policy beyond the Anglo-Irish sphere.

The creation of a twelve mile territorial sea simply added to their woes as the Navy's patrol area was massively increased just as they began to lose patrol craft. The expansion would have drawn the government attention to maritime affairs as the value of the resources off the Irish coast became clear. The government while in agreement as to the importance of replacing the corvettes could not find any suitable candidates at a price they could pay. Naval Service inspections of vessels overseas, such as the Ghanian frigate, generally recommended purchase. The officers might have been aware of the flaws of the proposed vessels, in the case of the frigate it had not been actively maintained since 1968 and all equipment could not be guaranteed to be in working order, but felt that any ship was better than no ships. Despite their willingness to put to sea in

whatever the budget would allow, the service faced the next decade with its corvettes waiting to be scrapped and no replacements finalised as yet.

Chapter 7

EEC Accession and the Revival of the Service (1970-1977)

The 1970s would see the Irish Naval Service revive from the brink of extinction to develop the largest fleet which the organisation had mustered to date. The various half-hearted attempts to replace the corvettes during the late 1960s took on a greater urgency once it became clear that the corvettes were most definitely unserviceable. The speed with which the fortunes of the service were revived would be commendable had those responsible not themselves been the cause of such haste.

As it became clear that the British could not produce vessels suited to the needs of the Irish at a price which the Irish treasury could bear, the idea of building patrol craft domestically to the specifications desired took root. Once proven feasible, it would be difficult for any group within the government to oppose a project which would provide the ships required by the Naval Service at a relatively low cost, with employment being provided within the state and with the ship being exactly what was desired rather than the nearest equivalent that the British could provide.

The new-found motivation to strength the service can be traced to two influences, the demands of EEC accession and the need for a greatly enlarged fisheries protection force. The adoption of a twelve mile fishing limit had strained the resources of the Naval Service and it was quite obvious that the proposed 200 mile European common fisheries area was beyond the aging veteran of the Second World War which made up the fleet. The problem was one of funding; the state did not intend to spend more on patrolling the territorial waters assigned to it than the monetary benefit which accrued from drawing on the resources therein.

Darkest Hour

There can be no doubt that the year 1970 represented the lowest point in the Naval Service's history. There was one vessel available for duty and the first of the home-built patrol vessels wasn't due to enter service for several years. Even during the inter-war period, there had always been a fishery protection vessel operating in Ireland but when the LE *Maev* broke down in early 1970, Irish territorial waters were completely unprotected for several weeks.³⁴⁴ Following her decommissioning in January 1971 and prior to the commissioning of the *Grainne*, the naval services had no ships whatsoever. Lt Peadar McElhinney was issued a pistol and ordered to report to the *Cu Feasa*, the state's fishery research vessel and now temporarily the state's only fishery protection vessel. A similar situation had arisen in the late-1960s as the corvettes began to degrade with a resulting deterioration in morale.³⁴⁵ On this occasion, this was ameliorated by the Government's formal commitment to maintaining the service and the promise of custom-built offshore patrol craft.

Coniston Minesweepers

Some manner of stopgap measure was now critical. Action was taken quickly and three minesweepers were sourced from the Admiralty. Naval Service inspection parties departed for Gibraltar and Hythe, where they declared the vessels suitable. This followed a period in which all vessels suggested by the British had proven overly expensive.³⁴⁶ The state sanctioned the purchase of three Coniston class minesweepers.

344. *Irish Times*, 18 Feb. 1970.

345. *ibid*, 12 Jan. 1970

346. Memorandum on procurement of all weather fisheries vessels, 1970 (N.A.I., TAOIS, 2001/6/107).



Fig 18: Coniston minesweepers alongside LE *Emer*.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The 'Tons had been designed by the Royal Navy to operate in waters in which the ocean-going Algerine minesweepers were ineffective. Coincidentally, they were built by JI Thornycroft Ltd, the company which had supplied the motor boats used by the Marine Service during the Emergency. They displaced 360 tons under normal conditions and 425 when fully loaded. At 140 feet in length, they were 50 feet shorter than the corvettes they were to replace and with a top speed of 15 knots. Their hull was double mahogany and aluminium alloy and other materials were used to ensure the lowest possible magnetic attraction.³⁴⁷ These ships were widely purchased as dual-use minesweepers/patrol boats by several navies and they were considered well-suited to Irish needs. Their sea-keeping capabilities were good, they were relatively economical and quite importantly, they were available immediately. On the 12 February 1971, the *LE Grainne*, was commissioned.

347. *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1972-73* (London, 1972), p.172.

The *LE Fola* and *LE Banba* were brought to Cobh from their previous home in Gibraltar and arrived on the 29 March 1971. These vessels had respectively been the *HMS Oulston*, *Blaxton* and *Alverton*.³⁴⁸ The names had been chosen in 1946 for the planned fourth, fifth and sixth corvettes of the service but remain unused until twenty five years on.³⁴⁹ So the Navy's position was again secure. But these ships were coastal patrol vessels and there was still a need for off-shore patrol vessels.

The Construction of the *LE Deirdre*

The naval authorities had always been in favour of developing some form of indigenous shipbuilding capability. Their experiences during the Emergency had highlighted the risks of relying on external sources of supply. Another factor prompting such action was the difficulty of acquiring vessels suited to Irish needs at a reasonable price. The *LE Deirdre* was intended as a solution to these problems. The government, motivated by a rare sense of urgency expedited the sanctioning process and the contract for the *LE Deirdre* was signed in February 1971, her keel laid at Verolme Shipyard in August of that year and she was launched in December.³⁵⁰ Following sea-trials, *LE Deirdre* was formally handed over in May 1972. Captain McKenna, who had served with the Naval Service since their inception, was to witness the deployment of the state's first wholly new patrol vessel before his retirement on 3 June 1973 and subsequent replacement by Captain Peter Kavanagh.³⁵¹ As a veteran of the Marine Service, he had served on every type of vessel the state had put to sea and it was fitting that he should witness the beginning of the Naval Service's move into fulfilling its offshore constabulary role.

Deirdre was the first Irish-built ship the Naval Service had acquired and she had been designed specifically for the role required. She was not a warship design but a variation on a trawler-like design, specifically the Norwegian *NORNEN* Class Patrol Vessel.³⁵² She did not have the watertight compartments that a warship needs to survive damage, her

348. *ibid.*

349. Naval Service vessels nomenclature (N.A.I., TAOIS, 2001/6/103).

350. Jane's Fighting Ships, 1972-73, (London, 1972) p.172.

351. *Irish Times*, 26 May 1973.

speed wasn't quite equal to that of the contemporary warship and her armament was light. But such was the intent. She was designed as a cost-effective fishery protection vessel. Her commissioning brought the number of patrol vessels in service to four, the highest achieved by the Naval Service to that point.

She also lacked certain capabilities which various groups within the Republic had been demanding since the 1940s. The Deirdre was not equipped with fire fighting equipment beyond that required for its own safety. It lacked salvage equipment, hydrographic equipment and could not be used as a platform for marine biology. Again, although these needs had been acknowledged by the government on several occasions, the core function of fisheries protection outweighed all other concerns.³⁵³



Fig 19: Diver airlifted aboard LE Deirdre during exercise.

352. Frank Troy, 'Engineering in the Naval Service' in *Journal of the Institution of Engineers of Ireland*, (May 1986), p.32.

353 . *Irish Times*, 29 Dec. 1971.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

In 1975, the contract was signed for a second vessel of a revised design, known as the P21 class. In December 1975, it was agreed to construct a new *Deirdre* class vessel. Now the first ship was a prototype of sorts and the new ship was a hardier and more heavily armed version of the original. The designers focused on four main improvements. Firstly, a lower profile and foredeck to reduce the retention of water in heavy seas as the *Deirdre* had a tendency to “dig into” larger waves. Secondly, improvements in stability and water tightness were sought and implemented. Thirdly, a reduction in propeller cavitation was achieved. Finally noise levels throughout the ship were reduced.³⁵⁴ This marked an effort to improve the lot of the crew, whose comfort had not been a priority in previous purchasing decisions. The haste with which the *Deirdre* was constructed was not repeated, the keel of the new ship, the *LE Emer*, was laid down at the start of 1977. The remaining two *Deirdre* class vessels followed in short order. The success of this program was to lay the foundation for the design and production of the *Eithne* class helicopter patrol vessel in the mid-1980s.³⁵⁵

The Troubles

At this time in the early 70s, the Troubles in the North were in full swing and the Provisional IRA was importing arms from Libya. This led to another notable operation, the capture of the *MV Claudia*. During March 1973, the *Claudia* travelled from Cyprus to Tunis, picking up arms while passing the Libyan coast. She then began the journey to Ireland. It was intended to transfer the arms to a fishing boat near Helvick Point. On March 24, the *LE Fola* left Haulbowline and the following day, the *LE Deirdre* and *LE Grainne* also departed. When the *Claudia* arrived at the rendezvous, she was met by the three vessels. The *Claudia* surrendered without incident but the fishing launch attempted to flee and only stopped after warning shots were fired. Over 5 tons of arms and explosives were captured and the operation certainly boosted the profile of the service both internally and on the world stage. It was noted by the *Irish Times* that it took three-

354. Frank Troy, 'Engineering in the Naval Service' in *Journal of the Institution of Engineers of Ireland*, (May 1986), p.32.

quarters of the navy to conduct this interdiction. Strangely, although the IRA men involved were to stand trial for the importation of arms, the captain and crew of the *Claudia* were sent on their way with little more than a warning. Commander Byrne is heard to shout from the quay as the ship is released from custody. 'We don't want to see you back again.'³⁵⁶

The Royal Navy undertook repeated operations to prevent arms transfers from North to South. Carlingford Lough was one hot spot. The lough was divided between Irish and British waters, however, British patrols were prone to wandering into Irish territorial waters to conduct searches. In response, Irish naval service vessels often moored in the lough to demonstrate the Republic's determination to prevent arms smuggling and to control its waters. Other areas of concern included fishing grounds off Louth, Down and the Isle of Man where fishing boats from both jurisdictions mingled and arms could be transferred covertly. However, the situation had to be handled with care to avoid Royal Navy and Irish Naval Service operations running afoul of one another.³⁵⁷ Although arms were very rarely seized in any of these examples, the deterrent effect should be noted.

Although cooperation would seem logical, there was still a body within the Republic opposed to any agreement with the British. The care which the post-war governments had taken to mask their links with the Admiralty was justified in light of the results of the 1971 coastal survey. The government had chartered Royal Navy vessels and personnel to assist in the effort. While surveying Baltimore Bay, local IRA members succeeded in bypassing the Naval Service protective guard and blew up the Royal Navy's survey launch at its berth in Baltimore.³⁵⁸

Economic Exclusion Zone

Ireland joined the EEC in 1973. This event, more so than any other, would have a tremendous impact on the Naval Service. From the moment of entry, the idea of a 200

355. *Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 1983.

356. *ibid*, 30 Mar.. 1973.

357. Royal Navy operations GRENADA/INTERKNIT, 1974 (B.N.A., DEFE 24/879).

358. *Irish Times*, 21 Apr. 1971.

mile economic exclusion zone was mooted, not as a result of EEC initiatives but rather as such zones were expected to form part of the recommendations of the United Nations Law of the Sea conference.³⁵⁹ This would reinforce the need for offshore patrol craft whose sea-keeping properties would allow them to patrol deep into the North Atlantic. The Irish unilaterally claimed a 200 mile fishing zone at the beginning of 1972 in light of the stalemate on the matter at the previous year's European fisheries conference.³⁶⁰ However, enforcement was nigh-on impossible with the ships at hand. The minesweepers could not operate that far into the Atlantic and the *Deirdre* could not provide adequate coverage alone. In 1976, the 200 mile exclusive economic zone was agreed at an EEC fisheries conference. This replaced the previous twelve mile limit. It had been hoped to adopt a fifty mile exclusive fishing area strictly for Irish fishermen but this proposal was rejected by the EEC and eventually dropped.³⁶¹ As expected, this expanded the operating area of the Irish Naval Service enormously. In light of the fact that the Irish were being called on to protect a large proportion of European waters, the EEC was willing to partly fund an expansion program for the Naval Service. The Irish government sought a grant of 75 per cent of the cost of expansion however, the EEC remained firm on 50 per cent.³⁶²

The Seventies bore witness to a marked rise in Eastern European and Soviet fishing vessels off the Irish coast. These craft often operated on the very edge of the twelve mile limit. The Service's attempts to police these incursions were complicated by the presence of Soviet-flagged craft. The Cold War was at its height and the Soviet Union was quick to take offense at any perceived slight against its craft. The Irish Sea was also a transit area for British submarines and Soviet intelligence gathering craft were undoubtedly masked by the fishing fleets.

359. *ibid*, 25 Mar.. 1976.

360. *ibid*, 31 Dec. 1971.

361. *ibid*, 23 Feb. 1978.

362. *ibid*, 18 Oct. 1977.



Fig 20: *LE Deirdre* on patrol.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The problem was one of funding. The profits of the Irish fisheries did not approach the costs of providing a fisheries protection service which could adequately monitor all 1,700 square miles of the economic exclusion zone. Maritime air patrols were of limited use as the courts were hesitant to accept fixes provided by aircraft.³⁶³

The *LE Fola* was embroiled in an incident involving a Soviet intelligence collector, the *Repiter* in 1975. On January 7, the *Fola* came across a vessel towing a line within the twelve mile limit. Her signals were not acknowledged and fire was directed across the target's bows. It soon became apparent that this was no fishing vessels and the *Fola* broke off its pursuit and simply observed the *Repiter* as she exited Irish waters. The Soviet Union was to lodge a formal complaint over the incident with the Irish ambassador in Moscow, alleging that an Irish naval vessel had fired on a Soviet hydrographic vessel in

363. *ibid*, 1 Oct. 1976.

international waters. The Irish were seemingly to ignore the demand that the perpetrators be disciplined.³⁶⁴

The *LE Grainne* in September 1976 affected the boarding and arrest of its largest prize to date, the *Belmoroye*.³⁶⁵ This operation is notable as necessitating the largest boarding party assembled by the naval service to date and resulting in the longest fisheries-related court case in Irish history. The *Belmoroye* was observed on the 29 September, fishing just within the twelve mile limit. The *Grainne*, under Lt Commander Kavanagh signaled that she was to stop and receive a boarding party. All signals were ignored and the decision was taken to fire warning shots across her bows. The Soviet vessel exited Irish territorial waters, dropped anchor and refused to accompany the arresting vessel to the nearest port. A deadlock ensued as neither side would compromise.

Overnight, a detachment of Army soldiers had been assembled onshore to reinforce the boarding party and they boarded the *LE Banba* at Dunmore East. However, once the group had arrived on the scene, the soldiers had been incapacitated by the high seas and could take no part in the operation. A contingent of ratings were armed and sent aboard the *Belmoyore*. The Soviets claimed that they were suffering from engine defects and that the anchor could not be raised. Frank Troy, the Engineer Officer on the scene suspected that they were simply manufacturing the fault but as all labels and signs were in Cyrillic could not effect repairs. The boarding party delivered their ultimatum, if the fault could not be resolved by 18.30; they would slip the hawser and bring the vessel in. Lieutenant Troy was on the verge of carrying out the operation when the Soviet captain relented and the anchor was raised. The *Belmoyore* arrived in Cork on October 1 and its gear and catch were confiscated.³⁶⁶

In response to increasing pressure from the fishing lobby, who opposed the presence of foreign trawlers and factory ships in Irish territorial waters, in particular, the Irish Sea. The Irish again unilaterally imposed restrictions on the size of trawlers permitted to

364. Tom McGinty, *The Irish navy* (Tralee, 1995), p.177.

365. Interview with Capt. Frank Troy (retd.) of Douglas, County Cork (12 Feb. 2009).

operate in their waters.³⁶⁷ This outraged Dutch and French fishermen who prepared to violate the restrictions resulting in the deployment of the Naval Service to prevent any mass influx of trawlers. Once the Royal Netherlands Navy made it clear that they would not intervene to protect Dutch fishing vessels in Irish waters, the protests died down and regular fisheries protection duties were resumed.³⁶⁸ The hardening of Irish attitudes towards the defence of their waters did ensure that the naval building program laid out in the mid-1970s would continue and the years 1978-1980 were to see three additional offshore patrol vessels deployed. Fines and penalties for illegal fishing were increased under the auspices of the newly appointed Minister for Fisheries.³⁶⁹ The title is worth noting as the fisheries had previously fallen under the remit of the Minister of Lands, a situation rich in irony but also a reflection of the lesser importance with which this section of the Irish economy had been regarded prior to the 1970s.

Temporary Patrol Vessels

Although three more P21 vessels were due to be completed by 1980, more ships were required to patrol Irish territorial waters until that time. Two were sourced for the use of the service in this period. In 1976, *LE Setanta* was acquired. She was not a patrol craft but the long-awaited and much discussed replacement for the *Shark*. After a lapse of almost two decades, the service once again commanded a stores ship. This craft would also be used as a training craft and allow the true patrol craft to focus on their core tasking, fisheries protection. In 1977, *LE Ferdia*, formerly the *MV Helen Basse*, was leased from her Danish owners to provide an additional patrol vessel while construction was underway. She proved thoroughly unreliable and the contract was not renewed once the initial twelve months had expired. As temporary expedients, they did not prove as capable as the Coniston minesweepers which were retained well into the 1980s but they did allow the offshore patrol vessels to focus on operations further out in the Irish exclusive economic zone. Ironically, the *Ferdia* was singled out by the Irish Fishermen's Organisation as the most effective in the fleet. However, it was probably hoped that by

366. *Irish Times*, 15 Oct. 1976.

367. *ibid*, 11 Apr. 1977.

368. *ibid*, 13 Apr. 1977.

369. *ibid*, 2 Dec. 1977.

encouraging the Naval Service to purchase trawlers rather than naval vessels, the number of patrol vessels in Irish waters would be increased as roughly twelve trawlers could be purchased for the three million pounds it would cost to build the *Emer*.³⁷⁰ This does suggest that to Irish fishermen, the presence of an INS vessel was of greater importance than its ability to directly prevent illegal fishing. This preference for massive deterrence at the expense of enforcement capabilities is interesting although its sustainability could be questioned. The *Muirchu*'s experience during the inter-war period suggests that poachers would eventually begin to test the actual capability of the INS to catch and arrest their fishing boats.

Conclusion

By 1977, the Irish Naval Service was poised for massive expansion. Over the next three years, an additional three *Deirdre*-class offshore patrol vessels would be commissioned. Along with the *LE Setanta*, this brought the total fleet strength to eight vessels. Seven years had seen a complete sea-change in their fortunes. With the increase in funding and an increase in responsibility, the service's future was secure. The Irish government might be tempted to reduce its expenditure on naval assets when it would only impact on domestic matters but it would not risk renegeing on its agreements with the European Economic Community.

The establishment of an indigenous ship-building capability appeared to eliminate one of the core weaknesses of Irish seapower, their complete reliance on external sources of supply. Indeed, the shipyard went on to launch a P30 class helicopter patrol vessel, the *LE Eithne*, which still acts as flagship of the fleet. But Verolme Shipyard proved unprofitable, despite heavy government subsidies, the combination of industrial unrest and low global demand for new ships saw its eventual collapse. With its closure, the state's ability to produce custom-designed vessels internally evaporated.³⁷¹ But the dockyard's brief spate of construction saw the heart of the fleet which would serve the state for almost three decades assembled, tested and launched.

370. *ibid*, 2 Sep. 1977.

371. *ibid*, 28 Sep. 1984.

The vast increase in the extent and type of territorial waters claimed by the state would shape its future development. Dedicated offshore patrol vessels were now a necessity as naval service craft would be ranging further afield into waters which would prove far more challenging to the men and ships of the services. The extinction of the naval service was now a political and diplomatic impossibility. The introduction of quotas and the enormous increase in foreign fishing vessels in and around Irish waters would also serve to strengthen domestic demands for an effective and suitably equipped fisheries protection service.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This thesis set out to document the history of the naval forces of the Irish state and to identify any commonalities which have influenced its development. It is clear that five factors can be seen impacting the development of the Irish state's naval forces throughout the period of this thesis. Each of the various naval forces has faced the same problems,

time and again. In brief, they include the financial constraints on naval spending, shortages of trained manpower, difficulties of supply, army domination of defence policy and apathy towards naval affairs amongst successive governments.

The most obvious factor has always been financial constraints. The Irish government was never in a position to develop their naval forces to a desirable level. The cost of new vessels continued to escalate throughout the period as the need for more effective naval vessels grew. This is not a problem solely for the Irish; the increasing cost of all military platforms has impacted on naval forces worldwide. The cost of a navy capable of defending the state was always beyond the resources of the state. This is not limited to the Irish, it is the strategic dilemma faced by all small states. They must decide where to strike the balance between a force which poses a credible threat but is beyond their abilities to maintain and the absence of any form of naval defence, which would ease the demands on their exchequer at the cost of their ability to defend their sovereignty at sea.

The expansion of Irish territorial waters out to the 200 mile limit in 1976 and the discussions which preceded that expansion resulted in a drive for a cost-effective fishery protection force. There were benefits to the territorial expansion in that EEC funds were made available to expand the Naval Service to the point where it could effectively police Irish waters. This followed from an increased public demand for a visible fisheries protection service which had resulted from Irish entry into the EEC and thus, the increased presence of foreign trawlers in Irish waters. The vast majority of articles from the period discussing the service detail the importance of fisheries protection, and the actions taken suggest an increased political will to demand vessels capable of doing so. Once the political will existed, the Department of Finance would make the funds available.

But sacrifices have still been made in the interests of greater economies. Even when the political will exists and funding can be made available, the priority is to provide the maximum level of fisheries protection at the minimum of cost, when savings must be made the wartime tasks of the naval services are generally the first item to be

disregarded. Irish naval vessels are woefully under-equipped to protect Irish territorial waters and this is a result of the low priority given to the war-fighting capabilities of the navy. This directly impacts their effectiveness as a naval force which is intended to defend Irish territorial waters, although this has proven less of a concern in the post-Emergency period and is currently a non-factor in a post-Soviet world. No threat or potential mission exists in the Irish security environment which might justify the high costs of maintaining naval vessels capable of modern naval combat.

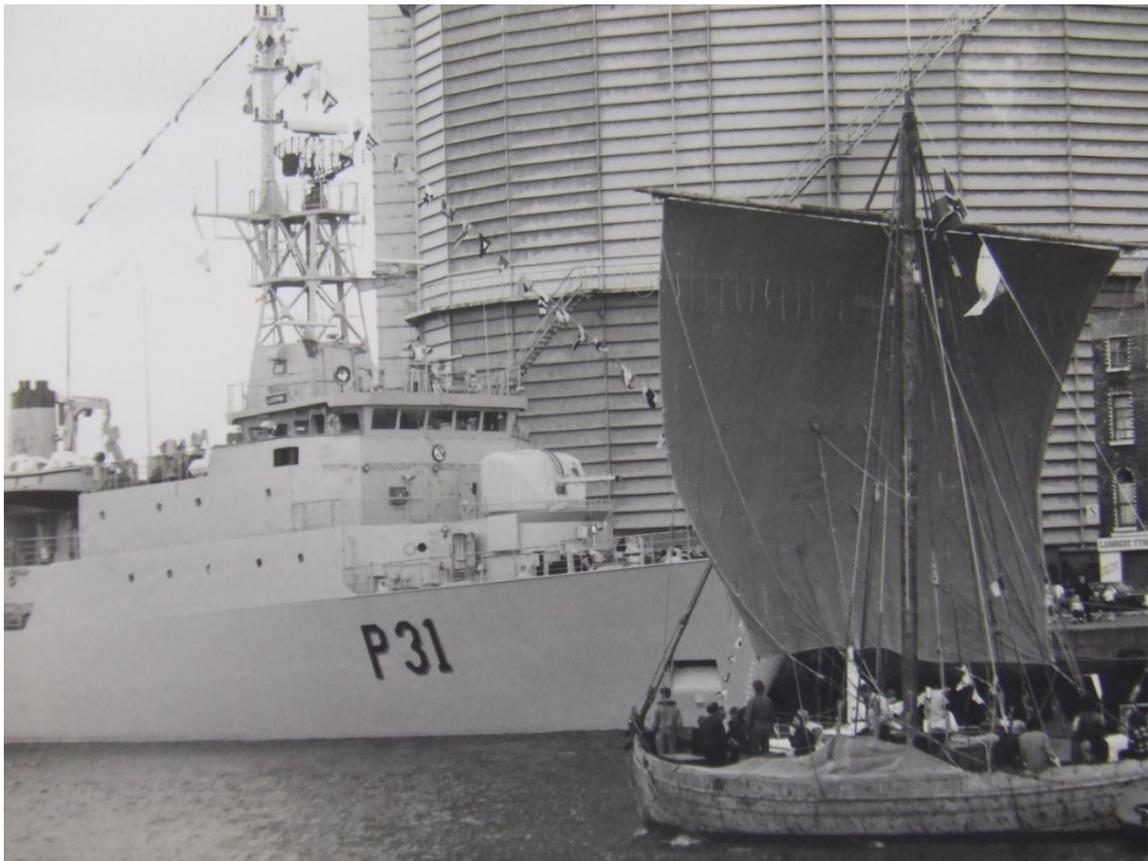


Fig 21: Viking longboat encounters *LE Eithne* in Dublin harbour.

(Image: Irish Military Archives)

The service has traditionally suffered from chronic under-manning. This is not solely attributable to factors unique to Ireland; many western nations have experienced similar problems. As well-paid work on land becomes more accessible, fewer volunteers can be found who will undertake long stretches at sea, away from their families and friends. In times of economic hardships, more recruits can be found but in such times the funds to

hire them are no longer available. In particular, technical personnel were often in short supply. Once trained, these personnel could earn a better income in private life and retention became quite difficult. Recruiting candidates of suitable quality to be trained as technical personnel was also troublesome with several recruiting campaigns failing to provide such men. The service has resorted to bringing expertise in from external sources. This included retired Royal Navy personnel or marine engineers from Irish Shipping Ltd.

During the Civil War, the use of civilian crews was the initial solution as the deployment and use of the vessels took priority over the more prosaic details of naval administration. Those men chosen for the Coastal and Marine Service were normally ex-merchant seaman with proven republican credentials rather than demobilised seamen who had served under the Crown in the First World War. The Emergency period was a more drastic case, with civilian crews being imported wholesale as their vessels were commissioned and their existing officers granted formal commissions despite their lack of any relevant experience. Although young officers and seamen of some potential were recruited, they entered into a service which did not operate along standard military lines and thus did not develop as intended.

The foundation of the Naval Service was intended to allow the military authorities to salvage those men they wished to retain while returning the others to their civilian lives. However, the shortfall in officer strength led to several being retained beyond the length of time desired. The presence of the Royal Navy, which accepts Irish citizens into its ranks, also damaged recruitment into the Naval Service by drawing on Ireland's limited pool of potential officers and seamen. In particular, during the 1960s when the service was in a state of decline, it could be held that the prospect of better pay and greater adventure in British service was adversely influencing Naval Service recruitment. It can be difficult to difficult to prove a negative, but it is a factor worthy of consideration.

Naval procurement was generally haphazard and situational. Generally, it was only once the need could no longer be ignored, the supplies would be provided. And even then,

what was supplied was not always what was desired. The British would on occasion, prove unhelpful, although they normally went to great lengths to aid the Irish Naval Service where possible. The Department of Finance appeared to take some pleasure in delaying military expenditure. Sanction would be withdrawn without warning and rows over small matters would often erupt, delaying even simple matters like the supply of uniforms to new recruits.

The Admiralty had assisted the Irish during the Civil War with advice on the purchasing of patrol boats. Although the Admiralty was always willing to provide assistance and more importantly advice, they were not willing to subsidise an Irish navy in any way. Their advice was also less aimed at ensuring Irish neutrality could be defended but rather as a means of pushing the Irish towards forces which could assist the Royal Navy in times of war.

During the Emergency, they supplied only equipment for which they had no use, which left the Marine Service with barely functional motor torpedo boats and coastal defences, in the form of minefields and gun positions, which are better commended for the ingenuity of their creation than their potential to prevent invasion. The years immediately after the war are exceptional in the scope of the weapons, equipment and ships on offer to the Irish which contrasts all the more with the dramatic reduction that came about in the 1950s as the British diverted their products to full NATO members rather than neutral Ireland.

Ireland was similar to other ex-dominions in that naval affairs could be ignored to a degree while Britannia ruled the waves. However, it is unique in that its attitude did not alter over time as British naval power began to wane. It is possible that, initially, the guerrilla background of the Free State's initial leadership influenced their opinion on military matters. As TDs which had served during the War of Independence and Civil War grew rarer from the 1930s onwards, it could be argued that the Dáil's willingness, as a group, to comment on military matters was reduced. The Defence Conference established during the Emergency certainly featured a high proportion of prolific

commentators on defence policy, including Deputy Mulcahy, former head of the National Army during the Civil War.³⁷² In the succeeding years, inertia, a tendency to favour a strong army and a fascination with the, then, seemingly revolutionary qualities of air power combined with the overwhelming presence of the Royal Navy caused the naval question to fall from notice.

The Emergency brought matters to a head and the shock carried over into the late 40s when naval expansion was a priority and a great deal of attention was paid to the importance of seaward defence. However, this did not endure into the 50s and the attitude of the government reverted to the pre-war norm of official indifference. This came to a head in the 1960s where only last minute intervention prevented the state being left utterly without patrol craft.

It is only after EEC accession, that the government has focused its attention on the creation of a reasonably sized fisheries protection force. It might also be said that it is only after EEC accession that the government has felt any public pressure to maintain a reasonably sized fisheries protection force. This, more than any change in their attitude, has seen the Naval Service continue to grow over the past thirty years.

The failure of the Naval Service to impose a level of influence worthy of their role, as the most active branch of the Defence, in steering Irish defence policy has worked to their disadvantage. In Irish defence planning, the dominant force was the Army, as it had the advantage of greater size and greater access to the decision-making process. Defence expenditure was weighted towards the army, with its needs taking priority over the two smaller services. The focus on land power is not unexpected as the army has always dominated defence planning circles and thus could effectively ensure that all recommendation to the government would continue to maintain the status quo. Turkey cannot be expected to vote for Christmas. The utility of the Army in bolstering Irish prestige through peacekeeping operations outweighs that of the Naval Service's overseas visits and endless patrolling of the EEZ.

372. First meeting of the Defence Conference (U.C.D.A., Aiken Papers, P04/3534).

It could be said that the army has sought to ensure that the Naval Service does not develop along overly independent lines and constantly sought to keep it firmly linked to the land establishment through joint training of cadets and ensigns throughout the period.

The history of the various Irish naval forces shows us a state, government and people which took little interest in maritime affairs and had little interest in altering the status quo unless forced to do so by external pressures. The efforts of the various naval services to protect Irish sovereignty remain largely unknown and unrecognised. The impact on the services on such well-researched areas as the Civil War and Anglo-Irish relations post-independence are equally ill-served in the histories of the time.

Although on occasion, these factors were subverted by events beyond the control of the state, they do, as previously stated, provide a base line for the attitude of the Irish government towards naval affairs. This attitude certainly stems from the general population's ignorance of maritime affairs and appears to prove the Mahanian concept of seapower as being partially dependent on the character of the people. The Naval Service has seen an unprecedented level of development since 1977 with eight ships currently serving in the fleet. However, the *LE Emer*, *Aoife* and *Aisling* are now between twenty-nine and thirty-one years old and replacements are required. Without the prospect of EU funding, it is possible that the fleet may see a reduction in its strength for the first time since the 1970s. The increase in suitable manpower has been alleviated to a degree by the increased technical knowledge and education of the Irish population. This is countered by the increased opportunities available to that same population ashore. Although, the recession makes more such candidates available, it also limits the budget with which to recruit them. The Irish are also now reliant on external sources of supply for purchases of new vessels. Although, this has resulted in the acquisition of true naval vessels as in the case of the *Peacock* and *Roisín* class patrol vessels, it does increase the costs of expansion. However as these vessels can be designed to the specifications of the service, it does appear that the pre-1970 problem of an over-reliance on second-hand British vessels of varying suitability has been overcome. Financial constraints which were

relaxed during the boom years of the late 1990s and early 2000s will grow more stringent in light of the ongoing recession. The timing is unfortunate for the service, in that it coincides with the need to refresh the Naval Service's inventory of patrol vessels. Funds for patrol vessels which made have been made available a decade previously are now likely to be devoted to bolstering the ailing Irish economy.

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