

## Origins of 2 Field Artillery Regiment: 1943 – 1948 Comdt W. Donnelly

*This is a transcript of a history of 2 Field Artillery Regiment, compiled by Lt Col W.G. Donnelly, Commanding Officer of the Regiment from 1950 – 1957. Its importance lies in the chronology of events and the inclusion of the names of the various officers associated with the institution of the unit. It is not meant to be either a social or operational history and its inclusion here is warranted in order that the information might not be lost. Many others have added to this history over years and no doubt, in the fullness of time, the complete and definitive history of the unit may be chronicled.*

The II F. A. Regiment was formed in 1943. In order to appreciate the events leading up to its formation, it has been found necessary to go back some years – to 1934, to be exact. In the spring of this year, on foot of a Government decision shortly before, the Volunteer Force came into being. The Organisation of the Artillery Corps at the time of the decision to raise the Volunteer Force was as follows:

Office of Director of Artillery

1st Field Artillery Brigade, comprising the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Field Batteries (18 Pdr) and the 4th Field Battery (4.5 How)

1st Anti-Aircraft Battery

1st Light Battery

The Artillery School

Depot Detachment Artillery Corps

Cadres for non-permanent Force Units

Note The 4th Field Battery (4.5 How) and the 1st Light Battery (3.7 How) were “A” Reserve Units. For the Organisation, see DFR A9 – 40/34.

The initial training of the Volunteer Force Batteries was undertaken in Kildare Barracks by the Regular Batteries. The scheme was as follows:

1st Field Battery was responsible for training the volunteers from the Southern Command. Capt C. Trodden I/C.

2nd Field Battery was responsible for training the volunteers from the Eastern command. Capt B.S.C. Thompson I/C.

3rd Field Battery was responsible for training the volunteers from the Western Command. Lt W. Donnelly I/C.

The first drafts of Volunteers arrived from the Commands on 17th April 1934. The period of training was for 28 days. At the end of this period, Potential NCO material was selected and proceeded for a further three months of training as NCOs. Again, at the end of the NCO period of training, candidates were selected for Potential Officer Courses. Thus, by the Spring of 1935, each Volunteer Battery had a number of Officers and NCOs trained.

The Regular Batteries continued this training of Volunteers at Kildare Barracks until September 1934, and then proceeded to the Commands as shown above, training Volunteers initially and carrying out Weekend Camps and Nightly Drills. They remained there until October 1935 and returned to Kildare Barracks leaving behind small Cadres to continue the training of Volunteers. This Organisation and Training of Volunteers continued up to April 1939 with the exception that all Volunteer Light Batteries were converted to 81mm Mortar Batteries in 1938. By April 1939, World affairs,, particularly in Europe, seemed to be drifting towards another world war.

At this time, April 1939, Capt R. Callanan, with Capt W. Donnelly was posted to Dublin to organise the II Field Artillery Brigade and to push on training with all possible speed. As a result of representations made by Comdt Callanan, OC, the following Units were organised and were being trained.

Office of Director of Artillery, GHQ

1 Field Artillery Brigade at Plunkett Barracks, Curragh Camp

1st Anti-Aircraft Battery stationed at McKee Barracks, Dublin

The Coastal Defence Artillery with HQ at Spike Island, and all the forts in Cobh Harbour, Barehaven (sic) and Donegal fully manned

Field Artillery Cadres functioning in each Command Area

The Depot and School Artillery Corps stationed at Plunkett Barracks, Curragh Camp, during the building of the new Barracks in Kildare.

5th Field Battery (Regular Cadre) Capt D. Cody OC Lt J. Griffin Lt P. O'Neill

Prior to the outbreak of War on 3rd September 1939, in addition to training large numbers of Volunteers, the process of mechanising the guns and trailers of the II Field Artillery Brigade went on with all possible speed. A number of sets of Martin Parry Adapter Equipment was received from abroad (which embraced dropped axles and pneumatic tyres). The work of fitting this equipment was undertaken by the Great Southern Railway Works at Inchicore. And proved to be completely successful. Prior to this work being carried out, the situation was somewhat Gilbertian, for the reason that, when guns had to be moved, special ramps were required to load the with their wooden wheels on to lorries. It was hard work and time devouring and the cause of frequent minor injuries, no matter how carefully the loading and unloading was carried out.

Due to the foresight of the Directive and Planning Section at GHQ, it can be seen from the foregoing, that a reasonable number of trained Officers, NCOs and Volunteers (approximately 3 officers, up to 10 NCOs and 50 Volunteers were available in most batteries) were ready on the outbreak of war. These Volunteers formed the bulk of the Field Artillery. It would be very unfair in writing this history of the Regiment, to let the opportunity pass without offering the greatest possible praise for the manner in which they flocked to the colours on being called up. Without them, the Field Artillery would have been in a very bad way. They, and the Regular Cadres deserve the highest possible credit.

II F.A. Brigade proceeded to its War Station, Mullingar Barracks, on the outbreak of World War 2 on 3rd September, 1939. The Units were accommodated under canvas on the green portion of the Barracks Square (where now stands the Dining facility.) A small party was left behind in McKee Barracks to complete the mobilisation and forward the troops in drafts to Mullingar. This work was completed in seven days – the delay resulting from the fact that quite a number of Volunteers were

in England and found great difficulty in getting back. The 5th Field Battery and 2nd Motor Bty took over Knockdrin Castle, Mullingar in October 1939 from the 11th Inf Bn. Capt D. Cody was Camp Commandant and OC 5th Bty; the other Battalion remained in Mullingar.

The Artillery position at this time in Mullingar was that the Volunteers of the western Command Artillery were amalgamated with the II F.A. Battalion (with the exception of the 15th V.F. Battery, Letterkenny, which was allotted to the Northern Forts at Dunree and Lenan).

2 Field Artillery Brigade Unit Officers II F.A. Brigade OC Comdt R. Callanan Adjt Lt C. Mattimoe NO QM – Btys were self-contained a 5th Field Battery (Regular Cadre) Capt D. Cody OC Lt J. Griffin Lt P. O'Neill Lt M. Buckley (R.O.) Lt C O'Sullivan (Mullingar V.F.)

6th Field Battery (Volunteer Force [V.F.] Bray) Lt. J. S. Nolan (Later Comdt F. Aherne Lt W. Reeves (Mullingar V.F.) Lt M. Touhy Castlebar V.F.) Lt J. McDermott (Mullingar V.F.)

7th Field Battery (V.F. Dublin) Lt J. Murray, Bty Comd (BC) Lt J. Nolan (Dublin V.F.) Lt Halloran (Mullingar V.F.) Lt J. Kane

8th Field Battery (V.F. Drogheda) Lt R. Carew BC Lt J McEvoy (Ballinasloe V.F.) Lt J. Sweeney (Ballinasloe V.F.) Lt M Monaghan (Ballinasloe V.F.) Lt Byrne (Drogheda V.F.) Lt T. Walsh

2nd Mortar Battery (V.F. Monaghan) Capt W. Donnelly BC Lt V. Smith Lt F. Mulligan (Monaghan V.F.) Lt T. Lyons (Monaghan V.F.) Lt S Gibbons (Castlebar V.F.) .

Artillery organisation again underwent a change in June 1940. The II F.A. Brigade was changed into two Field Artillery Battalions. The Mortar Organisation also changed and the mortars were sent to Infantry Battalions. When this reorganisation was completed, the following position pertained:

2 Field Artillery Brigade

II F.A. Battalion HQ OC Comdt R. Callanan Adjt Lt Dempsey (from OTC) QM Lt Smithwick (from OTC) I.O. Lt Sheridan, M. (from OTC)

6th Field Battery (attached to 2 Inf Bn Ballsbridge BC Lt. J. S. Nolan GPO Lt Byrne (Drogheda V.F.) Sec Offr Lt Barry-Landers (OTC) Sec Offr Lt Tierney (OTC) Attached Lt Deasy Attached Lt Farell M. (transferred from Kerry Bty V.F.)

10th Field Battery (attached to 11th Inf Bn, Gormanston) BC Capt W. Donnelly GPO Lt J.J. Nolan (Dublin V.F.) Sec Offr Lt M.T. Duggan (Dublin V.F.) Lt Grogan (OTC)

11th Field Battery (This was a new unit formed and training at McKee Barracks BC Lt C. Mattimoe GPO Lt T Quirke (OTC) Sec Offr Lt Slattery (OTC) Sec Offr Lt Lennon (Emergency Officer)

IV F.A. Battalion HQ OC Comdt D. Cody Adjt Lt R. Carew QM Lt M. Monaghan (Ballinasloe V.F.) TO Lt T. Tallon (Emergency Offr)

5th Field Battery BC Lt V. Smyth (Monaghan V.F) GPO Lt C. Sullivan (Mullingar V.F.) Sec Offr Lt P. McLynn (Emergency V. F.) Sec Offr Lt McDermott (Mullingar V. F.)

7th Field Battery BC Lt J. Griffin GPO Lt J. McEvoy (Ballinasloe V.F.) Sec Offr Lt J. Murray, Bty Comd (BC) Lt M. Greaney (Ballinasloe V.F.) Sec Offr Lt j. McDonnell (Emergency Offr)

8th Field Battery BC Lt J. Kane GPO Lt T. Walsh Sec Offr Lt Halloran (Mullingar V.F.)  
Sec Offr Lt J. Sweeney (Ballinasloe V.F.) .

On this re-organisation, all the officers with the Mortar Units proceeded to Infantry Battalions and became the Bn Mortar Officers. In or around June 1941, the organisation again changed, and the II and IV Battalions merged into the II F.A. Battalion with its HQ at McKee Barracks.

2 Field Artillery Battalion Headquarters McKee Barracks: OC Comdt R. Callanan 2I/C Capt W. Donnelly Adjt Capt R. Carew QM Capt M. Monaghan A/QM Lt Smithwick TO Lt T. Tallon

5th Field Battery Mullingar b. 6th Field Battery Ballsbridge

7th Field Battery McKee Barracks d. 8th Field Battery Longford

10th Field Battery Gormanston f. 11th Field Battery McKee Barracks.

With the exception of the 7th and 11th Btys, all the others were attached to Infantry Battalions. In July 1941, the Battalion was transferred to Collins Barracks and assumed responsibility for the Barracks in every respect. During the reorganisation and merging of the Battalion in 1941, Comdt Callanan was promoted Major and appointed Adjt of 2 Inf Div. He took with him, as his assistant Lt T. Walsh.

During 1941 and 1942, two more batteries, the 14th and 19th, were established and in early 1943, the 20th Battery was formed. Just to show that the planners were alive and active, the organisation again changed in March 1943, and out of the II Field Artillery Battalion was formed the II, IV and VI Field Regiments, consisting of three field batteries and one anti-tank battery to each regiment, and, thank goodness, this organisation remained static until the end of the Emergency.

The II and VI Regiments moved to Hibernian Schools, Phoenix Park (now St. Mary's Chest Hospital). A portion of the Barracks had been used and continued to be used until the end of the Emergency as St. Mobies Military Hospital. Collins Barracks vacated and both Regiments moved to Hibernian Schools on 8th October, 1943. As the IV Regiment was with 6th Bde, OC VI Regiment was appointed OC Hibernian Schools.

The Organisation of II Field Artillery Regiment was then as follows:

Battalion Headquarters OC Comdt W. Donnelly Adjt Capt J. O'Brien QM Capt M. Monaghan  
CPO M. Sheridan TO Lt W. Atkins

10th Field Battery Armament: 75mm Guns BC Capt P. Griffin GPO Lt Kellegher Sec  
Offr Lt J. Kerr Sec Offr Lt Mason

14th Field Battery Armament: 75mm Guns BC Capt T. Walsh GPO Lt N Farrell Sec  
Offr Lt H. Shortall Sec Offr Lt. C. Smyth

19th Field Battery Armament: 4.5" Hows. BC Capt R. Carew GPO Lt G. Byrne Sec Offr  
Lt N. Boyle Sec Offr Lt G. Kiernan

2nd Anti-Tank Bty Armament: 2 Pdr Anti-Tank Guns BC Capt E. Dineen Sec Offr Lt P.  
McDonald

All during the Emergency period, the II F.A. Regt proceeded with the Brigade on all exercises which were carried out from Dublin to the Border. GHQ inspections were carried out annually. Tests for the Regimental Trophy, Battery Shield and Single Gun were carried out each year also, generally

culminating in shooting test in Glen Imaal and while the Regiment never won any of the competitions, it placing at 3rd or 4th was satisfactory considering the participation of seven Regiments.

Another interesting point was that all through the Emergency, the ammunition for the guns was stored in Ballsbridge, Portobello (now Cathal Brugha) Barracks and Hibernian Schools. This was necessary in case it was required to be made available quickly in the event that our neutrality was not respected. Indeed, there were a few scares in 1944-45, but nothing came of them.

Interesting too was the fact that all units had to cut and save turf during the emergency period, so that sufficient fuel would be available for heating and cooking purposes and II F.A. Regiment's bog was in the vicinity of Allenwood, on Allenwood Bog. During the Emergency 1939-1945, a very high standard of training was attained and from the end of 1943 onwards, any job of work given to the Regiments presented no difficulties – it was automatic. This was more noticeable on Field Exercises, particularly in the areas of feeding, moving bivouac areas, marching, physical fitness and gunnery which was of the highest standard. This included a Divisional Artillery demonstration in Glen Imaal in 1944, when seventy-two guns were let loose on targets. This was Artillery's biggest and finest hour.

Another very good feature of this Emergency Period was the cooperation and liaison between supported units and artillery. Brigade and Battalion Commanders, up to this period, looked on artillery as another source of trouble and worry. However, it did not take very long to prove that they were a very necessary part of the organisation of Brigades and eventually all won all hands over to become very Artillery-minded. As a matter of fact, Commanders would not think of any exercise without being accompanied and advised by their artillery Commanders. The day of "Artillery Black Magic" was over – and a good thing for all concerned.

Due to the rapid expansion of Artillery Units during 1929-45 period, the training of large numbers of officers and NCOs had to be undertaken. Taking a broad view of the situation at the time, our Depot and School at Kildare has done a magnificent job of work and turned out a splendid material. It only need some field experience to turn these officers and NCOs in the majority of cases into really fine leaders. It can be said in all earnestness that the Depot and School came up to Artillery's best expectation and deserve the highest credit.

In October 1945, Volunteer and Emergency Officers were boarded by higher authority, with a view to permanent commissions in the Army. The numbers accepted would be very small (Regular Army – 4, Reserve – 9, Discharge – 7). Quotas were also fixed at this time for demobilisation on a monthly basis. As an example, twenty-three men was the figure fixed for November 1945. In November 1945, the Director of Artillery discussed with OC's II and VI Regiments the question of amalgamation of the two units into the II Field Artillery Regiments. Instructions were issued for the work to be completed by January 1946.

A board of three officers consisting of Majors McNally, Coffey and Cody interviewed NCOs – both Regular and Emergency – to be retained in the Regular Army and Reserve. At the same time, recruiting for the regular army was reopened. The response was very poor.

The order of amalgamation was:

Headquarters, Anti-tank Bty and 5th Field Battery 10th Field Battery

6th Battery and 19th Field Battery

11th Bty and 14th Field Battery,

All this work was completed and officers, NCOs and Men were taken on the strength of the II F.A. Regt in Orders on 17/1/46 . Surplus transport was handed over to 2 Field Company Supply & Transport Corps in Collins Barracks for sale. All officers were required to undergo an MT Course from 01 March to 30 April 1946 at Hibernian Schools. The purpose of this was twofold. It afforded officers a good working knowledge of motor transport and also employed Volunteer and Emergency Officer until such time as the board reported on who would be retained in the regular army. On 1st June 1946, Officers not accepted for service Regular Army, proceeded on pre-discharge leave.

During September and October 1946, all available NCOs and Men were turned out on harvest saving. This was due to the extremely bad weather during the summer and autumn. On 16th November, the Peace Establishment was received and put into operation. An order was received from Brigade that the Hibernian Schools was to be vacated and handed back to the Board of Works and the regiment to move to McKee Barracks. This move was to be completed by 18th December. This was duly carried out. The regiment had been stationed in Hibernian Schools for Three years and three months.

The officers comprising the Regiment on 18th December, 1946, on the move of the unit to McKee Barracks was as follows:

Commanding Comdt W. Donnelly  
Second-in-Command Comdt J. Nolan  
Adjutant Capt T. O'Brien  
Quartermaster Capt P. Griffin  
Command Post Officer (CPO) Capt D. Murphy  
Transport Officer (TO) Lt M. Purfield  
OC 2 A/Tk Capt J. O'Sullivan  
Section Officer 2 A/Tk Lt G Byrne  
OC 10th Bty Capt I. Noone  
Gun Position Offr (GPO) 10th Bty Lt P. McGonagle  
Section Officer (SO) 10th Bty Lt C Smith  
OC 14th Bty Capt R. Crew  
Gun Position Offr (GPO) 14th Bty Lt L. McCormack  
Section Officer (SO) 14th Bty Lt J. Donoghue  
Section Officer (SO) 14th Bty Lt P. McDonald  
Attached Comdt O'Herlihy  
Attached Lt M. Duggan  
Attached Lt S. Timmons.