

History of 2 Bde Arty Regt 2012-2023

Inception

The current 2 Bde Arty Regt may, on its face, be one of the youngest units in the Defence Forces having been formed in the wake of the re-organisation of the Defence Forces in late 2012, but it draws upon the rich heritage of the units amalgamated in its construction. This re-organisation saw the consolidation of the Artillery Corps into two line units, one for each of the newly consolidated brigades of the Army. Each unit, distinct from the Field Artillery Regiments which preceded them, and distinct from the Air Defence (AD) Regiment which it subsumed, provides both field artillery and the air defence capabilities to battery level. Developing these capabilities in a new unit was a significant challenge and would see the Regiment create its own unique and distinct character, influenced but not defined by the personnel and traditions that came predominantly from 2 Fd Arty Regt, 4 Fd Arty Regt and 1 AD Regt, along with personnel from 4 Cav Sqn, who had moved to Custume Bks following the closure of Connolly Bks in Longford.

The first challenge for this new unit was its new location in Custume Bks, Athlone. 2 BAR's artillery predecessor units had been located in McKee Bks - Dublin, Columb Bks - Mullingar and Plunkett Bks - Curragh. This brought to the fore one of the prime elements in all Artillery operations: Logistics. The collected holdings of each unit were transported to Custume Bks, where the Logs staff carefully checked them against the CS.41 created to support the new Brigade Artillery Regiment. Field Artillery Officers and NCOs were forced to reckon with a bewildering variety of Air Defence equipment and vice versa. Appropriate storage measures needed to be found to ensure that sensitive equipment was stored correctly, in our new home alongside 6 Inf Bn, the other major unit in Custume Bks. Through the diligence of the logs staff, the arms and equipment of this new unit were gathered, accounted for and assigned Gun Parks/ Stores until it seemed that artillery had always been there.

At the same time, the cultural transformation of disparate units drawn under one banner was driven by the Regt OC, Lt Col R. Yorke and RSM N. O'Callaghan. It was seen as vital that a new identity be created to ensure unit cohesion and a sense of collective belonging. This was achieved by a rigorous programme of training and exercises. This effort delivered both that the capabilities required of the new Regt in its support of state security and the inculcation of the Artillery spirit.



120mm Projectile in Flight

The new Regt quickly faced the additional challenge in 2013 of delivering an integrated unit, aligned with the Single Force Concept. Reserve Defence Force (RDF) gunners would be integrated with Permanent Defence Force (PDF) gunners in the new Brigade Artillery Regiments.

Organisation

The Regt in its current configuration consists of three PDF batteries and two RDF batteries. These are 1 Gun Bty, 2 STA Bty and 3 AD Bty (PDF), and 4 & 5 Bty (RDF). The Gun Bty's primary focus is the provision of Indirect Fire Support via both the L118 105mm Light Gun and the RUAG 120mm Heavy Mortar. The Surveillance and Target Acquisition (STA) Bty provides STA support using the ISTAR sensors of the Regt, such as the Orbiter MUAV, the Foxtrack GSR and the Recon TAS as part of the FST and Fire Control suites. The AD Bty provides a tactical Ground Based Air Defence (GBAD) operating the Giraffe Primary Radar, with RBS 70 missiles and 12.7mm HMGs for local defence of positions. In addition, 3 AD Bty maintains a capability as a heavy mortar battery.

The RDF batteries are integrated within the Regt following the adoption of the Single Force Concept and train alongside their PDF counterparts, regularly supporting unit live fire training. The RDF personnel of 2 Bde Arty Regt are an invaluable component of our organisation, without which we would be at a significant disadvantage. 4 and 5 Bty are drawn predominantly from the 54 Regt, based in Mullingar and Galway, 31 Regt, based in Tipperary, and 62 Regt, based in Dublin, with elements also drawn from 54 MPC, previously based in Athlone and Galway, and 56 Inf Bn, based in Tullamore. The re-organisation of the Defence Forces in 2012, and the subsequent adoption of the Single Force Concept, amalgamated these unit identities under the 2 BAR flag alongside their PDF counterparts for the first time.



Giraffe Radar Tracking Targets in the Curragh

Training, Operations and Responsibilities

The new structure outlined for the Bde Arty Regt necessitated a new approach to training. The respective roles of each Bty in supporting the others had to be established, clarified and exercised to ensure operational effectiveness. Regular exercises ensured that the capabilities of the new unit were developed and that a sense of cohesion among soldiers united under this new banner was inculcated. Live fire exercises, with integrated RDF personnel, created an enhanced training experience for all participants, filling out batteries and bridging any gaps which previously might have separated regulars and reserve

elements. 2 Bde Arty Regt continues to lean on its RDF personnel for support in training activities and promotes a strong sense of belonging for reserve personnel.

Alongside the training load imposed by the new structure, the Regt was required to contribute a significant level of On-Island operational support to the new 2 Bde. As the smallest major unit within the Bde, it would take its place in the rotation for deployments to Prison Security Platoons and other Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP i.e An Garda Síochána) functions. The unit has sustained this considerable operational output in support of our national security in large part due to the huge commitment and devotion to duty of its Gunners.

In a conventional operations context, the unit continues to deliver the contingent capability of providing fire support to each of the Bde's four infantry battalions as required and a range of sensors and ISTAR instruments for information gathering. It demonstrates its capability in this regard by participating in Unit and Bde exercises and contributing elements to Defence Force Training Centre Courses, Exercises and Operational Capability Concept (OCC) evaluations.

The unit quickly began to pass on its values and traditions to new entrants to the Defence Forces, with the first soldiers in the newly established unit trained in 2013 in Custume Bks. Officers and NCOs relished the challenge of inculcating a rapidly developing sense of unit identity to new recruits, whilst respecting our predecessors units and drawing inspiration from the history of these units and what they achieved. In 2021, 2 Bde Arty Regt broke from the tradition within the Defence Forces of identifying recruit platoons by a number and welcomed the Sgt Paddy Mulcahy DSM Recruit Platoon to Custume Bks, under the command of Lt I. Galloway and Pl Sgt G. Fay. This Platoon naming remembered the contribution of Sgt Mulcahy, who was killed in action at Elizabethville, Congo, in December 1961 while serving with A Coy, 36 Inf Bn and posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. His DSM citation reads:

“For distinguished service with the United Nations Force in the Republic of the Congo, in displaying leadership and devotion to duty to a high degree. Although painfully wounded during hostilities in December 1961, he refused to leave his platoon and subsequently, whilst looking after his men, he received the wound from which he died.”

Overseas

2 Bde Arty Regt has continuously supplied officers and troops across the spectrum of Defence Forces overseas operations, in the tradition of those Artillery units which preceded it. From its beginnings in 2012 it provided troops to the Heavy Mortar Platoon, Recce Coy, Irish Inf Bn in UNIFIL. This heavy mortar capability has been the cornerstone of Irish fire support overseas, going back to the earliest deployment of Artillery to the Congo in November 1962, and continuing to provide troops to this invaluable asset has been the primary overseas contribution of the Regt.

In 2013, the Irish government agreed to send an Infantry Group to UNDOF, in Syria, following the withdrawal of the Austrian contingent and the escalation of hostilities in what was fast becoming an open Civil War. This deployment would consist of an armoured Force Reserve Company for the UNDOF mission, to respond to any and all threats or requests from UN Military Observers deployed with UNTSO for reassurance or assistance. Supporting the FRC was an Artillery Surveillance and Target Acquisition (STA) detachment which offered a mobile, armoured observation capability and provided a wealth of detailed reports on the conflict as it transpired between the Syrian Arab Armed Forces (SAAF) and the Anti-Government Armed Elements (AGAEs) and also to the ongoing unresolved conflict, halted by the 1974 Disengagement of Forces, between Syria and Israel, which UNDOF was there to supervise.

The soldiers of the Regt have also participated in a variety of other small missions at all levels since its formation, from KFOR (Kosovo) and EUFOR BiH (Bosnia) in Europe, to EUTM Mali, MONUSCO (DR of Congo) and MINURSO (W Sahara) in Africa. The wealth of experience across the spectrum of international deployments, from operations, training and a variety of HQ staff functions is a consistent feature of the unit, which traces its overseas heritage back to the initial deployments with that first Heavy Mortar Troop to ONUC (Congo) in 1962.

Culture and the Future

In looking at the history of a relatively new unit, formed from the elements of four main disbanded units, it is important to look at that history as a lens through which to envision the future. Each of the Defence Forces units which came before us represented a segment in time and a specific set of needs determined by the state for its effective defence. 2 Bde Arty Regt represents the latest evolution in that path, combining the attributes and, among its senior leadership, the personnel of those units amalgamated in 2012.



Charity Gun Pull Through Mullingar

The majority of the personnel in the unit now have joined the Defence Forces since the 2012 re-organisation, and having been trained in that new joint culture, they look to the future, and the future of the Artillery Corps is bright. Recent developments, such as upgrades to the missiles for the RBS 70 system are likely to be supplemented by the purchase of enhanced primary radar capabilities. This should strengthen the Corps's ability to enable the manoeuvre and supporting elements' operations under a protected GBAD umbrella. Surveillance and Target Acquisition capabilities continue to evolve with the adoption of improved target acquisition systems and the continued evolution of the MUAV programme. At the centre of the corps remains the requirement to deliver fire in support of combined arms operations and the L118 105mm Light Gun Upgrade programme is likely to see improvements to that system increasing its relevance into the future. The contemporary conflict landscape acts as a reminder that fire support above all else is a key enabler of manoeuvre, both in the sky and on land, and whether that landscape be Ukraine or Simba Hill, artillery remains the king of battle.