

By PADDY MORONEY

# World War II declared but business as usual

THE OUTBREAK of World War II on Friday, September 1, 1939, did not immediately affect the *Limerick Leader* as a business, aside from the stories it carried.

Its first story appeared on its weekend edition that very day (although, as today, technically the weekend editions were dated for Saturdays).

Its banner—headlined the report, "Germany attacks Poland—towns bombed from the air", with subheads, such as, "Hitler to meet 'Force with Force'"; "Martial Law proclaimed in France"; and "London on the German proclamation". The main story was calmly headed, "Will Europe be at war tonight?"

And at the very bottom of the two-column report was the

paragraph, "Eire mobilises", reading briefly, "A Proclamation was issued in Dublin this evening mobilising all the reserve forces of the State."

The extensive coverage given the war, from its outset, but most particularly in its up-to-date approach, can only be explained in terms of listening in, constantly, to the wireless news services.

Clearly, no reports were culled from national daily papers, by permission, as they would anyway have been printed long before many events reported by the *Leader* had occurred.

The reports, from the very beginning, quote the British

Ministry of Information, and the Press Association. Later reports were stated to be "by phone and wire".

The following Monday, September 4, the *Leader* ran an editorial which said, somewhat resignedly: "Europe, or at least the greater part of it, is at war. The thought is saddening and depressing. For months past, an outbreak of hostilities seemed inevitable, yet the peoples of the world hoped and prayed..."

But with remarkable foresight, its author warned: "Our neutrality, however, will not save us from many trials and hardships."

"It would be too much to

expect that Ireland, having regard to its proximity to the theatre of war, should escape the shocks and reverberations incidental to large-scale hostilities..."

It continues: "Every citizen must be up and doing. Now that the first shock has passed, we have got to steady ourselves, take stock, and see what is best to do in the circumstances. Sacrifices must be made..."

"There is no need for undue alarm or despondency..."

"With Mr Lemass at the head of the newly-constituted Department of Supplies, the country can have hope and confidence. He is the right man in the right place..."

And he was. He asked Limerick Steamship Company to join with the Wexford Steamship Company and Palgrave Murphy of Dublin to form Irish Shipping Ltd., which rescued the country from direct participation in the war.

Nevertheless, life had to go on, and the next editorial in the *Leader* of the following Wednesday opened: "Once again, the beginning of the school year is with us and this week the various educational establishments in the city and county resumed business after the summer recess..."

Even so, the war gradually edged closer, with stories ranging from the sensational, such as the artillery action on the Western Front along the Siegfried Line, to such trivia as the reported boom in luminous watches in London, with the nightly "black-out".

The forthcoming shortages of space in the *Leader* for news of the war was sounded by an innocuous panel, on Saturday, September 23, announcing that in future, to save space, votes of sympathy, would be treated as advertisements.

Surprisingly, there were still editions, in the early days of the war, which made not a mention of the hostilities. There was no mention of rationing in (particularly) dutiable items—Clunes were still advertising their tobacco and cigarettes, and John Quin & Co, wholesalers, were offering retailers the best in teas from around the world.

There was, however, a hint of things to come: John Quin

& Co did refer, in a front-page double-column announcement, to the fact that "the demand at present is heavy and is, no doubt, due to a fear of shortage".

The company requested: "Whilst this is not altogether justified, buyers will render a valuable service to the trade in seeing that abnormal purchases of tea are not made by individual customers."

Meanwhile, the *Leader*, being closer to the action, ran a "Very Latest" column on the "war situation" on even its midweek editions—the information coming "by wire and phone".

By November, Europe had well settled into the "Phoney War", as it came to be called. Poland had been over-run, and apart from the odd invasion scare elsewhere, little seemed to be happening anywhere, except for sinkings at sea.

Even Allied soldiers in France, and their German counterparts on the opposite side of the Maginot line, just stared at each other through binoculars, despite being technically at war. There was a lot of talk about peace, and reports of secret peace conferences.

Nobody could foresee the German surprise attack on France and the Low Countries in May of 1940, the summer evacuation by the British Expeditionary Force of Dunkirk town and its beaches, and the Battle of Britain in August and, particularly, September of that warm and humid year.

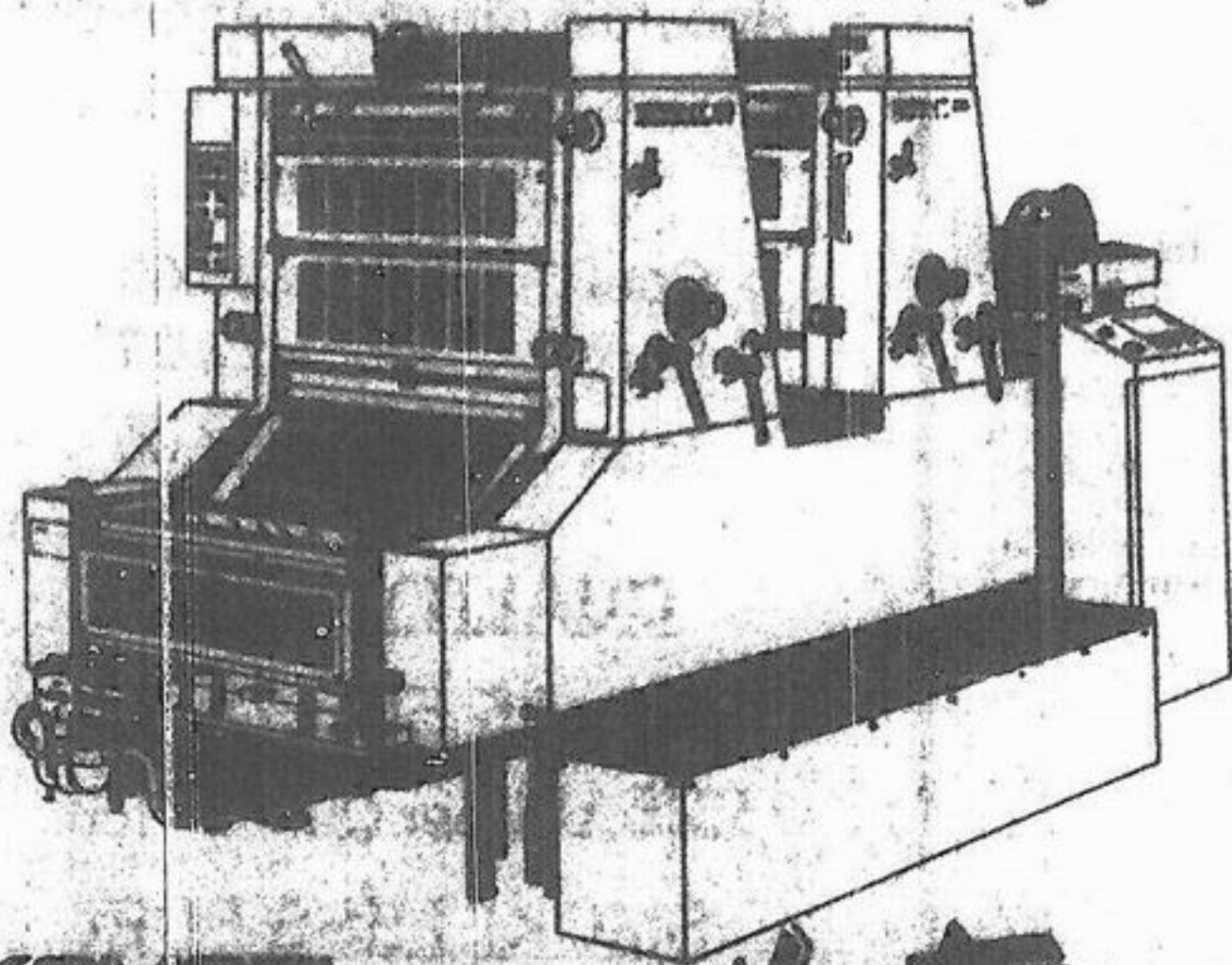
But Cannocks of Limerick, with some commercial acumen, advertised 5,000 yards of ARP (Air Raid Precaution) black-out material, at one shilling and sixpence (7½p) per yard, on the *Limerick Leader* of Monday, November 6, 1939.

The advertisement lasted only another edition, as the black-out was postponed indefinitely, and war appeared to recede. Called-up reservists were sent home from Sarsfield Barracks, that autumn of 1939.

No-one foresaw the shocks ahead—in particular the tragic loss with all hands of the steamship "Irish Pine," home port Limerick, to early-morning torpedo attack from a German U-Boat less than three years later, in mid-Atlantic.

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