

A GENERAL Election in January 1933 gave de Valera's Fianna Fail party its first over-all majority. The results for Limerick were: Fianna Fail: Donncha O'Brien, Ald. Dan Burke, Robert Ryan; Cumann na nGaedheal: George C. Bennett, Ald. James Reidy; Labour: Michael J. Keyes.

After his victory in the 1932 election, de Valera announced that his Government was no longer prepared to pay the land annuities to the British Government, claiming that Britain had no moral right to rents or annuities on Irish lands that England had confiscated in the past. Britain retaliated by placing heavy duties on Irish farm products—mainly cattle—entering Britain. The Irish Government retaliated in kind. This was the beginning of what came to be known as the Economic War. The Economic War, which was to continue for six years, hit the farming community very hard.

With so many men who had fought on opposite sides in the Civil War still active and still bitterly opposed to one another, things were very disturbed and dangerous in the country in the early 1930's. General O'Duffy, dismissed as Commissioner of the Garda Síochána by the Government in 1933, immediately joined a newly-formed organisation called the Army Comrades Association, composed of men who had fought in the free State Army during the Civil War. Very soon he was leader of the Association, the name of which he changed to the National Guard. He also gave its members an official uniform—a Blue Shirt. Almost at once, the members of the National Guard came to be known as the Blue Shirts. It was the era of the coloured shirt, with the Brown Shirts in Germany and the Black Shirts in Italy. The Blue Shirts were a familiar sight at many meetings, rallies and parades in Limerick at that time. Disturbances were commonplace at political gatherings.

O'Duffy now joined up with Cumann na nGaedheal and other opposition parties in the Dáil and formed a new party which he called Fine Gael, and of which he was appointed leader. Identification with O'Duffy and his methods soon surfaced, especially among the older members of the former Cumann na nGaedheal party, and he was asked to resign. O'Duffy resigned, and he was replaced by a man named Charles King who had sunk for the third time.

There was a picture of a nice young lad on page 5 of the "Leader" of the 26th August 1933. It was that of 15-year-old John S. Moloney, Main Street, Croom, a pupil of the Christian Brothers' Schools, Limerick, who, according to the caption, "recently displayed conspicuous bravery in rescuing from drowning in the river Maigue a man named Charles King who had sunk for the third time."

There was a report in the "Leader" of the 13th May 1933 on the funeral of Patrick Woulfe, P.E., Otago, a very prominent figure in the Irish language movement. Mr. Woulfe was the author of the great pioneer work on Irish literature, *Stairiú na nGaeil*, published in 1923 when he was a curate in Kilmallock.

THE YEAR 1934 was the beginning of an era of unbridled glory for the Limerick Senior Hurling team. They met Dublin in the All-Ireland final of the 2nd September, 1934, and the result was a draw. In the replay on the 30th September they won 5-2 to 2-5. The headlines in the "Leader" of the following day read: "The All-Ireland Champions. Limerick Team's Great Triumph. Joyous Scenes follow Heroic Struggle." The report said: "Limerick had a decisive victory over Dublin in the replay of the final for All-Ireland Hurling Championship. . . . The scenes of enthusiasm, the spontaneous and unrestrained outburst of cheering that marked the close of the game cannot be adequately described. . . . The Maheys were a tower of strength in those attacks and their exploits were a joy to witness."

The Economic War was still being waged when de Valera, head of the Irish Government, spoke at an aeroplane at Loch Gar on the 30th June 1935. He made special reference to the Land War of the 1880's, and reiterated his belief in Ireland's moral right to refuse payment of the land annuities to Britain.

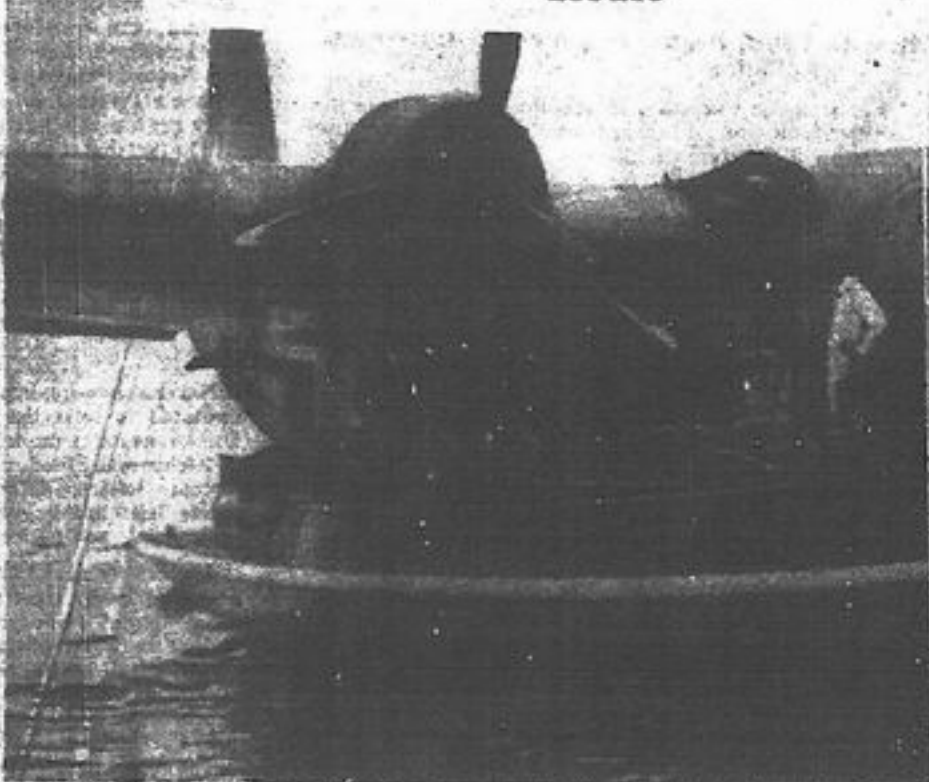
The Mountcollins correspondent of the "Leader" told of a spectacular occurrence in West Limerick in the issue of the 27th July, 1935. According to the correspondent:

"Haymakers employed in the meadow of Mr. Patrick Dore, Acres, Mountcollins, had to seek shelter the other day from the *si ghaoithe* or fairy wind which played havoc with the hay crop. Coming from the Co. Cork direction, it completely swept through the centre of the meadow, taking the hay crop up in spiral columns into the heavens."

"Motorists and others travelling on the Cork line pulled up to see the phe-

Hard times as Emergency succeeds Economic War

COUNTY LIMERICK 1933-1950 THE ECONOMIC WAR THE BLUE SHIRTS HURLING GLORY FOR LIMERICK ST GHASITHE OR FAIRY WIND AT MOUNTCOLLINS FLYING BOATS AT FOYNES DEATH OF NATIVE SPEAKER WORLD WAR II BREAKS OUT EMERGENCY IN IRELAND CALL FOR RECRUITS FOR ARMY AND LDF RESPONSE IN CO. LIMERICK 1940 ALL IRELAND WIN WAR SHORTAGES AND RATIONING FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE IN CO. LIMERICK STAGE COACH TO LIMERICK THE GREAT FLOOD OF 1946 AND THE CROOM RABBIT RURAL ELECTRIFICATION COMES TO CO. LIMERICK DE VALERA AT BRURIE FEIS ETC ETC



Probably the first flying boat to land at Foynes from America: the "Clare" being refuelled by the specialised steel launch "Maxwell II." The picture, from an Aer Rianta/Shannon Airport source, is dated July 6, 1937—the momentous day—the locale definitely Foynes, there is no information that another flying boat was in

possession, and others sought immediate shelter, thinking it was an air squadron was flying overhead. One of the haymakers, a Mr. Curtin, was thrown off the wynd and his hat was carried off."

An old man told the Mountcollins correspondent that the *si ghaoithe* was but only a passing for a funeral on its way to Carrig a Phioibaire, which was situated on the lands of Patrick M. Harnett, Craeg, Abbeyfeale. Fairy music was often heard at Carrig a Phioibaire.

Limerick's senior hurlers again made the headlines, locally and nationally, in 1936, when, on Sunday, 6th September, they defeated Kilkenny in the All-Ireland Final by 6-6 to 1-5. Across a full page of the *Limerick Leader* of Saturday, 12th September ran the headline: "Dazzling Glory of Limerick's Macellows. Hurling Display. Irish Champions and World Champions."

"Limerick's hurling supremacy," said the "Leader" report, "can no longer be doubted anywhere, for Sunday's smashing victory places it completely and definitely beyond question. By their splendid display in Croke Park our gallant fifteen have shed lustre not only on themselves and their city and county, but on their country in general. The hurling was of an exceptionally high order throughout, and while the Kilkenny men played a great game they surely were 'not in it' in the end, finish and superb artistry that have made the wearers of the green and white the unquestioned combination they have proved themselves to be."

A DOWNPOUR that began at noon on Sunday, 11th August, 1946, and that continued for more than 24 hours, led to the severest flooding ever remembered in Co. Limerick. The *Limerick Leader* of Saturday, 17th August, told the story of the flooding in graphic detail, including the still-talked-of episode of the Croom rabbit.

Terrible damage was done to corn and hay crops. Near Abbeyfeale, 70 cattle and 6 horses belonging to a Mr. Aherne, were mugged. As the flood waters threatened their marooned stand, the cattle, with the greatest difficulty, swam 100 yards to safer ground. Several other cattle and a horse were reported drowned in that area.

In the Kilmallock area many roads were impassable, and the Lábach over-flowed its banks and caused widespread flooding.

There were floods over the whole Hospital/Elton/Knocklong area as a result of the overflowing of the Morning Star river. A great quantity of hay was damaged.

In the Upper Maigue region, in the neighbourhood of Colmanstown and Drewscourt, there were

unprecedented floods. For the first time in living memory there was no postal delivery on Monday morning. Part of Colmanstown Bridge gave way, submerging the roadway to a depth of 4 feet. Entire fields in the district were transformed into lakes in which stood numerous islets—these latter being wynds of hay, the water reaching to half their height. Many houses were flooded. Cornfields had the appearance of being heavily rolled.

And so the tale of woe continued: severe flooding in Bruree village near the Maigue bridge; hundreds of acres converted into a huge lake in the Coolanoran and Ballyallinan area near Rathkeale, with anything from 1,000 to 2,000 wynds of hay standings in the water; ruin and destruction in all that East Limerick countryside where "the Mulcair River flows". At Annagh four very courageous men rescued eight horses from drowning in a very dangerous operation—the monks of Glenstal Abbey had provided them with a boat which made the rescue possible.

Finally, there was the already-

mentioned episode of the Croom rabbit which the Croom correspondent reported dramatically for the "Leader" of the 17th August as follows:

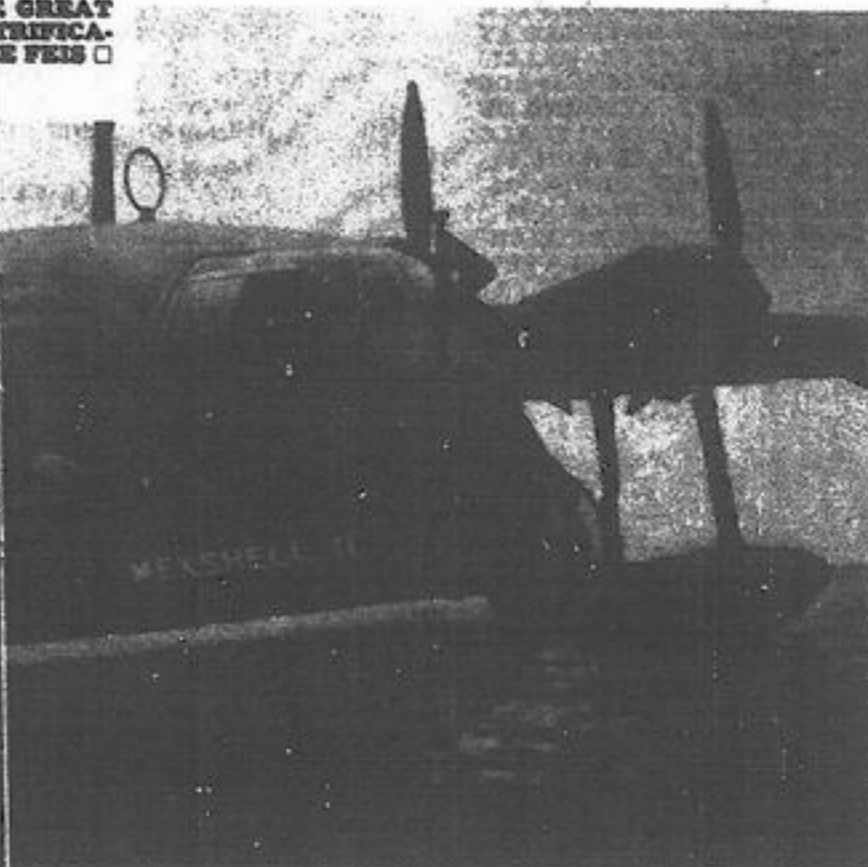
"At Croom by 10 o'clock on Monday the flood (in the Maigue) had reached its high-water mark, and a roaring, swirling, jostling, foaming mass of angry waters rolled relentlessly past, carrying flotsam of every kind on its heavy bosom. Many wynds of hay floated down with the flood, and onlookers on the bridge were amazed to see a rabbit clinging desperately for life on one of them. As the wynd approached the bridge the mass of hay spun for a moment and then was sucked into the vortex which was formed by the waters racing through the almost choked-up arch."

The bunny's perch was too high, the top of the wynd decapitated, and it and the bunny were cast into the water. Tossed about among the speeding conflicting currents below the bridge he struggled gamely and, to the exceeding joy of the onlookers, made land some hundred yards further on."

Finally, there was the already-



In power for most of the era: Eamon de Valera.



'Magic' rabbit escapes

Leader in the preceding couple of weeks hinted at the doom that was to come:

"German troops on the move. Ominous developments in Europe. Talks on The Danzig Trouble" (L.L. 12/8/1939)

"Situation more serious. International position grows graver" (L.L. 16/8/1939)

"Chamberlain's Note to Hitler. Britain will stand by Poland" (L.L. 23/8/1939)

"Britain closes Mediterranean to Merchantmen" (L.L. 28/8/1939)

The War began on September 1st with the German attack on Poland. On Sunday, September 3rd, Britain and France declared war on Germany. A large British expeditionary force was landed in France that month, but things were to remain relatively quiet until early April when the Germans invaded and occupied Denmark and Norway. Then, on 10th May, they invaded Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg.

That evening's "Leader" said: "Alarming developments in the war situation took place in the early hours of this morning when German troops invaded Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. The new created a profound situation throughout the world."

The Germans swept through the three countries and into France in their Blitzkrieg or "lightning war". Nothing could stop them. On the 30th May, in an almost incredible operation, some 370,000 retreating British troops were evacuated from the port of Dunkirk to England. France surrendered on the 22nd June. The situation for neutral Ireland began to look serious. Would the Germans attempt an invasion, or would the British invade to forestall a German landing as they had done in the case of Iceland? This was the beginning of what came to be known as the Emergency Period in Ireland.

The Irish Government called for young men to join the Defence Forces to defend the country in case of invasion. National Service enrolment forms were available in all Garda Barracks from the beginning of June. Volunteers had the option of joining the regular army, or the Local Security Force (LSF), which was composed of two groups: Group A (for military service), and Group B (for police duties). Shortly afterwards Group A became the Local Defence Force (LDF) and Group B was known simply as the Local Security Force of the LSF.

Enlistment was rather slow at first; then things began to get better; finally, there was a rapid improvement. The "Leader" of Saturday, June 15 had reports from several

areas. **NEWCASTLE WEST:** "The response to the call for men for the Defence Forces and for the Local Security Force appears to be gathering momentum. . . . At a meeting of West Limerick Brigade, Old IRA, held in Newcastle West . . . a resolution was adopted calling on all Old IRA members to enrol immediately for service with the various defence services."

BALLYAGRAN Old IRA adopted a similar resolution.

RATHKEALE: "Enrolment for the Defence Forces and the Local Security Force is now proceeding at a satisfactory rate in Rathkeale. About 30 young men had enrolled in the Defence Forces and 50 for duty in the Local Security Force."

BALLYLANDERS: "Quite a few from the district indicated their willingness to serve the country's cause in case of emergency by signing on at the barrack. Some are already in training and others are waiting to be called."

KILMALLOCK reported "a good response to the call for more men for the fighting forces of the State."

During July, the "Leader" reported a huge increase in the numbers enrolling in several centres, including Kilmeeby/Feenagh, Kilmallock, Foynes, Ballyagran, Knockaderry, Newcastle West, Dromcollogher, Ballylanders, Bruff, Limerick City, Rathkeale, Atha, Glin, Hospital, Bruree, Pallasgreen, Adare, Askeaton. Members of the various LDF groups met once a week in local halls or other suitable buildings for basic military training.

MEANTIME, all through the late summer and autumn, the papers carried news of fierce air battles over England. In Ireland, blissfully preserved from the horrors of war, it came to All Ireland Hurling Day, 1st September, 1940. Limerick minors and seniors had reached the finals, the former to play Antrim, the latter to play Kilkenny. Despite wartime restrictions almost 50,000 people crowded into Croke Park. Limerick won both matches. The senior match was described as having been played at top speed, the display of field craft by both sides electrifying the vast attendance. The final score was: Limerick 3-7, Kilkenny 1-7.

Early in 1941, as the threat to essential supplies (flour, tea, coal, petrol, etc.), normally obtained from outside, grew, compulsory tillage was introduced, and turf replaced coal as the common fuel. Rationing of many commodities, including tea, sugar, flour and petrol, was introduced.

From now on until the end of the war people were continually on the move, from one small town or village in their neighbourhood to another, seeking—usually in vain—such items as cigarettes, bicycle tyres and dry batteries for radios. A thriving black market developed in tea. Private cars went completely off the road, and trains ran on turf.

But there was a great spirit of comradeship and friendship among the people, and the lingering bitterness of the Civil War vanished as men who had been in opposite political camps in the Civil War and after, now came together in the Army, or the LDF or the LSF, for the common purpose of defending their country in its hour of need.

A very serious outbreak of foot and mouth disease occurred in Ireland in the early part of 1941. There was consternation when the disease spread in Co. Limerick's dairying area. The report in the *Limerick Leader* of the 26th March said: "An outbreak of foot and mouth disease was confirmed last night on the holding of Mr. William Donnelly, Amogan, Craeg. The outbreak occurred among 48 head of cattle and 24 sheep. All the animals were slaughtered today."

Outbreaks were confirmed on 4th April on the farm of Mr. Michael Cahill, Clonoul, Craeg, and on the farm of Mr. Patrick Quin, Killynny, Adare. As a result of the outbreaks, all GAA fixtures in Limerick city and county were postponed, as was greyhound racing at the Limerick Greyhound Racing Track.

People in Ireland in the war years did not stand still, marking time, waiting for peace and plentifulness to return. There was a lot of worthwhile activity. In Murroe, they built the first Muintir na Tire hall in Ireland, which, according to the "Leader" report, was opened and blessed on Sunday, 13th July, 1941.

On June 22nd, 1941, Germany invaded Russia; and on 7th December of the same year the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour brought Japan and America into the war. Now it was indeed a World War. With private cars off the road in Ireland, and with trains and bus services much curtailed, Lord Adare hit on a novel idea to supplement the public transport in the Limerick area. A news item headed "Its First Run—Coach arrives in Limerick", in the "Leader" of Monday, 8th June, told the story as follows:

"A flourish on the horn, a swish of the whip, the startled crack of horses' hooves on the road, the creak and strain of harness and the initial swish of the coach and all were off to start the new service from Rathkeale to Limerick this morning. Back had come the

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THE NEWS OF THE CENTURY



Edited by
Máirín
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day, July 5th, 1937. The "Leader" of that date carried a short inconspicuous report headed "The Big Flight—To Start This Evening". It read: "Imperial Airways liner 'Caledonia' will leave Shannon at Foynes this evening at 7 o'clock on her first trans-Atlantic flight. Simultaneously, Pan-American Airways 'Clipper III' will leave Botwood, Newfoundland, for the Shannon. She is expected to arrive at about 9 o'clock tomorrow morning."

The flights took place, and everything worked out according to plan. These were the inaugural trial flights that blazed the trail for the future regular trans-Atlantic commercial flights.

July 1st, 1937, was a historic day. It was the day on which the people voted on the New Constitution; and it was also the day of a general election. The people voted to accept the New Constitution (often called de Valera's Constitution), and Fianna Fáil won the general election. The Limerick results (city and county) were as follows: For the

Constitution: 35,199; against: 21,856. Elected to the Dáil: Fianna Fáil: Dan Bourke, Michael B. Colbert, Donncha O'Brien, Robert Ryan; Fine Gael: George C. Bennett, John J. O'Shaughnessy; Labour: Michael J. Keyes.

Excavations conducted at Loch Gur in the summer of 1937 by Professor Sean P. O'Riordan resulted in many important finds.

There was another General Election in June 1938. Once again, Fianna Fáil were returned to power. The Limerick results were: Fianna Fáil: Dan Bourke, Donncha O'Brien, Tadgh Crowley, Robert Ryan; Fine Gael: James Reidy, George Bennett; Labour: Michael J. Keyes.

ON SATURDAY, 25th June, Dr. Douglas Hyde, one of the founders of the Gaelic League, was installed as first President of Ireland under the New Constitution. The Limerick County Feis of the Gaelic League, which was held in Adare on Sunday, 2nd July, 1939, was formally

opened by An Fear Mor (Seamus O hEochá), a native of Monaghan, West Limerick, and Principal of Ring Irish College. It was a great success. Also on the matter of the Irish language, the "Leader" of the 29th July, 1939, told of the recent death of an old native speaker of Irish from the Abbeyfeale district. It said:

"One of the few that were left of the old Gaelic speakers which linked his generation with an earlier one, when Irish was almost generally used in West Limerick, died when John Harnett, of Dromtrasna, Abbeyfeale, succumbed after a few weeks illness at the age of 85. Proud of his knowledge of the language, he was ever ready for an argument in the old tongue which he used on all possible occasions. He was the eldest of four stalwart members of the family, a quartet who were associated with the first Gaelic Athletic Association of hurlers and footballers in West Limerick more than half a century ago."

The inauguration of a trans-Atlantic air mail service via Foynes took place on Satur-

day, 5th August, 1939. It brought huge crowds to Foynes, as we learn from this report in the "Leader" of Wednesday, 9th August: "Saturday was a big and historic day for Foynes. At 7 o'clock on the evening of that day the 'Caribou', Imperial Airways' giant flying boat, left Shannon Airport waters for Botwood, Newfoundland, on the inaugural flight of Britain's first trans-Atlantic air mail service. . . . Mr. de Valera and other members of the Irish Government were among thousands of spectators who watched the arrival and departure of the 'Caribou' at Foynes on Saturday afternoon. Visitors had come to Foynes from all over the southern counties to see the sight, and the roads in the vicinity of the airport were lined with motor cars. A special train brought hundreds from Limerick city."

That same year of 1939 was the year that saw the world plunged into the most terrible and destructive war of all time, World War II. Ominous headlines in the *Limerick*