



LIMERICK AND FRANCE DURING THE JACOBITE WAR OF 1689-1691

For many people in Ireland, their knowledge of the French presence in the Jacobite War of 1689-91 is limited to the battle of the Boynes and St. Ruth's death at Aughrim. The expedition to Mayo in 1798 of some 1,000 troops under Humbert has lingered longer in folk memory, and has gathered to itself a certain romantic aura which has always been associated with that rebellion. The struggle of the previous century, however, has never been allowed to fade from the collective memory of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland, where it is still celebrated as the triumph of Protestantism. In the rest of the country, it has been submerged into the general seventeenth century pattern of rebellion and defeat, followed by confiscation and persecution, with the added dimension of the beginning of that diaspora known as the Flight of the Wild Geese.

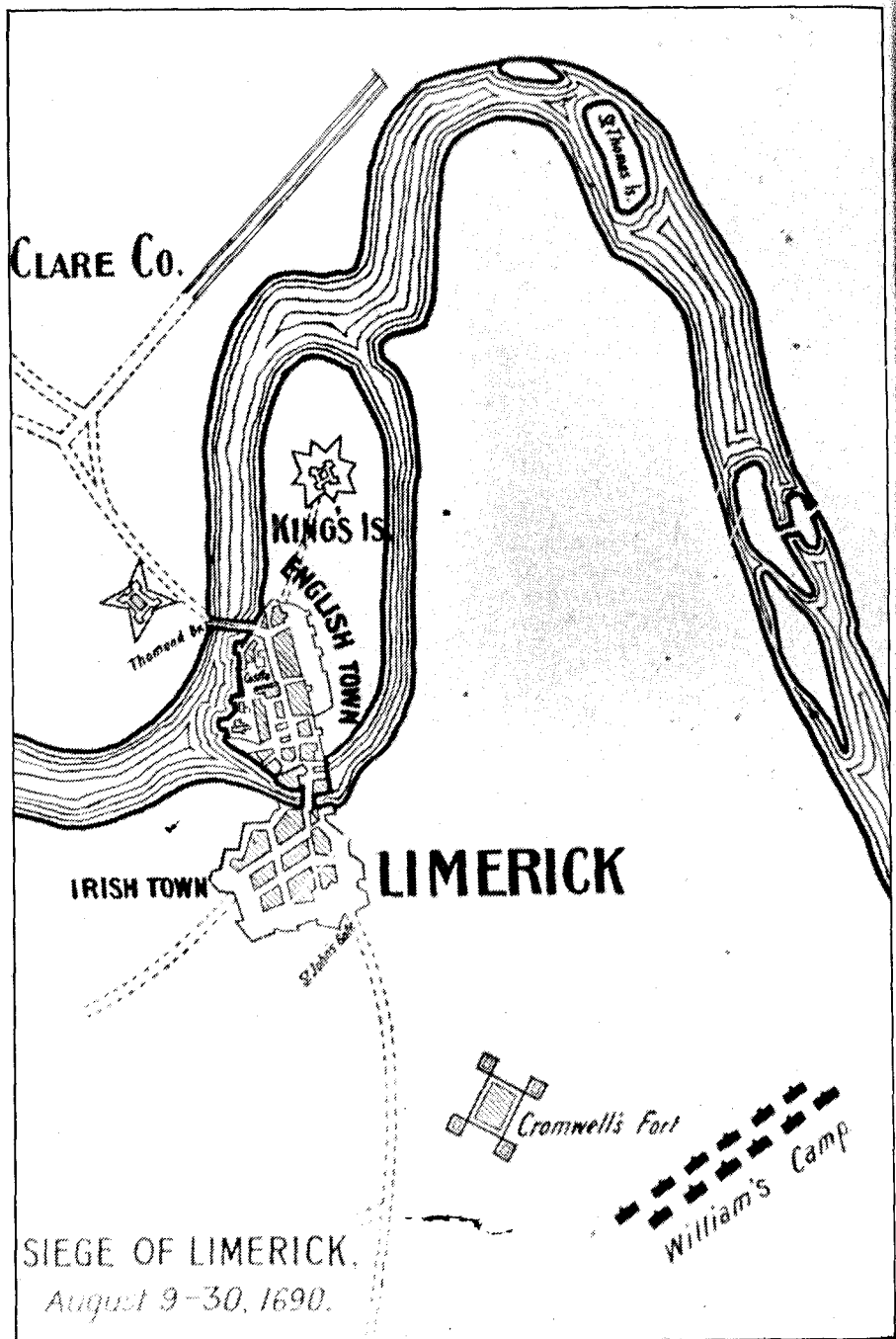
The Irish struggle was viewed quite differently from France, where Louis XIV ruled the strongest state in Europe, and found himself, in 1686, facing the opposition of the League of Augsburg, soon to be joined by William of Orange, the nephew and son-in-law of James II of England. William landed in England, in November, 1688, and usurped the English throne, while James fled to France, early in 1689, where he was graciously received and succoured by his first cousin, Louis. All Ireland, with the exception of Derry and Enniskiller, had rallied to the Catholic James, and this was seen as a heaven-sent opportunity for the French. With French help, Ireland would be held for James, and William would be prevented from participating actively in the war on the Continent. It was a strategy which proved eminently successful for Louis. His Irish investment kept William involved in Ireland for three years, incurring enormous losses in men and money, while his own loss of some 1,200 French troops was as nothing compared to the inflow of some 16,000 after Limerick, in addition to the 5,000 odd members of the Mountcashel Brigade, which had arrived in France in the previous year in exchange for the French contingent sent to Ireland.

The French aid sent to Ireland at this

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period was vastly more substantial than any sent previously, or since, by a

Continental power. It consisted of men, money, arms, ammunition and provisions of all kinds, which were sent throughout the three years of the war, with Ireland eventually becoming so

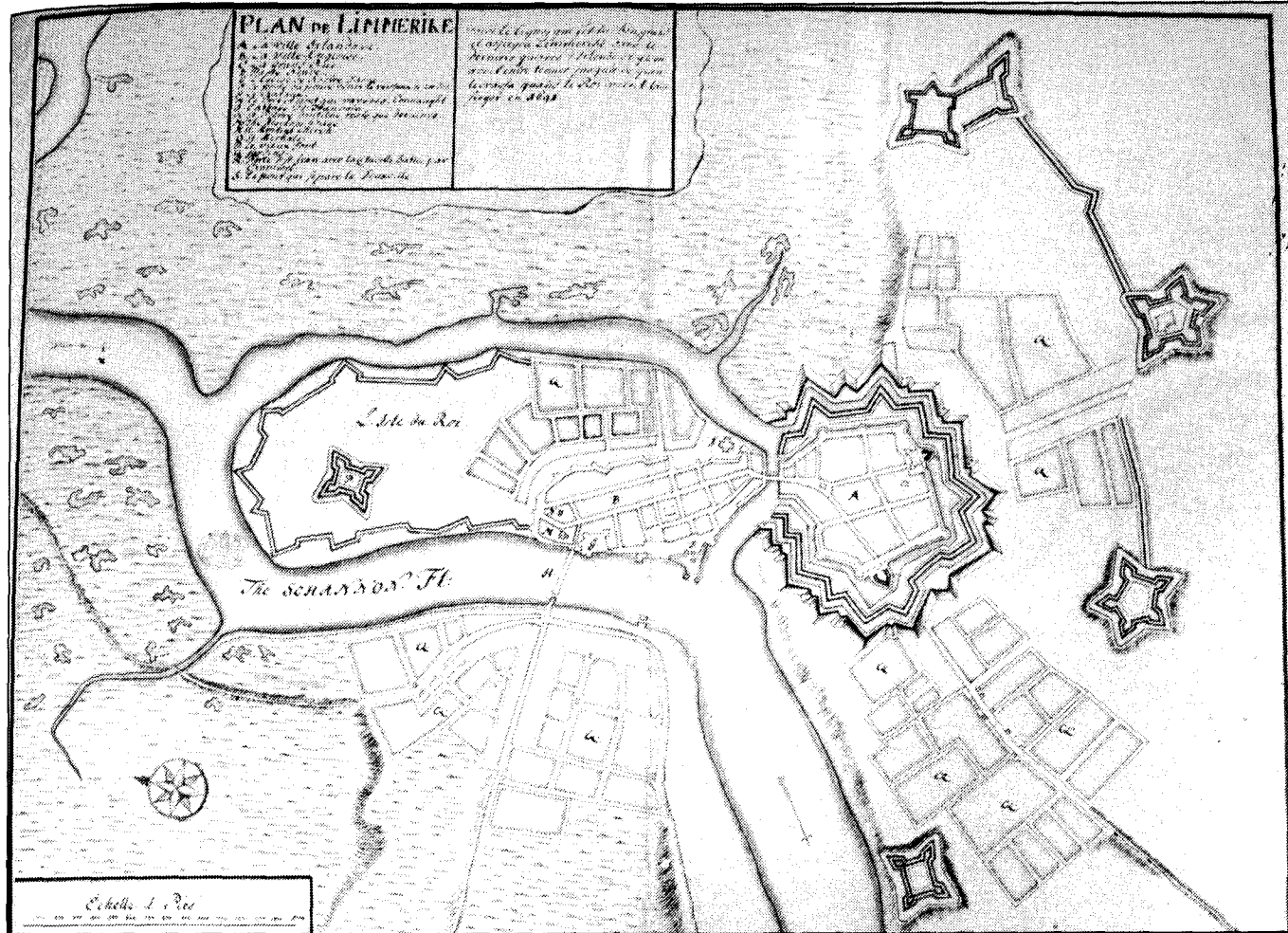


Map of the Siege of Limerick, August, 1690.

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French map of Limerick showing projected fortifications between the sieges 1690-91. The proposed works were not carried out.

devastated that the struggle could not be carried on without French supplies. One has to remember the conditions of the time to appreciate the French effort: the buying and assembly of provisions at the ports; the movement of troops on foot; ships at the mercy of wind, weather and enemy fleets; the arrival in Ireland to a land devoid of roads and transport, without shelter for men or goods; the transition from the most progressive country in Europe to one of the most backward.

It was no wonder that the French sailed for Ireland in good heart, but were not long in the country before they realised the enormity of the difficulties awaiting them. Some French officers came to Ireland with James in March, 1689, while others came in May. The more important of these were Rosen, who was to be marshal of the Jacobite army, Maumont lieutenant-general, Pusignan and Lery major-generals, and Boisseleau brigadier. Louis sent the Comte d'Avaux as his ambassador to James, and Fumeron to be intendant or commissary-general. Pointis was sent to command the artillery, while engineers, artillery officers and commissaries came as well. Other general officers arrived in August, but this first year of French intervention was to impinge very little on the city of Limerick. The port was not

considered suitable for the reception of supplies from France, as the distance was too great from the city to the sea, and the warships could not with safety penetrate too far into the estuary. Besides, it was much further from France than the southern ports of Kinsale, Cork and Bantry.

Limerick was, however, considered as a port of disembarkation for the 7,000 French troops sent to Ireland in 1690 under the command of the Comte de Lauzun, as it was thought that the country round about would provide suitable quarters, and that use could be made of the Shannon for the distribution of the supplies that would come with them.⁽¹⁾ The French War Minister, Louvois, writes to the ambassador to this effect in November, 1689, and instructs him to have the intendant, Fumeron, make the necessary preparations. It was estimated that four battalions could be lodged there in spite of the ruinous state of the houses. M. Fumeron bought grain, gave orders for beer to be brewed, and for the inhabitants of the countryside to bring in horses and provisions for sale to the troops. The town was well provided with previously commandeered fodder, and the surroundings were rich in livestock, especially mutton, so that a contract was made for the supply of meat at one penny a pound. A hospital was set

up for 400 patients, and buildings were made ready for the storage of the supplies which were coming from France, and for those which were already in the town.⁽²⁾ At one stage, James declared that he intended coming to Limerick to meet the French troops, but Fumeron managed to dissuade him from this as it would have endangered the French fleet by disclosing its destination in Ireland, and it would also have been detrimental to the welfare of the troops, because the Court would occupy some of the badly-needed lodgings, and their consumption of provisions would lead to a rise of prices.

However, Kinsale was preferred as the port of disembarkation for the French contingent, which was expected in the spring of 1690. The naval officers declared that the Shannon estuary was full of rocks, that the harbour was bad, and that it would be impossible to sail out of it in a westerly wind. This decision was considered a bad one by the French authorities in Ireland, because Kinsale was a smaller port, quarters and stores were inadequate there, and subsistence and transport would be far more difficult. In the event, the French came to Cork on 22 March, 1690, on the instance of Lieutenant-General d'Anfreville, commander of the fleet, who did not wish to have the entire fleet enter Kinsale, a



proceeding which would have been risky in the extreme.

It had become painfully obvious that the French Court was as inadequately informed on the coast and ports of Ireland as on the nature of the interior and the navigation of the rivers. Reports were being sent from Ireland concerning these matters, but frequently arrived after decisions had been taken in Versailles. The disadvantages of an over-centralized government were becoming apparent, with control being exercised from a distance of about 850 miles from Paris to Dublin. On the other hand, the Irish seemed unable to profit by the French efforts on their behalf, their administration proving completely inadequate to deal with the task in hand.

French engineers had, meanwhile, been working on the fortifications at Limerick. One of these was Lozières d'Astier, who had sailed from Brest on 6 May, 1689, and had hopes of being made engineer-in-chief when M. de Massé was killed at Derry in July. He was disappointed in this hope, but was employed during the winter of 1689-90 working at Athlone, Ardee and Limerick. The French officers reported that the fortifications at Limerick were in a ruinous condition,⁹ and that the workers who were expected there had not yet arrived. The Irish government dragged its feet, and it seemed to the Frenchmen that they were the only people doing anything.

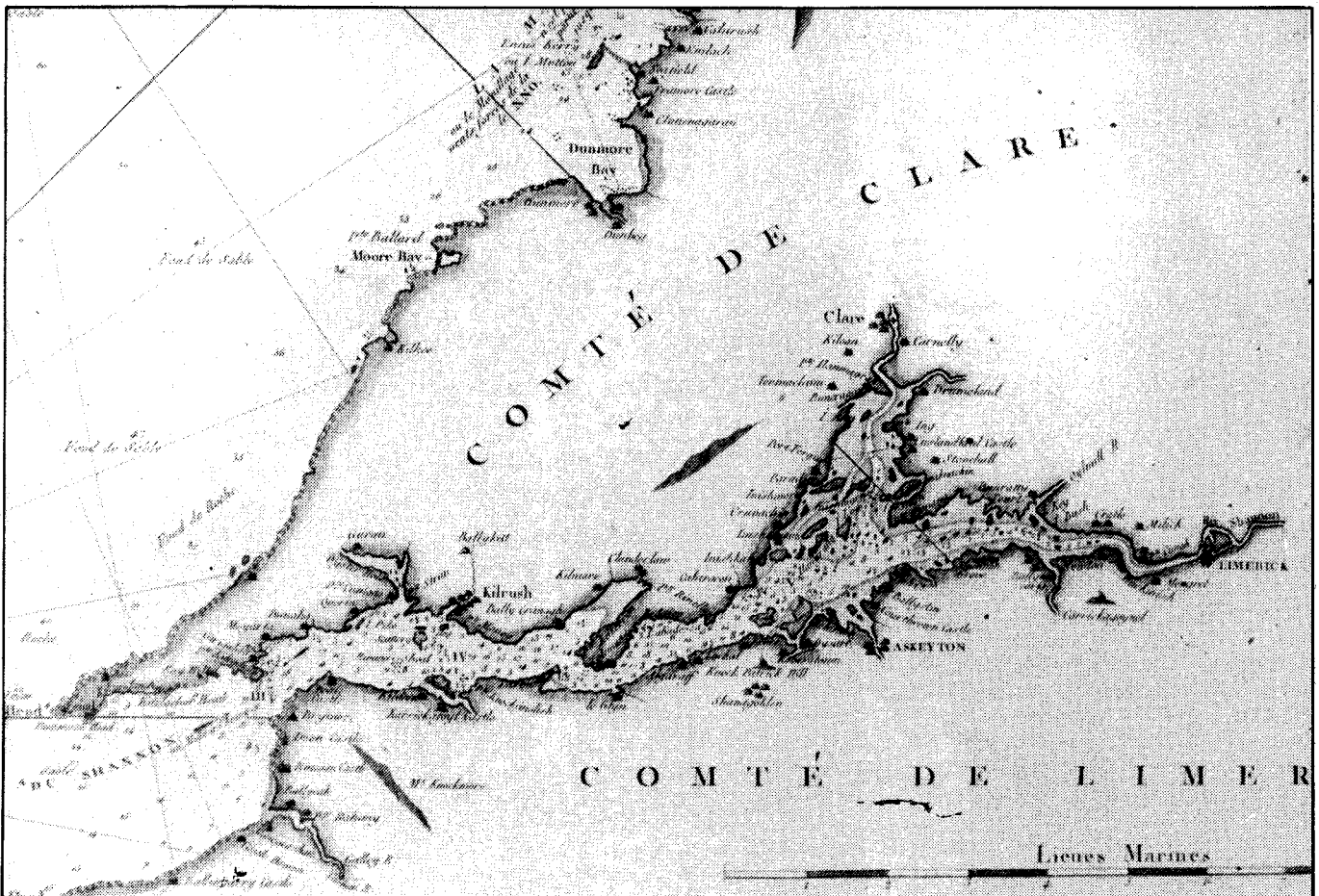


Comte de Lauzun, from a portrait by Lely.

Ambassador d'Avaux, General Rosen and Commissary-General Fumeron returned to France with the fleet. The new commander was the Comte de Lauzun, with La Hoguette as his lieutenant-general, while the new intendant was d'Esgrigny. The difficulties of moving the French supplies from Cork were largely attributed to the inefficiency,

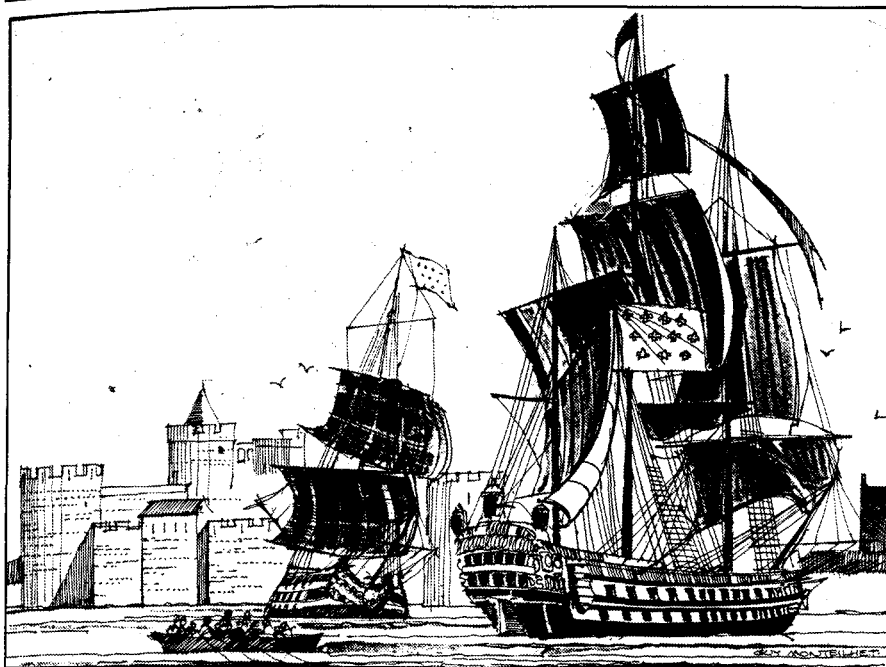
or worse, of Lord Dover. The French troops fell sick in their quarters, and this was attributed to the hardships of the crossing, the bad weather during the disembarkation and on their march to their quarters, the poor quality of the water and beer, and the wretchedness of their accommodation. Four hundred were to die in the 'hospitals', which were hospitals in name only.

Work was now proceeding on the fortifications at Limerick, and supplies of wool and other merchandise were being stored there and at Waterford in readiness for French merchants, who would take these goods in exchange for the supplies they had brought from France. Nine companies of the French regiment of Mérode came to Limerick in May with powder which had come from France. It was considered at this stage that it would be essential to hold Limerick and Kinsale should the Jacobites suffer a defeat, and the French leaders did not feel they could defeat the Williamites with the means at their disposal. Lauzun's instructions were to protect James and preserve the French troops, and these orders were to dictate his actions in the months before the Boyne, and at the battle itself. He was instructed also to be diplomatic in his relations with James and Tyrconnell, and in this he was highly successful. There was a marked absence of that rancour that had existed between James and Rosen in 1689, and between Tyrconnell



French map of the Shannon Estuary.

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The departure of the 'Wild Geese', drawing by Guy Monteillet.

and Saint-Ruth in 1691. This was a negative achievement at best, but the safe return to France of James and the French troops pleased Louis and James's Queen, even if the achievements of the French troops in Ireland reflected little glory on the French army.

The Prince of Orange arrived in Ireland at Carrickfergus on 24 June, 1690, his troops and supplies having preceded him. Events were to move rapidly from then until the battle of the Boyne on 11 July. This battle was considered by the French to have been a rout rather than a battle, and its loss appears to have been due to bad leadership on the part of James and Lauzun. However, the French troops had performed well in the retreat, and had prevented the Williamites from following up their victory with the usual wholesale slaughter of the vanquished.⁽⁶⁾ The remnants of the Jacobite army, with their cannon and treasure, converged on Limerick, which was now to play a significant part in the struggle.

NOTES

1. See Appendix 1, translation of document No. 674 from S. Mulloy (ed.), *Franco-Irish Correspondence, 1689-1692, Vol. I (1983)*.
2. See Appendix 2, translation of document No. 673 from S. Mulloy (ed.), *Franco-Irish Correspondence, 1689-1692, Vol. I (1983)*.
3. See S. Mulloy, French Engineers with the Jacobite army in Ireland, 1689-1691, *Irish Sword*, No. 61 (1983), pp. 222-232. Also Appendix 3, translation of document No. 667 from S. Mulloy (ed.), *Franco-Irish Correspondence, 1689-1692, Vol. I (1983)*.
4. See S. Mulloy, 'French Eye-Witnesses of the Boyne', *Irish Sword*, No. 59 (1982).

APPENDIX I

(Guerre A1 894, No. 164)

Memo on the river at Limerick

This river is called Shannon. Its source is



The river is called Shannon. Its source is near Sligo ...!

near Sligo north of Athlone. Its length is about 180 miles; or more than 60 French leagues. It is not navigable everywhere, because of the very high rocks over which it flows, but from Limerick to the sea, a distance of 60 miles or about 20 French leagues, it carries vessels of from 200 to 800 tons. Those of 800 tons can come to within a league of the town, and those of smaller tonnage down to 400 tons can enter the port of the said town at high ride.

Nearly the entire estuary lies from east to west. Its mouth has a width of three French leagues which gradually decreases to a width of 2,600 to 2,800 yards.

The entrance is very easy and without danger. The only difficulty is a sandbank at Beal Castle point six leagues up river, which extends for about 1,400 to 1,600 yards, but at the edge of the bank there are about eighteen to twenty fathoms of water, and to avoid it, one must pass close to the northern edge. Two leagues further on, there is an island called Scatterry, where men of war can anchor in 10, 12 or 14 fathoms of water, good depth, but since they would be exposed to winds from the south-west, west and north-west, they must advance a further two leagues, where there are three leagues of anchorage from Tarbert to Foynes. The vessels there are sheltered from all winds. There are ten to twenty fathoms of water there, good depth and quite good holding. At this place the river is 2,400 to 2,600 yards wide. There is timber along the whole length of the coast and plentiful drinking water. From Foynes to Limerick is a distance of 9 to 10 leagues, which can be covered in three hours with favourable wind and tide, and in less than two tides when the wind is completely contrary, and at $2/3$ tide one can stand on the bottom everywhere in the river from the said Foynes as far as Limerick.

There is no fortress to prevent entry to the estuary from the sea, but there are places which could be fortified for this purpose cheaply and usefully.

APPENDIX 2

(Guerre A1 894, No. 159B)

List of the Provisions made at Limerick

1,000 barrels of wheat in grain.
150 barrels of wheat in flour.
150,000 brown biscuits for soldiers.
15,000 white biscuits for officers.
3,000 faggots of wood for heating the ovens.
492 barrels of strong beer.
822 barrels of barley for making beer.
2,275 barrels of salted beef.
6,380 hundredweight of hay.
820 hundredweight of straw.
1,678 barrels of oats.
200 beds with bolsters, straw mattresses, blankets and sheets, and all utensils necessary for the care of 400 patients.



APPENDIX 3 (GUERRE A1 894, NO. 155A)

INVENTORY OF THE CANNON AND AMMUNITION AT LIMERICK.

Brass	Metals	Iron	Firstly. Cannon of the Irish citadel Inches in Diameter	Weight of balls	Number of balls
2			5 1/2	18	386
1			4 3/4	12	314
		1	3 1/4	4	
		3	3	3	
		1	3 1/2	5	
		1 split unserviceable			
		4	3 1/4	4	
			Irishtown, Balls Tower		
1			8	63	194
2			4	6	
			Mungret Tower		
1			4 1/2	12	
1			4	6	
1			4 1/2	9	
			Red Man's Tower		
		1	3	5	
			Long Tower near Mungret Tower		
		1	3 1/2	5	
			Bridge Tower		
		1	3 1/4	4	
		1	3	3	
		1	2 1/2	2	
			King's Castle, Castle Yard		
1			7	42	281
1			4 3/4	12	
		2	3 1/2	5	
		1	3	3	
			Tower in the middle of the Castle		
2			6	24	421
			Stable Tower		
2			4	6	
			Gate Tower		
1			2 1/2	2 1/2	
			Bridge Tower		
1			4	6	
			Balls Tower at the Quay		
			3 1/4		
			Water Tower		
1			4 1/2	12	
			Total		
			Brass cannon	19	
			Iron cannon	18	
			General total	137	
			Total of cannon balls	1,596	
			Plus a brass mortar of 12 inches		
			Bombs of	11 1/2	107
			Bombs of	13 3/4	64
			Bombs of	15	147
			Total of bombs		318
			Loaded Grenades	83	
			Empty Grenades	321	
				404	

MUNITIONS OF WAR

Barrels of powder	73	Pairs of boots, unserviceable	14	Chains for draught oxen	12
Barrels of musket balls	13	Broken pack-saddles for horses	72	Axes for cutting timber	3
Bales of match	146	Leather girths for said		Large iron hoops for naves	7
Cuirasses, serviceable	260	pack-saddles, serviceable	57	Iron axle for wheels	1
Helmets, unserviceable	197	Cruppers, serviceable	84	[?] Blunderbuss	1
Muskets, serviceable	12	Haversacks for the soldiers	680	Pieces of wood to stock muskets	100
Musket barrels	196	Ramrods for muskets	800	Pickaxe handles	600
Musket barrels, unserviceable	460	Iron-shod shovels	435	Pieces of wood to make	
Pairs of pistols, broken	51	Shovels, unserviceable	17	wheel spokes	400
Pairs of pistols, without rests	63	Halberds without handles	152	Wooden pegs	400
Pistol barrels, unserviceable	80	Serviceable halberds	31	Mortar carriage	1
Pairs of holsters, unserviceable	200	Pickaxes	58	Small iron mills for grinding corn	11
Arquebuse barrels	3	Barrels of nails for shoeing horses	3	Brass petards	3
Barrels of sulphur	1	Barrel of crofit [?] for pricking horses	1	Breast-straps for horses,	
Barrels of saltpetre	3	Basket full of iron for tipping staffs	1	serviceable	96
Pairs of boots, serviceable	77	Iron handles for querns	36	Mounted cannon, serviceable	4
		Shields	6	Mounted cannon, unserviceable	3
		Barrels of iron pieces for		Steel bars	7
		mounting on axles	3	Hand-barrows for carrying earth	240