A Chaírdle,

Chief of Staff’s Message
To the Men and Women of Óglach na hÉireann

Since my last written message to all ranks of Óglach na hÉireann, Ireland and the world have been gripped by Covid-19. For most people, daily life has changed beyond recognition. For the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps, at home and abroad, our routine and Framework Operations continue as normal. We have had to adapt and change to protect our nation – through Operation Fortitude - to counter the Coronavirus.

‘Fortitude’ is defined as the demonstration of great strength of mind to endure adversity with courage over a long period of time. Today as Óglach na hÉireann women and men fulfil their duties through Operation Fortitude remember that this is us, the military, playing our role as part of the national response to combat this virus. As nurses, doctors and many other healthcare professionals are to the fore, we remain close enough to make a difference and will continue to support them by covering emerging gaps and giving practical help through the HSE and other agencies. Be assured that the General Staff’s effort is focussed on the medical force protection of our personnel internally, which allows us to contribute to the national effort externally.

The establishment of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in McKee Barracks for the duration of this operation brings together military planning and specialist capabilities from all services, including our Reserve Force, and demonstrates how we deliver on our intent to ‘Strengthen the Nation’. On the ground, for the men and women of Óglach na hÉireann carrying out ATCA operations this ‘Joint’ capability may not seem vital, as your unit chain of command remains unaffected. However, it allows our entire organisation to plan, deploy, monitor and analyse our daily and future operations with the HSE who are now embedded with the JTF. The JTF also provides the many Government Departments and Agencies countering Covid-19 a “one-stop-shop” as they seek assistance from us in the coming months. For example, we continue liaison and outreach with An Garda Síochána, Dublin Port, Dublin Airport Authority and the Dept. of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

I have enormous pride in the loyalty, dedication and commitment that you have shown. Soldiers, sailors, airmen and women, from line to technical and medical, testing, tracing, transporting, building, planning, communicating, caring and more our response has not been found wanting. We have shown our willingness, ability and competence in spades. Everyone should take confidence in this competence. The General Staff, Formation Commanders and I have seen – and have also heard from many people - of the readiness, professionalism and practical Values in Action that these operations have shown. It takes physical courage to willingly conduct testing for Covid-19. Our Government has rightly
placed a strong emphasis on community spirit. Your military support in your area of operations is helping address gaps in your community in a time of crisis. Your leadership in this regard has once again proven Óglaigh na hÉireann to be is ready, willing and able.

I am highly impressed with the many innovative measures undertaken by members of Óglaigh na hÉireann to counter the challenges of Covid-19. For example, we were central to the launch of AB Decontamination Wipes; they have proven to be a safe, effective and environmentally friendly wipe to defeat viruses and other bio-threats. Also, the JTF continues to collaborate with the HSE and academia seeking avenues to drive innovation in other areas that can counter the spread of the virus, such as providing screens in vehicles and aircraft to ensure our own force protection, to name but a few of the solutions developed.

The General Staff and I are keenly aware that while Ireland has been asked to “stay at home”, some of our units overseas can’t get home as planned. We fully understand that this has caused frustration and disappointment to our units abroad and their families at home. We have used the Air Corps to rotate some smaller missions, but this is not possible for our larger missions. I have personally engaged with the Force Commander in Lebanon and with UN HQ, New York trying to minimise delays. We all know that military life brings many unique challenges, however, the support of our families is challenged and brought into sharp focus at times like this. Please be assured that the General Staff have worked hard to minimise rotation delays as much as possible, to provide accurate information, and all the while working within UN guidelines.

For families everywhere, military life and the current restrictions due to Covid-19 can place additional pressures on everyone. Their forbearance make our careers possible and once again I thank them sincerely for their sacrifice. When you get a chance, please take time to recognise these pressures and thank your spouse, partner and family for their support. Also remember, our Personnel Support Services remain available to lend support for those that require it. Factual information is in our member’s area on www.military.ie. In addition, a dedicated two-way channel (covidinfo@military.ie) has also been set up for all personnel and their families to submit questions that our team will do their best to answer.

Óglaigh na hÉireann will continue to maintain tailored Framework Operations in tandem with our support for the Covid-19 effort. Subject to national guidelines we have suspended a lot of our routine activities. It is my intent to recommence a more normal work routine in line with appropriate advice. The problems, issues, commitments and pressures that existed for Óglaigh na hÉireann pre-Covid-19 still remain and rest assured the General Staff are planning for the future and want everyone to contribute to the ongoing Lessons Learned process for Operation Fortitude.

While recruitment is temporarily on hold, it must re-commence. An important part is the Re-Enlistment campaign that will assist our Retention effort. While other Agencies have launched emergency “re-joiner” programmes to deal with the current crisis, our “re-joiners” are intended to stay when this crisis ends, to bolster our capability skills gaps. Our shortages were identified before this crisis for reasons we are well aware of, and we want
any returnees to remain in service post-Covid and feel valued. If you think an ex-service man or woman might be interested, please point them in the right direction.

As you know the Minister for Defence has authorised the payment of ATCA and MESA Allowances to personnel deployed for Operation Fortitude tasks. In addition, in recognition that Ogláigh na hÉireann may require surge capacity in certain technical skills, unestablished technical pay currently not provided in DFR CS4, will be paid to personnel who are deployed for Covid-19 duties, having met certain conditions. Be assured that we remain engaged with the Representative Associations, and I value their constructive approach. I will continue to advocate for appropriate pay and allowances even during this period of crisis.

Our duty has always been, first and foremost, to defend and protect Ireland and our citizens. This does not change, but right now that also means maintaining our own resilience, both mentally and physically, in order to remain ready to respond professionally as we strive to Strengthen the Nation. As you wear your uniform every day remember the words of General Richard Mulcahy – one of our founding fathers - who reflected that our uniform “does not make us less people, it is a cloak of our service, a curtailer of our weaknesses and an amplifier of our strengths.” Our uniform and our values are key differentiators of our service. Operation Fortitude, like all other large scale national operations, will be won by you. Your leadership, allied to the human factors of will, confidence and commitment, when combined within the framework of our values are what will pull us through. The women and men of Ogláigh na hÉireann play a critical role in under-writing the will of the Irish people. Our uniform, our presence and our posture provides visible confirmation of that support.

MARK MELLETT
VICE ADMIRAL
CHIEF OF STAFF