



THE DEFENCE FORCES MAGAZINE

AN COSANTÓIR



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na hÉireann
IRISH DEFENCE FORCES



JUL / AUG 2026



PRECISION | LEADERSHIP | RESILIENCE



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From the editor

This edition's front cover features a photograph by Pte Tom Halpin (AR), D Company, 7 Infantry Battalion, the winner of our Social Media Photo of the Month competition. We'd like to thank everyone who took the time to enter and encourage all members to keep an eye on Connect and our social media channels for future competitions. Alongside the Photo of the Month competition, we also ran an On Parade competition through the Connect App, which received an excellent response. Those who submitted photographs were entered into a draw to win the new An Cosantóir race T-shirt, with entries showcasing the professionalism, pride and camaraderie that exist throughout the Defence Forces. While gathering articles for this edition, the team was also busy preparing for two key events on our calendar: Overseas Family Support Day and the An Cosantóir 10K later this year. Both events continue to be greatly valued by serving personnel, veterans and Defence Forces families. As always, we hope you enjoy this edition of An Cosantóir. The magazine is at its best when it reflects the experiences, achievements and stories of Defence Forces personnel at home and overseas. If you have an interesting story to tell, an exercise or deployment to highlight, or photographs that capture life in uniform, we encourage you to get in touch with us. Your contributions help ensure An Cosantóir continues to represent the people and professionalism of Óglaigh na hÉireann.

"The soldier is the Army. No army is better than its soldiers." — General George S. Patton

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AN COSANTÓIR



Manager

Comdt Helen Hosback
Capt Claire Foley
Info@military.ie
045-445306

Editor

Sgt Eric Ryan
Connect@military.ie
045-445307

Photographer

A/M Sam Gibney
Photo@military.ie

Admin Staff

Cpl Martin Bennett
Cpl Christopher Kenny
Pte Robbie Lacey
Requisitions@military.ie
045-445307

DF Webmaster

Sgt Louise Kehoe
Webmaster@military.ie
045-445307

Designer

JM Publishing & Media
Arklow, Co.Wicklow, Ireland
Tel: +353(0)87 1344135
Email: Info@jmpublishing.ie

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Front Cover

Photo by – Pte Tom Halpin, Winner of our social media photo of the month competition. A recruit preparing a hot brew during an exercise

Back Cover

ARW SOF-Q Course poster

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ARTICLE BY CAPT JACK FEENEY

PRECISION UNDER PRESSURE

*International
Sniper
Competition
Ireland 2026*

The International Sniper Competition Ireland 2026 brought together some of the finest military marksmen from Ireland and abroad for four days of demanding competition across the Defence Forces Training Centre (DFTC) and the Glen of Imaal, County Wicklow. Hosted by the Infantry Weapons Wing (IWW), the event tested competitors in marksmanship, fieldcraft, physical fitness, communication and teamwork, while fostering professional relationships between allied military forces.

Seventeen teams competed this year. Six international teams travelled from the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Canada, Croatia and the United States, while eleven national teams participated, six of the seven infantry battalions were represented from the Irish Defence Forces. Several battalions fielded both senior and novice teams, highlighting the continued development of sniper capability across the Defence Forces.

International teams began arriving on 14 May and were welcomed ahead of the competition. On 15 May, all international competitors attended Kilworth Range for a dedicated weapon zeroing day. This preparation phase allowed teams to confirm the accuracy of their rifles and optics while becoming familiar with local conditions. The range was prepared and managed to an exceptionally high standard by Range Warden Sgt Byrne, whose professionalism and support were greatly appreciated.

The competition officially commenced on

Monday, 18 May, when teams assembled at the Infantry Weapons Wing. Competitors received an opening address from Commandant of the Military College, Colonel Ó Fátharta, and Officer Commanding Infantry Weapons Wing, Commandant Lanigan. Following the opening remarks, teams received a comprehensive safety briefing and underwent a full equipment and kit inspection.

Phase One took place across two ranges within the Defence Forces Training Centre. The opening phase consisted of challenging stands that combined rifle and pistol shooting with physically demanding tasks. Competitors were required to demonstrate accurate marksmanship while operating under stress, fatigue and time pressure. The stands also tested communication between sniper pairs, decision-making and the ability to perform effectively in demanding operational scenarios.

The standard of competition was exceptionally high from the outset, with teams displaying impressive professionalism and skill. Success depended not only on shooting ability but also on teamwork, fitness and composure under pressure.

Following Phase One, competitors relocated to the Glen of Imaal, one of Ireland's premier military training environments. Day Two began with Phase Two on the Anti-Armour Range, where teams faced stands designed to test the full spectrum of sniper skills. Competitors were challenged in target detection, observation, range estimation and precision engagement across varied terrain and changing conditions.





As the day progressed, teams experienced what many described as all four seasons in a single day. Rain, sunshine, low cloud and shifting winds continuously altered conditions, forcing competitors to adapt their shooting solutions and tactical approaches. The ability to adjust quickly and maintain concentration proved critical.

Day Two concluded with Phase Three on Coan Range within the Glen of Imaal. By this stage, fatigue was playing a significant role, yet competitors continued to perform at an exceptionally high standard. Every point became increasingly valuable as teams battled for positions on the leader board.

Day Three saw teams move to Ballyvaghan in the Glen of Imaal for Phase Four. While competitors had already endured difficult weather during the opening stages, Day Three introduced perhaps the most challenging factor: strong and persistent winds.

Wind remains one of the most difficult variables for any sniper to master, particularly when engaging targets at extended ranges. Throughout the day, competitors made constant calculations and adjustments while reading complex wind conditions across the range. Despite these challenges, shooting quality remained remarkably high. Teams demonstrated the professionalism and adaptability expected of elite military snipers, relying on their training and experience to overcome the demanding conditions.

One of the most impressive achievements occurred during Day Three when Private Bolger of 3 Infantry Battalion, competing as a novice sniper, successfully engaged a target at 1,400 metres. The shot ultimately stood as the longest successful engagement recorded during the competition and represented an outstanding accomplishment for a first-time competitor.

The fourth and final day began with what many participants regarded as the toughest stand: the "Sniper Race." Designed to test endurance, teamwork and marksmanship under pressure, the stand required sniper pairs to follow a designated route to the finish line while carrying their equipment and managing physical fatigue.

Along the route, teams encountered a pistol stand where

they received ammunition before moving to the firing line and engaging their target. Once completed, competitors continued to a rifle stand where they again received ammunition before engaging a second target. The stand captured the essence of modern sniper operations, requiring competitors to perform accurately while physically exhausted and under significant time pressure.

Following the team events, attention turned to one of the most anticipated traditions: The Longest Shot Competition. The standing record had been established during the previous International Sniper Competition Ireland in 2023 with a successful hit at 1,424 metres. For the 2026 competition, organisers increased the challenge by placing the target at 1,510 metres.

Despite several determined attempts from highly skilled competitors, no successful hit was recorded at the extended distance. Nevertheless, Private Bolger's 1,400-metre shot earlier in the competition remained one of the standout moments of the week and highlighted the exceptional standard of shooting demonstrated throughout the event.

With all competitive events complete, participants, staff and guests moved to Coolmoney Camp in the Glen of Imaal for the prize-giving parade and competition function. The ceremony recognised the outstanding performances of competitors while celebrating the professionalism and camaraderie displayed throughout the week.

The Best International Team award and Overall Competition Winners title were claimed by the United States team of Specialist Angerman and Specialist Zwiers. Their consistent performances across all phases secured them first place overall. Specialist Swiers also received the Sergeant John "Killer" Killeen Memorial Trophy for Best Pistol Shooter.

The International Runner-Up Team award was presented to the Belgian pairing of Sergeant LeQueux and Corporal Lsmkin, whose strong performances kept them among the leading teams throughout the competition.

In the national category, the Best National Team award and Overall Competition Runner-Up position went to the 27 Infantry Battalion team of Corporal McQuaid and Sergeant Fitzpatrick. Further success for the battalion came through their novice team of Private Sipoteanu and Private McKeown, who secured the Runner-Up National Team award and capped off an outstanding competition for the developing generation of Defence Forces snipers.

While the competitors deservedly received recognition for their performances, the event's success depended equally on those working behind the scenes. Special appreciation to Officer Commanding Infantry Weapons Wing, Commandant Lanigan, and Company Sergeant Infantry Weapons Wing, Company Sergeant O'Malley, for their extensive planning and coordination.

Special mention goes to Sergeant Cole, who directed the competition and continues dedicating significant time to developing sniper capability throughout the Irish Defence Forces. His commitment, along with the DF sniper community, to maintaining high training standards and excellence was evident throughout the event.

The International Sniper Competition Ireland 2026 again demonstrated the professionalism, skill and dedication of military snipers from Ireland and abroad which the IWW hopes to showcase again in 2027. Through four days of challenging competition, difficult weather and elite-level performances, participants showcased the qualities defining the modern military sniper: precision, discipline, resilience and teamwork. As competitors departed the Glen of Imaal, they did so having strengthened international relationships, shared valuable knowledge and upheld the highest standards of military excellence.



ENGINEERING FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

The QRF-Engineer Partnership in UNIFIL

ARTICLE BY CAPT BRIAN O'FARRELL AND LT LUKE SWITZER

Captain Brian O'Farrell

I was commissioned with the 98th Cadet Class in 2023 and am currently deployed as an Engineering Officer with the 128 Infantry Battalion serving under a United Nations mandate as part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

My current overseas appointment commanding the Engineer Platoon is a culmination of The Army Engineers Graduate Programme (AEGP). The AEGP is an elite five-year leadership and professional development programme, which encompasses a cadetship, master's programme, home unit and overseas posting. Prior to my overseas appointment, I was posted to the 2 Field Engineer Company in Custume Barracks, where I lead the Engineer Recce Platoon as part of the unit's Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC) effort. The AEGP has now culminated in my current six-month deployment to Lebanon.

2IC to the Engineer platoon is Sgt Nick Fahy. Having also participated in the OCC effort as the Advanced Search Team (AST) Platoon sergeant, he has completed many military search courses and overseas deployments. As a result, he brings a wealth of experience, knowledge and guidance to the team. The Engineer platoon consists of personnel from across the DF with a wide variety of trades, and skills which are required for the broad range of taskings in the Area of Operations.

Lieutenant Luke Switzer

I joined the Defence Forces in 2014 and have spent most of my career serving with 1 Brigade Cavalry Squadron, Cork. Having been promoted to Sergeant in 2023, I applied and was selected for the 12th Potential Officer Class, ultimately commissioning as a Lieutenant in 2025. I've undertaken two previous deployments to Lebanon, serving as a Corporal on both. My previous overseas deployments provided me with significant operational experience and a strong understanding of the mission. Having previously served as an NCO in the mission area, I have a thorough appreciation of the roles and responsibilities of those within the Quick Reaction Force (QRF).

I am currently deployed with UNIFIL as the Reconnaissance Commander for the QRF, where I lead Quick Reaction Team (QRT) 1 in conducting route reconnaissance, route clearance, and rapid response operations across our area of responsibility.

The QRF is made up primarily of Cavalry Corps personnel from units across Ireland, including Sgt Darren Cronin and Sgt Phil O'Keeffe from my home unit. Having completed multiple courses, deployments and training exercises together over the past decade, we bring a wide range of experience, professionalism, and cohesion to the team, enabling us to respond effectively to the wide range of tasks assigned to the QRF.

Capt Brian O'Farrell

Lt Luke Switzer



Engineer Platoon and QRF Role in IRISHPOLBATT, UNIFIL

Prior to deployment to the mission area, the 128 Inf Battalion conducted pre-deployment training in Ireland. QRF and Engineer members of the battalion underwent an intensive period of collective training, culminating in the Mission Readiness Exercise in the Glen of Imaal. This training emphasised the importance of interoperability, tactical proficiency, and mission specific skills required to operate

effectively in UNIFIL. Through combined exercises and realistic training serials, both elements developed the necessary procedures to conduct route clearance in order to maintain freedom of movement and respond effectively to a variety of operational tasks within our area of operation.

Since deployment to the Mission Area, as the commanders for their respective cells, Capt O'Farrell and Lt Switzer work closely together to support IRISHPOLBATT operations. The integration of Cavalry and Engineer capabilities provides a versatile and responsive force capable of addressing a broad range of operational challenges.

Traditionally, these Corps have

operated independently at home and abroad, however due to the complexity currently present in the AO, this partnership first established by the 127 Inf Battalion highlights the necessity of this cohesive relationship.

A combination of QRF and Engineer platoon, with support from the medical section are the battalion's rapid response elements that are the first to be tasked to a major incident within the AO. The QRF is made up of two Quick Reaction Teams. QRT 1 is comprised of recce dismounts in two armoured vehicles on standby at ten minutes notice to move, with QRT 2, the secondary element of the QRF maintaining a standby of thirty minutes notice to move. In a similar way, the Engineer Platoon, consisting of a Fire crew which has a three-minute response time and a route clearance team in a High-Mobility Engineer Excavator (HMEE) which has ten minutes notice to move, provide a versatile unit capable of deploying a highly adaptable force on behalf of the battalion.

Since deployment, the QRF and Engineers have cleared routes required for movement by identifying and clearing any potential threats or hazards. The QRF element deploys their specialist capability of recce combined with providing overwatch and security. In turn this allows the Engineers freedom of action to conduct an advanced search of potential hazards before deploying specialist armoured clearance assets. The result of these route clearances facilitates the freedom of movement for U.N. personnel and local civilian population.

These clearance operations have been vital to the mobility and sustainment of IRISHPOLBATT in the non-permissive environment of Lebanon. Due to the extensive damage to supply routes in the AO, there has been a search element required to be embedded in all operational movements.

One such operation that included a response to a fire occurred early in the deployment of the 128 Inf Battalion to the mission area. This required QRF and AST assets to clear and secure a safe route and area for IRISHPOLBATT Firefighters to extinguish a fire in vicinity of a U.N. Outpost 6-41. This outpost, located within the IRISHPOLBATT AO, is manned by U.N. soldiers from the French Army. Due to the proximity of the outpost to Camp Shamrock, IRISHPOLBATT Firemen have a technical agreement with the French Contingent to intervene in the event of a fire. This cooperation strengthens inter-contingent relations. Prior to the response of this incident, the battalion crisis action team (CAT) conducted a situation analysis before deploying Irish troops to the scene. The dynamics of the situation were continuously evolving, with intelligence suggesting that the root cause of the fire was due to a downed drone with a possible explosive payload. This equated to three main hazards that were identified by the CAT; launching into a kinetic hostile environment, operating within the AO at night, and the possibility of an explosive device on site of the fire. The complexity of the situation required the simultaneous deployment of a variety of skilled personnel. Armoured vehicles, manned by QRT 1, provided navigation and overwatch, AST operating in the armoured HMEE, provided mobility and clearance finally allowing the fire crew to tackle the fire safely.

The search and clearance operational arrangement between QRF and ENGRs is built on mutual trust, shared training, and operational experience. This strong partnership between these two elements ensures they can respond rapidly to emerging situations and deliver a capable, adaptable, and effective force asset wherever required across the mission area. Going forward these two elements will continue to deploy in the AO, to facilitate the battalion's commitment to UN Mandate 1701.



APC Route Clearance



128 Inf Bn Recce Troop



128 Inf Bn Engineers



BUILDING INTEROPERABILITY FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS

ARTICLE BY COMDT COLM KAVANAGH

The ability to communicate, share information and operate alongside international partners has become an essential requirement for modern military operations. Whether supporting United Nations peacekeeping or European Union missions, interoperability underpins operational success by enabling different nations to operate together in increasingly complex environments.

Recognising this importance, the Defence Forces deployed three CIS Corps personnel, as observers, to the recent Coalition Warrior Interoperability Exercise (CWIX), at NATO Joint Force Training Centre, Bydgoszcz Poland. This provided prospects to identify opportunities for Irish participation from 2027 at one of the world's largest technical interoperability exercises.

What is CWIX?

CWIX is NATO's annual technical interoperability exercise. It brings together military communications specialists, engineers and software developers from NATO allies, Partnership for Peace Nations and

approved industry partners to test national command, control and communications systems interoperability. Each year, thousands of participants attend the exercise to validate new technologies, assess interoperability against recognised standards and identify technical improvements before deployment on operations.

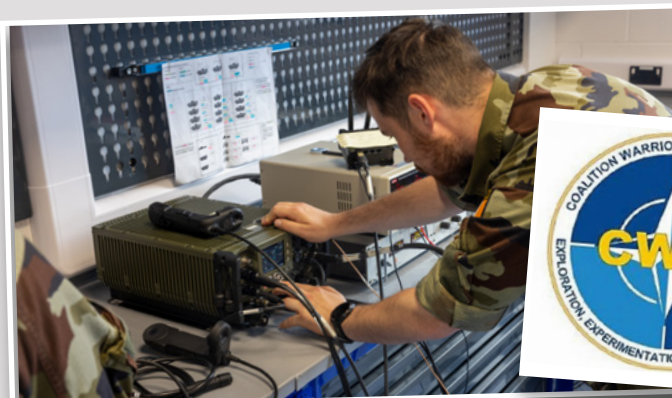
As a Partnership for Peace Nation and an Affiliate C member within Federated Mission Networking (FMN), Ireland has the opportunity to participate in this collaborative environment. Participation allows the Defence Forces to test its own systems against internationally recognised standards and ensure compatibility with those of partner nations.

Observing Today to Participate Tomorrow

The Defence Forces observer delegation attended CWIX 2026 with a clear objective to understand how Ireland could participate effectively in future exercises.

The delegation observed interoperability testing across a broad range of capability areas which included tactical applications, radio integration, Federated Mission Networking and Software Defined Radio (SDR) waveforms. More than 3,000 personnel representing over 25 nations participated in the exercise, making CWIX an invaluable opportunity to engage directly with military experts, capability developers and technical specialists.

The visit also enabled Defence Forces personnel to engage with technical specialists from other military organisations, NATO agencies and approved industry partners. These discussions provided valuable insight into current interoperability challenges, emerging technological developments and practical approaches to capability development.





share operational information during multinational missions. FMN establishes common standards that allow different national systems to connect and exchange information effectively as opposed to each nation using identical equipment.

Developing Capability through Partnership

CWIX differs from traditional exercises in that it places significant emphasis on collaboration and knowledge sharing. Network engineers, specialists and military communication experts work together to solve interoperability challenges that can affect multinational operations.

For Ireland, this collaborative approach provides access to a network of experienced partners who have already developed similar capability. Opportunities to further develop this collaboration exist in the participation with partner nations and through smaller exercises such as a Nordic FMN exercise, assisting the Defence Forces build both the technical capability and personnel expertise required for future CWIX participation.

Planning for the Future

The Defence Forces continues to modernise its communications and information systems to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected operational environment. Participation at CWIX provides an opportunity to demonstrate Irish technical capability, validate new communications systems and strengthen relationships with partner nations to ensure effective operational capability during multi-national co-operation.



A Focused Irish Contribution

Given the broad range of disciplines represented at CWIX, the Defence Forces is aiming to concentrate its efforts on two Focus Areas that directly support operational effectiveness – Software Defined Radio Digital Waveform Interoperability and Federated Mission Networking.

Software Defined Radio Digital Waveform Interoperability

The Defence Forces is currently implementing a new generation of Thales SDR radios as part of its tactical communications modernisation programme. Participation in CWIX would allow Irish personnel to verify interoperability between IRISH SDR and partner nation radios. Testing against other military and NATO-approved industry platforms provides valuable technical assurance and delivers multinational interoperability building on national capability. Importantly, CWIX allows nations to identify and resolve any interoperability issues in a controlled environment before an operational deployment.

Federated Mission Networking (FMN)

The second focus area would be the participation in FMN assessment, verification and validation (AV&V). FMN provides the common standards and technical architecture that enable participating nations to securely

The 2026 Defence Forces observer delegation successfully identified priority capability areas, established valuable international contacts and confirmed the Defence Forces ability to contribute meaningfully to future interoperability activities.

As the CIS Corps continues the rollout of new tactical communications systems and develops greater alignment with FMN standards, CWIX offers the platform to test, validate and improve these capabilities. By ensuring that Irish communications systems are able to achieve and maintain interoperability with those of partner nations, the CIS Corp will ensure the Defence Forces has the capability to contribute effectively to multinational operations, and remain a capable, interoperable and technologically prepared force for future missions.



ERASMUS

CIS TTS STUDENT SELECTED FOR ADVANCED POWER ELECTRONICS COURSE

ARTICLE BY SGMN SHANE CORCORAN

I am currently a final-year student on the CIS Technician Training-to-Specialisation (TTS) programme at SETU. The final year of the course focuses on advanced communications, electronics, networking and engineering systems, culminating in a major technical project. My project involved the design of a battery management system for the SETU Mars Rover team, and the technical nature of this work led to my selection for an intensive international engineering programme in power electronics at the University of Vitoria-Gasteiz in Spain.

The selection for the ERASMUS programme was first mentioned to me during the third-year projects interim presentations focused on the progress of the projects to that date. The content of the Mars Rover battery management system closely resembled the material on the ERASMUS programme as both dealt with the topic - power in electronics. The course was recommended to me by Diarmuid O'Briain, the Head of the Department of Engineering in the university Vitoria-Gasteiz in Spain, and the military liaison officer, Keith Smyth, assisted with organising a place. Once my name was put forward, I was placed into the pool with other engineering students who applied with relevant projects. The academic department then nominated the students for the trip, and me and another student from robotics were chosen to attend the programme and represent the University. Once I was successfully nominated, the administrative department began assisting us with both the completion of the ERASMUS application forms and the required documentation for the trip, as well as organising a Microsoft Teams meeting with the instructional staff at the University of Vitoria-Gasteiz.

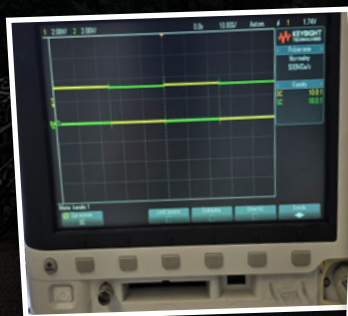
The ERASMUS course which focused on power electronics was facilitated by the university Vitoria-Gasteiz located in the Basque country of Spain. The course was a very rewarding experience and highly beneficial for my 3rd year project as part of the SETU Mars Rover team. The course focused on the theory and science behind power converters and how they might be employed in different applications. The course was mainly taught through group work allowing the students to work in groups giving a different perspective from students around Europe. The supporting theory lectures were very insightful, and I learned a lot about the application of buck and boost converters alongside IGPT (Insulated-Gate Bipolar Transistor).

The period of the course was one week and during the first two days of the course, the lectures focused on the background

knowledge of the buck converters which we would later design and assemble in the laboratory. Tuesday afternoon & Wednesday students on the course formed teams in the Lab and began designing and testing the buck converters. The converters were assembled and soldered on PCBs and the readings tested and verified by designing a simulation on MATLAB. This was my first experience utilising MATLAB, and the lecturers were very helpful and understanding when showcasing the versatility of MATLAB simulations. Later in the week, guest speakers from major electronic companies around Europe including CEGASA a leading manufacturer of Lithium battery banks and a guest speaker who formally worked for the European space agency (ESA) attended the course to provide lectures in their area of expertise. These lectures were invaluable in relation to my project a battery management system for the Mars Rover project and provided me with new implementation ideas for the final artefact.

Outside of the academic programme, the University arranged a tour of the city of Vitoria Gasteiz and a tour of the Santa Maria Cathedral in the city showcasing the diverse history of the region. Thursday night saw the lecturers organise a "Pinxto" night which involves socialising in venues like Tapas bars where drinks and small meals can be purchased in a social setting. During the social engagements organised by the University, students had the opportunity to gain an insight into the lecturers and PHD students educational background, current studies and gain feedback from the experts on our projects, goals and future education journey.

The ERASMUS trip was a wonderful experience. It provided me with the opportunity to see how another university operates and learn from professionals from Europe. The trip provided the opportunity to learn new technologies, circuitry, and software all which are applicable to my current studies. The design of the course facilitates student engagement so that through networking, new perspectives can be shared, students' project ideas can be discussed and different studies from across Europe can be exchanged. I would recommend these small ERASMUS trips to anyone as a lot can be learned in a week and many new experiences can be had. I would like to thank Diarmuid O' Briain, David Allen, Keith Smyth, and the military for recommending and facilitating this trip and the administrative staff in the college especially Helen Wheeler and Noémi Savanian for organising the paperwork and providing all the relevant information required making this a simple enjoyable experience.



HISTORY THE 3RD FIELD ARTILLERY BATTERY 1977-1998



First 105mm shoot in Glen of Imaal in 1981.



ARTICLE BY GNR (RETIRED) TRENT O'REILLY

In June 1977, a reorganisation changed the status of the Curragh Training Camp to the Curragh Command and Commandant P. Nowlan was transferred to Magee Barracks (Kildare) and tasked with raising (from scratch) the 3rd Field Artillery Battery which would comprise the PDF unit of the 6th Field Artillery Regiment (FCÁ). In September, newly promoted BS Danny Finn and BQMS Mick Hughes were posted in from 1 AA Regiment and newly promoted Sergeants Martin Kelly, Peter Webb, 'Butch' Halpin and 'Lags' Page were posted in from Depot Artillery. The battery was filled out by two platoons of recruits who commenced artillery training the following spring and in June 1978, the battery deployed its 25 pounders to Leitrim position in the Glen of Imaal (under canvas) and commenced its inaugural artillery shoot. By September the battery was proficient enough to utilise the FACE computer and AWDATS communication system in its artillery practices.

In 1979 the unit was transferred to the Depot Artillery where it was tasked as the demonstration battery for the Artillery School. In October 1980 the unit re-equipped with the new 105mm Light Gun and carried out a spectacular inaugural shoot with this weapon from Leitrim position in icy easterly winds on 26 February 1981. The first demo shoot under better weather conditions took place on 12 March; high and low angle shoots and airburst were demonstrated, with the

battery utilising FACE, AWDATS, LASER rangefinder and PACER. In September 1983, the battery participated in Exercise Shannon, a brigade-level training exercise near Limerick. In 1984, the single gun action was formally introduced and the following year saw the battery carry out a demonstration with three guns firing high elevation while the other three simultaneously fired low angle. This was further refined and in 1986, 3rd Field Battery carried out a demonstration in the Glen which saw all six guns firing at high angle before depressing barrels and firing again, with all twelve rounds arriving on target together. The demonstration for 1987 commenced with this High-Low barrage which was followed by a superb airburst shoot fired in salvos for maximum effect. This was followed by a most impressive single gun action under the command of Corporal Steve McGrath.

In June 1987, 3rd Field Artillery Battery celebrated its tenth anniversary with some style. After a parade by ACMAT trucks towing the 105s and an address by battery commander Comdt O'Grady, the Band of the Curragh Command gave a powerful rendition of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture which was embellished by the firing of 25 pounders on the barrack square.

In May 1988, the battery participated in the annual 'corps camp' providing a demo for the Command and Staff School. This occasion saw the final display of the unit's trademark High-Low barrage. Although the battery continued to regularly deploy

to the Glen during the second decade of its existence, lack of manpower would oblige the unit to operate as a three-gun battery with reduced crews. Nonetheless, the battery continued to provide vital support for young officers and artillery NCO training.

That September, a team from the 3rd Field Artillery Battery won the inaugural Heavy Mortar Race during Artillery Day in McKee Barracks which involved the stripping and assembly of a Brandt 120mm mortar and its carriage through a demanding assault course.

In 1991, Comdt Martin Molloy was appointed battery commander and would retain the appointment until 1998. Apart from Comdt (later Maj-Gen) Nowlan, other young officers who served with the battery and went on to greater things included Capt Eoin Ó Neachtain, Capt Seamus McDermott and Lt Dermot Hanifin.

In 1995, BS Finn, the longest serving member of the battery was promoted and transferred to the Air Defence Regiment. 3rd Field Battery fired its 105s in the Glen for the last time in May 1997. In early 1998, instead of field artillery training, the unit instead trained with Bofors L60s and L70s and its final shoot in the Glen in April 1998 was with HMGs. That July, Defence Minister Michael Smith announced the closure of Magee Barracks as part of a Defence Forces Reorganisation. As a result, the 3rd Field Artillery Battery was finally disestablished, with most remaining personnel transferring to the ADR.



3rd Field Artillery Battery, Magee Barracks, Kildare 1985

LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE

ARTICLE BY S/LT CONALL KIERNAN

The journey to becoming a naval officer is designed to test every aspect of an individual's character. My own path through the Naval Service began with a two-year cadetship in the Operations Branch, incorporating three months of basic army training followed by an intensive period of sea training. I then spent a further two years at sea as an officer under training, understudying the roles of navigation, gunnery, and operations officer. This period culminated in the successful completion of my watchkeeping examination.

Through these experiences, I have come to understand that leadership and resilience are inseparable. The ability to lead depends on the ability to endure, adapt, and recover from pressure. Training in the Defence Forces is intentionally difficult, not as punishment, but as preparation. It builds the mental and emotional strength necessary to make sound decisions and inspire confidence in others when conditions are most challenging.

Resilience in Training

Resilience first revealed itself as a necessity during the army phase of cadetship. Those early months were relentless. The physical demands were significant, long marches, constant drills, little rest, and continual assessment. Fatigue became a constant companion, and the smallest mistakes often carried disciplinary consequences. However, it was precisely through this intensity that I learned the difference between endurance and resilience. Endurance is surviving the moment; resilience is learning from it and continuing with purpose the next day.

At sea, the nature of resilience shifted. The physical demands lessened, but the mental demands increased sharply. The maritime environment is unforgiving, and the requirement to be technically competent across multiple domains, navigation, seamanship, communications, and warfare, meant there was never time to become complacent. Every evolution, from entering harbour to launching a boarding team, was a potential examination of both skill and composure.

The constant cycle of assessment and feedback could easily have been discouraging, yet it taught me a crucial truth: resilience is not a single act of toughness, but a sustained pattern of self-discipline and recovery. It is about acknowledging mistakes without being defined by them.

Leadership Lessons from Each Stage

Army Training: Discipline, Teamwork, Endurance, and Humility

Army training stripped away individuality in a way that was humbling and essential. It forced me to see leadership not as personal ambition, but as service to the team. Leadership began with reliability, the quiet confidence that others could depend on me when they were tired, hungry, or uncertain. I learned that orders carry weight only when backed by example. Teamwork was not optional; it was survival. Endurance came from shared hardship, and humility came naturally when even the most basic task could expose weakness.

Sea Training: Responsibility, Technical Mastery, and Reliance on the Team

When I transitioned to sea training, the emphasis shifted from following to leading. Responsibility replaced instruction. Every task, from taking a radar fix to plotting a course, carried real operational implications. Technical mastery was no longer academic, it was a prerequisite for safety.





Leadership at sea also demanded reliance on the team. A warship functions as a living system, and every department depends on the others. I quickly learned that even as an officer trainee, my ability to lead depended on trust built through competence, honesty, and composure. At sea, mistakes are inevitable, but panic is unacceptable. Maintaining calm in uncertainty became a defining element of my understanding of leadership.

Understudy Roles: Adaptability, Learning from Qualified Officers, and Balancing Authority with Approachability

The period of understudy roles as navigation, gunnery, and operations officer was perhaps the most formative. Each role demanded a different mindset. The navigator must think ahead, anticipating hazards, planning contingencies, and

managing information with precision. The gunnery officer must think in the moment, commanding a team, ensuring safety, and maintaining readiness under pressure. The operations officer must think broadly, integrating intelligence, communications, and command intent into coherent action.

From qualified officers, I observed that the best leaders were those who could shift seamlessly between authority and approachability. They projected a quiet confidence and were willing to listen before deciding. That balance is something I have tried to develop myself. Authority is necessary for decision-making, but approachability builds the trust that makes those decisions easier to follow.

The Watchkeeping Exam: A Test of Leadership and Resilience

The watchkeeping exam represented both a personal and professional milestone. It required me to demonstrate that I could navigate a warship safely in confined waters, respond to emergencies, and manage the bridge team under pressure. The exercise tested not just technical skill, but composure.

During the assessment, I was acutely aware that every instruction I gave carried weight. The environment was controlled, but the responsibility felt real. I found myself relying heavily on the habits built throughout my training, clear communication, methodical thinking, and the ability to stay calm despite stress. Resilience in that moment meant focusing on the task at hand rather than the potential consequences of failure.

Passing the exam was deeply rewarding, not because it marked the end of training, but because it confirmed that resilience had matured into confidence. The qualification

symbolised not only competence, but the ability to be trusted with people and equipment in situations where there is no margin for error.

Personal Reflection

Resilience, to me, has come to mean more than just withstanding difficulty. It is about maintaining clarity of thought when tired, leading calmly when others are anxious, and finding solutions when none seem obvious. There were moments of doubt during training, periods of exhaustion, frustration, or self-criticism, but those moments became the foundation for growth.

Leadership, I have learned, is not defined by authority or position. Rank may grant the right to give orders, but leadership earns the willingness of others to follow. The officers I respected most were not those who spoke the loudest, but those who remained composed in crisis and fair in discipline. They understood that respect is built through consistency, competence, and care for their people.

The journey through cadetship and officer training has shown me that resilience and leadership are not static qualities but ongoing disciplines. Resilience must be cultivated daily, through small acts of perseverance, reflection, and self-improvement. Leadership, similarly, is not a destination but a continual journey of earning trust, demonstrating competence, and showing calmness in adversity.

Training was never meant to be easy, and for that I am grateful. Every challenge, from the first army drill to the final moments of the watchkeeping exam, has reinforced that difficulty serves as a catalyst for development. As I continue my naval career, I carry forward the understanding that resilience enables leadership.

CULTURE

PILOT WELLBEING AND PEER SUPPORT

ARTICLE BY COMDT DÓNAL CURRAN,
OC FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL

At 09:30 GMT on the morning of 24 March 2015, GermanWings flight 9525 made a routine check-in with air traffic control and the instructions were to proceed as cleared from Barcelona to Dusseldorf. Eleven minutes later, all contact with the aircraft was lost as it crashed in the Alps with the loss of 150 lives.

As with all air accident investigations, the root cause of the crash became the focal point and evidence sources including the “black box” – or cockpit voice recorder, began to draw investigators’ attention to the Co-Pilot – Andreas Lubitz. It became clear he was unfit to fly having concealed details of doctor’s notes excusing him from work due to medication for

both psychiatric issues and insomnia. Ultimately, investigators found his deliberate actions alone caused the loss of GermanWings 9525.

I have been flying for almost 30 years. I remember vividly being told pilots are expected to “leave their troubles at the door once they step into the cockpit”, as if flipping a switch mentally can park the worry of bills, stress of sick children or anything else life throws at us that might keep us awake at night.

Being “fit to fly” is essential for pilots as it directly impacts their ability to manage, react and operate an aircraft effectively, minimising the risk of pilot error caused by fatigue, health issues or stress. In the Air Corps, the Air Regulations Manual

(ARM) Part A, Section 6 deals with Crew Health Precautions and makes a brief reference to the importance of “mental health”. However, it does not provide for procedures or steps to take in the event a pilot suffers a decrease in medical fitness because of stress related illness.



As a consequence of the GermanWings accident, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) issued Regulation (EU) 2018/1042, now (EU) 2020/745, which required all commercial air transport operators to implement a support program and is now considered vital in supporting crew well-being and promoting aviation safety.



Mental health and wellbeing have never been more prevalent than it is today. Against this background, steps are being taken to improve supports in the military context. Notably, the Air Corps and Personnel Support Service (PSS) have established a support group for crews operating the Emergency Aeromedical Service (EAS) which has been very successful. The natural evolution is to offer a similar support, now best practice in civilian aviation, to all pilots and potentially aircrew in the Air Corps.



Support is critical for student pilots in particular. Cadets and Young Officers on “Wings” courses spend months in full-time ground school studying 14 subjects and sitting exams before they even sit in the PC-9M. The flying training then consists of 128 individual flights where students are graded on their performance constantly and must respond to the demands of military flying or risk being removed from the course. It's high stakes and it's extremely stressful.



In the Flying Training School (FTS) we are working closely with PSS to facilitate a forum for student groups to provide feedback on all aspects of their training, with an

emphasis on wellbeing. This has led to collaboration with the DF Psychologist and our intention to run a Mindfulness and Wellbeing course based on the 8-week evidence-based curriculum developed by Williams and Penman. The course will introduce participants to practical mindfulness techniques, reflective exercises, and strategies for integrating mindfulness into daily routines, with the aim of enhancing focus, stress management, and emotional regulation. Delivered through a combination of guided sessions and group discussions, the programme fosters both individual resilience and peer support, providing the students with tools to manage both the unique pressures of aviation training, and of daily life.

The anticipated benefits of running this course at this stage in their careers are substantial. Students should experience improved concentration, reduced stress, and enhanced emotional stability, all of which are critical for safe and effective performance in high-pressure environments. Group participation encourages collaboration and shared learning, strengthening students' cohesion and communication as a class. The programme supports the development of adaptive coping strategies, potentially helping students manage cognitive load, maintain attention during complex tasks, and respond calmly under pressure.

The intention is to build an Air Corps Peer Support network around these skills so Operational pilots outside the routine of life in FTS can avail of additional supports as necessary. The key here is that our “Peers” fully understand the nuances of military life and operational flying. These Peer Support Programs (PSP) are designed to be a “safe harbour.” A pilot experiencing stress can self-refer to a peer (a fellow pilot trained in basic psychological support) and in most cases indemnified by a third party, who ultimately review all cases.

The PSP is often the primary vehicle for the return-to-work process. It allows for a non-punitive path where the pilot can be assisted by mental health professionals and peers to ensure they are mentally resilient enough to return to the flight operations. This ensures the pilot still possesses the cognitive and psychological attributes required for the specific operational environment enhancing overall flight safety.

Although not mandatory for Military operators and challenging for an Organisation the size of the Air Corps, the implementation of a Pilot Peer Support Program is in line with best practice as set out in EASA Regulations. As we look towards the evolving roles of the future Air Force, both home and abroad, such a commitment to our pilots' wellbeing would underpin the values of Óglaigh na h-Éireann and provide additional safety controls for operations.





IRISH CAVALRY CORPS ENHANCES COMBAT CAPABILITY

RS6 30MMX113 WEAPON SYSTEM

ARTICLE BY COMDT TOM TOOHER

The Irish Defence Forces' Cavalry Corps is entering a new era of battlefield capability with the introduction of the RS6 remote weapons station 30mm x 113 chain gun. Designed to enhance reconnaissance, surveillance and direct fire support operations, the new system represents a significant leap forward in the firepower and effectiveness of Ireland's armoured reconnaissance forces.

For decades, the Cavalry Corps has fulfilled a critical role as the Army's eyes and ears on the battlefield, answering the Brigade commander's critical information requirements (CCIR) and priority intelligence requirements (PIR) allowing

them to make timely and accurate decisions. As one of the Defence Forces' primary manoeuvre elements, Cavalry units are tasked with reconnaissance both mounted and dismounted, information gathering, security operations and supporting infantry formations. The integration of the RS6 weapon system strengthens these core functions while providing a substantial increase in combat capability.

At the heart of the system is the M230 LF 30mm x 113 chain gun, offering a muzzle velocity of 840m/s and a range of up to 3KM, firing at approx. 200 rds. per minute, with ammunition natures of TP and HEDP



available, with new C-UAS proximity ammunition also being developed. As the RS6 is gyro stabilised, it has superb accuracy and lethality, more than most machine-gun armaments traditionally associated with reconnaissance vehicles and can engage targets on the move. The weapon provides crews with the ability to engage light armoured threats, counter enemy reconnaissance assets, fortified positions and other battlefield targets while maintaining mobility and operational flexibility.

Complementing the main armament is a coaxial 7.62mm machine gun mounted alongside the 30mm cannon. The coaxial weapon allows crews to engage dismounted personnel and softer targets without expending larger-calibre ammunition, providing a versatile and effective secondary capability. Coaxial machine guns remain a proven feature of modern armoured fighting vehicles, enabling rapid target engagement while sharing the same line of sight as the primary weapon.

The RS6 is also equipped with a sophisticated surveillance suite that significantly enhances battlefield awareness. Advanced day and thermal imaging sensors, target acquisition systems and long-range observation capabilities enable Cavalry crews to detect, identify and monitor threats at extended distances. This improved situational awareness supports the Corps' reconnaissance mission by allowing information to be gathered

and relayed quickly and accurately to commanders, including integration with the new Software defined radio, allowing for live feed from the RWS system to be relayed to commanders on the ground as was demonstrated recently when the 1 Armoured Cav Squadron participated in the recent CIS led exercise in Kilworth, sending direct feed of Enemy dispositions to the Infantry coy commander as he was at the start line of his night attack allow him to adjust his battleplan based on real-time information.

Perhaps most importantly, the introduction of the RS6 expands the Cavalry Corps' ability to deliver mounted direct fire support. While reconnaissance and security remain its primary role, modern operations increasingly require armoured units to provide immediate and precise firepower in support of infantry and joint-force manoeuvre. The 30mm chain gun gives commanders a highly responsive weapon capable of suppressing enemy positions and shaping the tactical battlefield when required.

The fundamental force multipliers cavalry brings, particularly in an overseas environment, are mobility, flexibility, lethality, communication, manoeuvre and an ability to conduct ISTAR in the operational area while providing direct fire support to overmatch adversaries. As a surveillance platform the RS6 improves ISTAR capability. In the modern and future environment

both on and off island further add-on integrated sensors, including tethered drones and UAV, mast mounted optics, ground surveillance radar and UGV will be essential to collect accurate information to provide situational awareness. Timely accurate information can mitigate risk and provide force protection by having timely and accurate situational awareness and decision making. In essence the RS6 direct fire capabilities with sufficient calibre and range create security through force projection and the ability to react and respond by overmatch. This capability can deter opposition forces from conducting hostile actions against own forces.

The arrival of the RS6 marks a significant milestone in the modernisation of the Irish Defence Forces, the weapons system and the development of ammunition natures such as airburst proximity also future proofs the RS6 as a counter Unmanned Aerial vehicle (CAUS) asset, giving the Defence Forces a key effector in this regard. Combining reconnaissance excellence, advanced surveillance technology and powerful direct fire support, the new weapon system ensures that the Cavalry Corps remains a highly capable and adaptable force for the challenges of contemporary military operations.



14-SOLDIER DRONE SURVIVAL MINIMUM

Dispersion is essential — most terrain will punish bunching up

Smoke can conceal soldiers from UAS observation

A stretcher party draws fire; the recovery team draws more

ARTICLE BY A. BEATTY AND E. O'BRIEN

For light infantry and other un-armoured activity - such as sustainment, checkpoints and HQs - drones are no longer a niche capability; they shape movement, survival and assault before troops meet the enemy. Soldiers need drills they can train to apply age old principles on today's battlefield. Officers must rethink control, fire support and force design. Full references appear in the Connect app edition of this article

Infantry cannot wait for higher HQ to solve the drone problem. It is at section and platoon level, having an effect on the battlefield. Drones (UxS) have not made infantry obsolete - they afford lethality before the enemy is seen, through recce, precision strike and attacks on routes. This applies across the spectrum of conflict, including peacekeeping. If a section cannot detect, disrupt or destroy drones, they are visible and targetable. In the Russo-Ukrainian War, drones cause over 80% of casualties - more than artillery. ¹ Counter-UAS (CUAS) is required at all levels, starting with the section. Air defence can't be confined to artillery. Full references appear in the Connect App edition.

Light Infantry Combat

UAS provide constant observation, targeting and fire correction. However, the battlefield is not fully transparent: pilots work a 2D screen, degraded by terrain, weather and EW - they miss things. Yet they detect movement well - and people must move. The result is *movement as timed exposure*: every time a soldier moves, a 'clock' starts. Veterans describe movement as possible, but not automatic. ² It's a severe threat for dismounts³ - even vehicles cannot outrun UAS.

Dropper drones are often more valuable than FPV kamikazes. As infantry close air support, they're reusable, deliver payloads up to 15 kg, drop mines, attack logistics and kill without being seen. For the enemy, droppers and FPVs turn routes into kill zones; ⁴ for us, they resupply remotely and take risk out of conducting particularly dangerous jobs. Ground drones (UGS) do not replace infantry; they

lessen soldiers' exposure during the most exposed tasks; resupply, CASEVAC and crewed weapons. UGS sit best at company level, but NCOs and officers at all levels must know how to use them - or they will bog down, break down or be killed by UAS.

Nowadays, planning movement incorporates UAS recce/overwatch and CUAS. Camouflage, radio-emission control and thermal management are essential. Darkness is not protection - cheap thermal imaging can make night movement more visible. ⁵ Improvised thermal camouflage and scrim add friction to the kill chain and buy time. *Under persistent observation*, survivability also means becoming the least interesting target. ⁶ Veterans report that well-equipped troops drew fire when conscripts did not. Deception is essential; some soldiers even play dead.

Camouflage is PPE. Maximise body armour and helmet coverage. Eye protection is critical - plastic drone fragments wound. Active hearing protection alters the drone's sound and degrades recognition.

The conditions for assault must be shaped in advance: the objective is scouted, isolated, degraded and suppressed. ⁷ Fire support and CUAS planning are now the same problem, needing radio discipline, smoke, movement timing and suppression of enemy UAS.

What privates and junior NCOs could train for now

Six drills, these drills can be trained for tomorrow's battlefield.

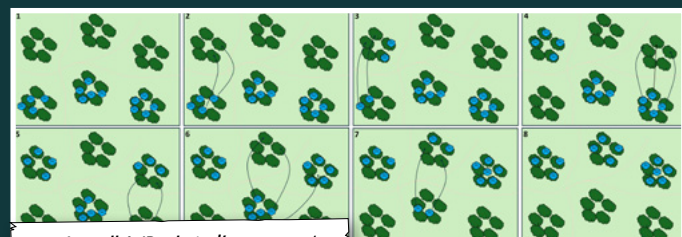
- 1:** Assume you are being watched. Train packeted movement between cover and concealment. Build in SLLS drone halts. Every soldier knows the route. A higher concentration of enemy drones requires smaller packets (2-3).
- 2:** Actions-on drone sighting. The observer keeps eyes on. Everyone else freezes, move slowly into concealment and reduce signature. Do not run - movement is what drones detect best. The commander should note the time and decide whether to hide, shoot or disperse (small drones loiter under 30 minutes).

3: Actions-on being seen. Detection may not mean being targeted immediately; the kill chain takes time. Question what is coming - corrected fire, or an FPV? Act: small-arms CUAS fire, smoke, rapid dispersion, a rush to cover. Get under foliage. Put obstacles between the soldier and an FPV.

4: Route planning is required to be a section skill. Do not assume yesterday's route is safe today. Drones sit over likely movement corridors, and waiter drones (FPVs lying in ambush) make patterns dangerous. The battlespace requires all soldiers to be critical thinkers.⁸

5: Treat downed/grounded armed drones as IEDs. Do not approach. Mark from a distance, report and avoid.

6: Move decisively once committed. Speed reduces exposure, but



Battle Drill 1: 'Packeted' movement

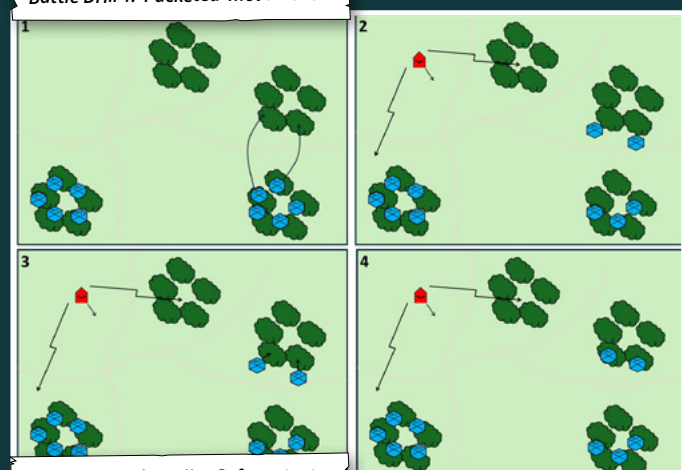
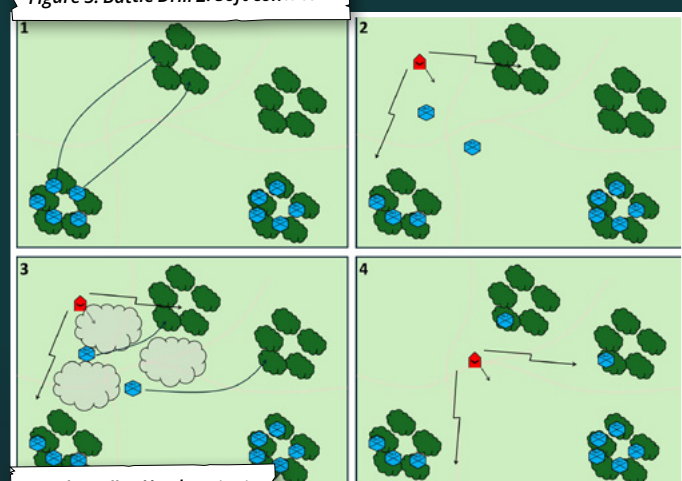


Figure 5: Battle Drill 2: Soft contact



Battle Drill 3: Hard contact

speeding vehicles create casualties of their own.

What junior and mid-ranking officers and NCOs need to change

Small UAS attack movement, sustainment and commanders up to 30 km from the FLOT. Plans depending on visible congregation and repeated radio use will fail. Orders and control measures must be understood before movement. Mission command is essential.

A veteran section commander put it bluntly: "I have to accept that I don't have control of my section for long periods of time". HQs are found through their radios; clear intent and mission command mitigate this.

The planning burden is heavier; every action must assume enemy observation. Since fire support and CUAS are one problem, these must be habitually associated. Once seen, the enemy need not close - corrected artillery, a dropper or FPV, a strike on the reorg. A jammer helps but will not save them; ultimately "you need a gun; an AI-assisted gun would be good".

What senior officers need to act on

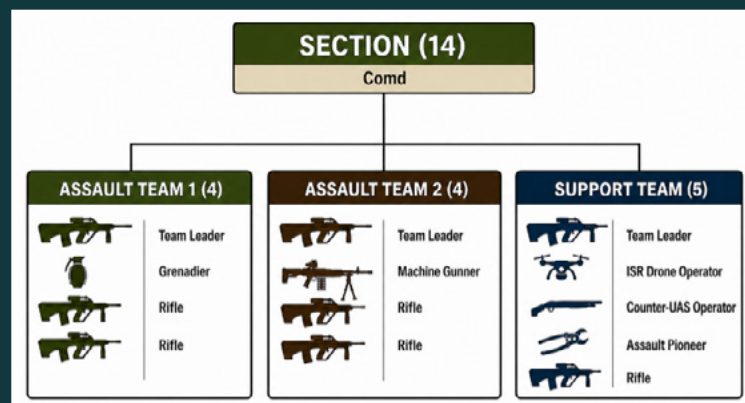
Nine soldiers cannot solely carry the task load, operate the new systems and remain cohesive once dispersed. Capability must evolve continuously.

CUAS must be decentralised. Dismounts and light vehicles cannot rely on higher echelons. Without organic CUAS, they will take avoidable casualties - pertinent for crisis-management operations.

The downed-drone-as-IED problem restores the assault pioneer as an essential role. Successful CUAS action can drop an IED into a position.

These requirements point to a 14-soldier section: three detachments under a corporal, possibly a sergeant.⁹ ISR and hard-kill CUAS sit where needed, and the section commander has the force protection required.

The DOTMLPF-I implications for the civil and military sides of DOD are direct. Training must produce soldiers competent with drones, CUAS and CIED. Procurement must prioritise section-level ISR drones and armed FPVs at company level, expand the light mobility fleet and consider electric bicycles. Applying conventional aviation administration to small drones suppresses the scale and consumable nature that gives them value.¹⁰ Adversaries have



adapted; the force design has not.

Armies which waited for doctrine to catch up with the machine gun paid the price. As the machine gun once organised the section, the UAS operator may now organise the detachment - where drones deliver the lethality and the soldiers protect and enable the pilot.

Conclusion

Drones have not made infantry obsolete. They've changed survival, where combat begins and how movements judged. For the soldier: battle drills. For the platoon commander: delegated authority and CUAS and CIED integration. For the senior officer: DOTMLPF-I must catch up. Movement is timed exposure; every downed drone is a likely hazard. The section that understands this - equipped and trained accordingly - has a better chance of survival. The section that does not will be degraded from afar.

References are available upon request to the editor

RDF

NATO RESERVE FORCES INTEGRATION COURSE



ARTICLE BY COY SGT BRIAN O'KEEFFE

Strategic relevance

The NATO Reserve Forces Integration Course provides a timely and practical lens through which the Defence Forces can assess how NATO and partner nations organise, support and mobilise Reserve capability at a point when Ireland is actively considering the future development of its own Reserve Forces.

Held at the NATO School Oberammergau in southern Bavaria, the course brings together Reserve and Regular personnel from NATO and partner nations to examine the alliance context, compare national Reserve models and identify practical lessons for improving Reserve readiness, integration and mobilisation.

Each year, with the support of the NATO Committee on Reserves, the NSO runs two courses specifically relating to Reserve Forces. These are the NATO Reserve Forces Integration Course, and the NATO Senior Reserve Officers Course. In recent years, Officers have attended the Reserve Forces Integration Course. This year, it was opened up to Senior NCOs and both myself and CS Martin Brennan from 2 Bde HQ, were selected to attend.

The purpose of the course is to "Provide Reservists with a working Introduction to the NATO alliance" and is run over 5 days, typically in May each year. The course is open to Reserve and Regular military forces from both NATO and partner nations, and attendees consist of Senior NCOs, Officers and some civilians. The course uses a blended mix of remote learning, on site lectures / briefings, syndicate work and moderated discussions.

NATO context and Reserve policy

This year's course had 25 students from 10 countries; full members of NATO such as the UK and Germany, new members such as Sweden, and Partnership for Peace (PfP) nations such as Ireland and Armenia. Ranks ranged from OR-7 (Coy Sgt equivalent) to OF-5 (Col) from Army, Navy and Air Force. There was a wide range of experience and it became clear quite quickly that each country organises its Reserve Forces in its own unique way. Some of the students are, effectively, fully employed within Reserve Units, while others have adopted models similar to our own with Reservists in full time civilian employment, carrying out Reserve commitments in addition to civilian careers.

The course aims to give an overview of the NATO organisation to Reservists, and the first day and a half reflects this with briefings on the history of NATO, its structure, and how the military and political sides of the organisation interact with each other. Significant focus was placed on the NATO Committee on Reserves (NCR)

The NCR is a NATO advisory committee which has four main objectives

- To provide policy advice on Reserve issues
- To strengthen the readiness and effectiveness of NATO Reserves by providing a forum for the exchange of information and sharing of best practices
- To maintain awareness of relevant issues and identify common activities that may be of interest to NATO and partner



Mobilisation, integration and specialist capability

Talking to our colleagues from countries such as the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden, it is clear that all of our Reserve Forces face similar issues, from problems with force generation and retention, to issues with the scales and types of equipment

As well as the possibility of international courses, RDF Members upskill in many areas including ARP's

nations, through liaison with organisations and associations that have an interest in Reserve Affairs (CIOR, CISOR and CIOMR)*

- To support educating of Reserves by liaising with NATO School Oberammergau on Reserve Courses.

The NCR is involved in several initiatives via working groups, employer support conferences and education and training. Some of the working groups are dealing with issues such as mobilisation and recruitment, two areas which are currently affecting our own Reserve Forces. It is interesting to note that NATO does not actually define what a Reservist is, or should be capable of. This reason for this became clearer when we received briefings on the structure of Reserve Forces from three different countries (Estonia, Germany and Sweden), and with the syndicate discussions.

Comparative Reserve models

One of the more interesting aspects was the reflective discussion we had as part of our syndicate work. We were asked to answer various questions about our own Reserve Forces, from defining what a Reservist is, their roles, recruitment and the type of training undertaken.

Reserve Forces in each country seem to be structured along the lines of "whatever works for them", based on the history and needs of the country and whether they have conscription or not. It was very interesting listening to these briefings and getting an idea of the structures and background support needed to effectively maintain and, potentially, to mobilise Reserve Forces. There are also significant differences in the roles of Reserves. Some countries use former conscripts who have completed their compulsory service and can be rapidly mobilised. Sweden, as part of its whole of society approach does this and also maintains a Home Guard which is primarily tasked with supporting society in the event of a crisis. Germany's "Home Guard" is tasked with protection of vital infrastructure, while the UK (which re-branded the Territorial Army as "The Reserve" in 2014), seems to take a hybrid approach. Personnel are able to slot into Regular Units to fill a short-term need while still being part of specific Reserve Units.

Other syndicate discussions (followed by a presentation) to the main group, looked at issues around mobilising Reserves, the administration and logistics of doing this, as well as the difficulties of integrating Reservists and their equipment into Regular Units. The irony of this was pointed out by several students, given that NATO doesn't define what a Reservist is, and when it comes to utilising them doesn't differentiate between a Regular or Reserve Unit. It simply looks for "capability", ie. An Infantry Bn, Cavalry Sqn etc. Whether this is a Regular or Reserve Unit is irrelevant. Put simply, the Unit should be capable of carrying out its role, whether they are full time personnel or part time Reservists.

available. There also seems to be a common theme of issues surrounding the recognition and utilisation of specialist civilian qualifications, such as HGV drivers and medical personnel.

Implications for Ireland

As the Defence Forces considers future Reserve reform, continued participation in the NATO Reserve Forces Integration Course and the NATO Senior Reserve Officers Course would help expose Irish personnel to practical international approaches to recruitment, retention, mobilisation, employer support and the use of civilian specialist skills. The key lesson is that there is no single Reserve model, effective systems are designed around national need, clear capability requirements and the administrative structures needed to activate personnel when required.

Ireland should capture learning from these courses in a structured way, share it with those involved in Reserve development, and examine specific opportunities such as employer engagement mechanisms, clearer mobilisation processes and better recognition of civilian qualifications that could add immediate operational value.

*CIOR

Confédération Interalliée des Officiers de Réserve / Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers

*CISOR

Confédération Interalliée des Sous-Officiers de Réserve / Interallied Confederation of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers

*CIOMR

Confédération Interalliée des Officiers Médicaux de Réserve / Interallied Confederation of Reserve Medical Officers



COY SGTs Martin Brennan 2 Bde HQ and Brian O'Keeffe 7 Inf Bn

FORGED THROUGH CHALLENGE

The 101st Cadet Class

ARTICLE BY VARIOUS CONTRIBUTORS

Ex LONG REACH – Lt Oisín Ward O’Brien, 2 BDE ORD GP

Our first major hurdle in Phase 3 of training was Exercise Long Reach, a 22km section level navigation exercise. Starting at 1700 hrs, carrying full admin and section level weapons, we began our march near Lough Tay. After first summiting Djouce we cut around the west side of War Hill and headed north towards Kippure. Here, the ground was boggy and uneven, requiring us to drop our pace and push on as nightfall approached. It was well and truly dark when we reached the safety point at the base of Kippure, and after a hasty resupply we continued on upwards.

Upon hitting the top of Kippure, we were greeted with a pitch black, featureless landscape where our pace dropped even further as we attempted to traverse the seemingly endless expanse to Seefingan. By the

time we reached that spot height, it was just past 0000 hrs and exhaustion had set in with a vengeance. After the briefest of breaks, we headed toward Seefin, with the end in sight at Seefin’s peak. We half stumbled; half fell down the hill’s northern face and finally were met with the comforting glow of infamous transit van and ROPS headlights. Completing the final leg of this route march, we were very content to arrive back on the hard stand about 9 hours after the time we had started.

Ex OOTW – Lt Luke Thompson, 7 INF BN

Our OOTW exercise comprised of two 96-hr ground exercises, the first of which was at the FOB in Kilworth, Co. Cork and the second of which was at Kilbrannish forest on the side of Mount Leinster in Carlow. We were all very nervous as we boarded the ROPS to Kilworth before the first insertion into the FOB on the Monday morning. We had little time to dwell on our nerves as we were greeted in Kilworth by both an active enemy and incessant rain. It was a great

experience to be using the FOB on exercise in an operational manner and hopefully it will have prepared us for real life scenarios we may face in the future. The trails in the area provided a beneficial complex location to perform our foot patrols and conduct deliberate actions. For the second 96 hr exercise we inserted into our patrol harbour by going up and over Mount Leinster. This was a very demanding insertion. We were again greeted by non-stop rain, although the coverage from forest trees gave some relief. It was enjoyable to be in an area no one in the class really had any experience in, and no one knew what to expect. The week of training was focused on mastering ground soldiering and offensive actions. At ENDEX on the Friday morning, the CS had a breakfast roll ready for everyone as we boarded the ROPS completely exhausted but having completed the largest hurdle of the cadetship.

ADVENTURE WEEK - 2/Lt Kevin McNeil, 2 BDE TPT COY

After a long seven months of phase two, our cadet class reached a significant milestone in our training, "Adventure week". The class were split evenly and made our way to opposite ends of the country.

The first contingent travelled to Finner Camp, Co. Donegal to partake in a wide variety of kayaking, rock climbing and surfing set amongst the stunning Donegal scenery. While the Donegal scenery and wild Atlantic sea waves gave us incredible memories, and the activities provided us new skills, the real learning was found in trusting ourselves, and the team when it mattered most.

The other half of the class travelled south to Sarsfield's Barracks, County Limerick to take part in a scuba diving course. During the day, the class explored the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Co. Clare and during the evening, they created unforgettable memories with one another. At the end of a testing week familiarising themselves with diving equipment and conducting guided dives, many came away with a scuba diving qualification and a brand-new hobby to carry with them in the future.

Adventure week was widely regarded as one of the major highlights of our Cadetship and was the ideal way to celebrate the completion of phase two together before the class split to enjoy some summer leave.



REIMAGINING OFFICER DEVELOPMENT

Why Ireland Should Bring Back a University Officer Training Corps

ARTICLE BY CAPTAIN CORMAC NELLIS - ARMY FORCE DESIGN OFFICE

The Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces (2022) was widely welcomed across Óglaigh na hÉireann. It clearly identified significant capability gaps, staffing shortages, and the need to rethink how we recruit and develop people. Much of the discussion since then has focused on funding and equipment. That matters—but people are the real issue. Without a sustainable way to attract and develop talent, everything else will struggle. This challenge is becoming more acute as we operate in an increasingly complex environment - whether that's in cyber-space, the maritime domain, or on overseas deployments. This article focuses on one practical idea to attract and develop young officers: the reintroduction of a University Officer Training Corps (UOTC). This is not a new idea. Historically, such schemes have been hugely successful on this island—and there are strong reasons to revisit the concept today.

Old Wine in a New Bottle

Ireland actually has a proven track record when it comes to university-based military training. Prior to independence in 1922, Trinity College Dublin maintained a fully functioning Officer Training Corps linked to the British Army. This system trained students to be commissioned officers, many of whom served in Irish regiments throughout the First World War. While it became politically unacceptable after 1922, it proved that universities in Ireland can support structured military training at scale. After independence, The Free State did not immediately replace this system which resulted in the loss of a ready-made pipeline of educated officers.

However, all that changed in 1929 with the establishment of the Volunteer Reserve Force. This included a university-based Officer Training Corps, with over 1,200 students taking part. It wasn't just a concept—it was a functioning system, drawing from places like University College Dublin, University College Cork, and University of Galway. Importantly, this was not just a copy of the British model. By adapting to Irish needs, it emphasised practical training, national identity, and the development of an Irish officer corps rooted in society. By the mid-1930s, the idea evolved into the Regiment of Pearse, with many of its functions absorbed into

the wider Volunteer Force. This kept the core idea alive: part-time training, educated recruits, and strong links between civilian careers and military service.

The takeaway is simple: Ireland has already tested this idea. It worked, it attracted numbers, and it linked education with military leadership. It just wasn't sustained.

A Modern Challenge

Today, the Defence Forces face a similar challenge, albeit in a more complex environment. Modern military operations require expertise in areas such as engineering, medicine, law, cyber security, and data analysis. Yet recruitment efforts do not consistently reach these groups. At the same time, more young people are entering third-level education and remaining there longer. If the Defence Forces are not present in that space, we are missing a large portion of the talent pool. A UOTC would directly address this gap by embedding military training within the university environment, allowing students to engage with the Defence Forces during their studies and before they have committed to other career paths.

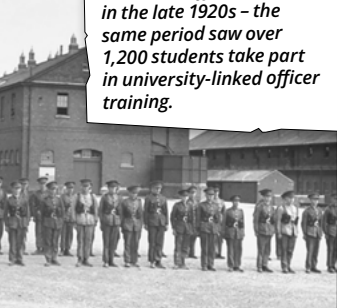
Bridging the Gap Inside the Organisation

Another key issue is the relationship between the Reserve Defence Forces (RDF) and the Permanent Defence Forces (PDF). The Defence Policy Review (DPR) 2024 aimed to create a reserve that can “seamlessly train, operate, and deploy” (p.50) alongside the permanent force. Historically, the reserves have played a vital role in strengthening national resilience, particularly during periods of crisis such as the Emergency and the Troubles. However, since the 2012 reorganisation, integration has remained limited. Geographic dispersion and differences in training timelines have made it difficult to align both components effectively. In addition, the Defence Act (1954) does not provide a comprehensive legal framework to protect reservists' civilian employment. This significantly limits their ability to participate fully in training and operations alongside their PDF counterparts. A UOTC could help fix



Students of Trinity College Dublin served as officer cadets during the Great War – an early example of university based military training in Ireland.

Free State officer cadets in the late 1920s – the same period saw over 1,200 students take part in university-linked officer training.



this in a pragmatic way.

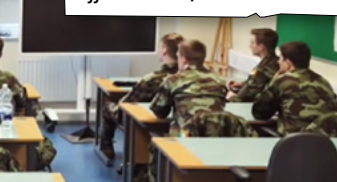
Rather than attempting to integrate reservists later in their careers, a UOTC would begin that process at the point of entry. Students would train part-time during their university studies, developing military skills and leadership experience from an early stage. Upon graduation, they could choose either to

remain in the Reserves or transition into the PDF. In both cases, they would already meet a defined training standard and share a common foundation. Over time, this would help build a more cohesive officer corps and a stronger organisational culture.

Making Better Use of Universities

Ireland's universities are producing exactly the type of graduates that we need, yet engagement remains limited. A UOTC would establish a consistent presence within these institutions, making military service more visible and accessible. It also creates opportunities beyond recruitment. There's real potential for collaboration in research, especially in areas like technology, medicine, and security. Shared facilities—gyms, lecture theatres, even labs—could be used to improve both training and capability. Leadership development could combine academic thinking with military experience, while sports and adventure training would build resilience and teamwork.

Shared resources such as gymnasiums, lecture theatres and drill halls would allow the project to be delivered at relatively low cost compared to officer development schemes



Reserve Defence forces personnel partake in Junior & Senior leadership training – highlighting the standard expected of all Irish troops.



By allowing students to train while continuing their education, a UOTC style system makes military careers more accessible for all.

A further advantage of this approach is the reduction in time and cost currently associated with officers in full-time education. Under the existing scheme, school leavers who commission into the PDF must complete a period of full-time third-level education. This removes newly commissioned officers from units—often for several years—at a time when those units are already understrength and facing recruitment and retention challenges.

This gap not only affects operational effectiveness but also delays the professional development of young officers at a critical stage in their careers. A UOTC model would instead encourage graduates to enter the organisation directly, creating more flexible entry pathways. Units would benefit immediately from the arrival of newly commissioned officers, while the overall cost and time required for officer development would be reduced compared to current structures.

This isn't just about numbers—it's about improving the overall quality of our officer corps.

Reaching the Right Audience?

There's a strong push to increase participation among females and minority groups in the Defence Forces. However, there's an underlying structural issue. More young women than ever are going into third-level education and staying there longer. While this is a positive societal shift—it reduces the effectiveness of traditional recruitment pathways. As a result, we end up in a mismatch: we want



Interwar reserve training in Ireland – where the university officer training concept evolved into structures like the Regiment of Pearse.

more women in the organisation, but we're recruiting from a shrinking pool. A UOTC style system makes military careers more accessible for all. By allowing students to train while continuing their education, the Defence Forces remove a significant barrier to entry. Participants can explore military service without committing to a full-time career immediately. This flexibility is particularly important in attracting a broader and more diverse range of candidates. The knock-on effects of this are that it builds awareness and interest in military service early, and it creates a clear path into officer roles after graduation.

If we're serious about improving diversity, we need to meet people where they actually are—and right now, that's in universities.

Connecting the Defence Forces with Society

There is also a broader societal benefit. For many people in Ireland, the Defence Forces are respected but distant. Interaction with the organisation is limited, and understanding of its role can be superficial. A UOTC would help bridge this gap. A visible presence on university campuses—through training, events, and collaboration—would make the Defence Forces more accessible and better understood. This connection works in both directions. Future officers who come through a university-based system are likely to retain stronger links to civilian life. In a modern military, that connection is valuable. It supports adaptability, communication, and a better understanding of the society the Defence Forces serve.

Is It Actually Achievable?

This doesn't need to be a massive or high-risk project. A UOTC could be rolled out in phases, starting with a small number of universities and expanding over time. The key advantage is that much of the infrastructure already exists. Universities already have gymnasiums, classrooms, and training spaces, while the Defence Forces have RDF centres and Department of Defence properties that could be used more effectively. By linking these resources together, the programme could be delivered in a practical, low-cost way without the need for significant new investment upfront. The key is getting the basics right: making sure training fits around academic life, offering incentives to attract good candidates, and linking it properly with existing officer training.

This is not about building something entirely new. It is about using what is already available more effectively.

Final Thought

This isn't a silver bullet—but it is a practical idea that fits how Irish society works today. Ireland has already demonstrated that university-based officer training can work. From Trinity's early OTC to the Free State model and the Regiment of Pearse, the lesson from history is clear: the concept works, but to be a success it needs long-term commitment. If we in Óglaigh na hÉireann are serious about building a sustainable, skilled, and representative officer corps, then a modern UOTC deserves serious discussion—not just at senior level, but across the organisation.

The question isn't whether we can afford to try something like this. It's whether we can afford not to.

IRELAND AT THE HEART OF NATO MILITARY POLICE TRAINING

RQMS Roch Ryan leading the COA development session, guiding students through operational planning in a contemporary European context



ARTICLE BY RQMS ROCH RYAN, RQMS MILITARY POLICE CORPS & MP GP DFTC

NATO operates a range of Centre's Excellence across member States. These Centre's were established to enhance NATO's collective expertise, standardise

doctrine, and strengthen interoperability by concentrating specialist knowledge within dedicated multinational hubs. The Military Police Centre of Excellence (MPCOE) is located in Bydgoszcz, Poland and was established in 2013. The MPCOE conducts a range of courses, seminars, workshops and conferences annually, drawing on the expertise of NATO members and partner Nations. Irish Defence Forces Military Police (MP) have a long history with the MPCOE,

both as students and as facilitators. This relationship has evolved since the first Irish MP student attended the NATO Senior NCO Course in the MPCOE in 2015 and the first facilitator in 2016. Both MP Officers and NCOs have attended a range of courses since 2015 including NATO MP Senior Officers' Courses and Senior NCO Courses, NATO MP Digital Evidence Collection and Handling Course, and NATO MP Command Senior Enlisted Forum.

The 2025 iteration of the NATO MP Senior NCO Course marked a historic moment for Ireland's partnership with the Military Police Centre of Excellence. For the first time, an Irish Provost Marshal, Colonel Damien Coakley, visited the Centre in an official capacity, and for the first time the Director of the Defence Forces Legal Service Branch, Colonel Richard Brennan, attended and delivered a legal lecture to the course. To mark the occasion, Colonel Coakley presented the Centre with a plaque bearing the Irish Military Police

crest and recognised the Centre's Senior Enlisted Leader, Sergeant Major Zdenek HANAK (Czech Military Police), for his contribution to the international MP community and for founding the NATO MP CSEL Forum. The combined Irish presence and instructional leadership left its mark with senior staff informally referred to the day as "Irish Day."

These milestones rest on a decade of steady engagement that began over a decade ago, when a previous Company Sergeant Patrick Balfe (now Sergeant Major, Retired) became the first Irish MP NCO to attend the course before later returning as a facilitator. From those first steps to today's strategic presence, Ireland's Defence Forces MP are no longer just participants, but trusted partners shaping the future of multinational military policing.

Deepening Cooperation

Ireland's engagement continues to mature. The MP Centre of Excellence has expressed a desire to enhance cooperation and existing support, with Irish Military Police. This reflects the Centre's recognition of the value that the Irish Military Police bring from operations with the UN, NATO and EU, and the Defence Forces' commitment to continued partnership.

Legal Insight that Resonated Across Nations

Colonel Richard Brennan, Director of the Defence Forces Legal Service Branch, delivered a session that brought real-world clarity to the complexities of international law in contemporary operations. The lecture explored the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) / International Humanitarian Law (IHL), transitions from peacekeeping to peace enforcement, shifts in rules of engagement (ROE), and practical application of SOFA and SOMA agreements. Drawing on real case studies, he examined where the rules were applied correctly and crucially, where they were misapplied, to deepen professional judgement, highlight legal risk, and strengthen operational decision-making. For many of the 26 students from 19 nations, they said it was the first time these frameworks were directly tied to their responsibilities on deployment.

Strategic Thinking: From the Trench to the Table

Senior NCOs are no longer just "boots on the ground" they are also "brains in the room." The course's strategic Courses of Actions (COA) module guided students through realistic multinational scenarios rooted in the European security environment, showing how senior NCO input shapes operational outcomes. Delivered by RQMS Roch Ryan attending not only as a facilitator but also as a recognised Subject Matter Expert (SME) the session encouraged participants to move "from the trench to the table," reinforcing their role as key advisors during mission planning. Participants responded positively, noting the shift from tactical execution to strategic influence.

From First Steps to Forward Leadership

What began as a single seat on a course has grown into instructional leadership and curriculum development. Irish personnel now contribute as facilitators, subject matter experts and partners in course design reflecting trust earned through performance and professionalism.

Strengthening the Network: The CSEL Forum

The NATO MP Command Senior Enlisted Leaders (CSEL) Forum

originally proposed by Sergeant Major Zdenek HANAK has become a key driver of professional dialogue and innovation across NATO and PfP communities. Ireland has supported the Forum since its inception in 2023, represented each year by RQMS Roch Ryan. Its influence can be seen in the establishment of the NATO Junior MP NCO Course, developed following the 2024 Forum, extending the leadership pipeline alongside the Senior NCO course.

Looking Ahead

Involvement at this level is not about the numbers, it is about impact. The Irish Defence Forces may be small in comparison to other militaries but its highly capable and professional Military Police Corps continues to punch above its weight. As international cooperation becomes ever more critical, the Defence Forces' ability to project influence through expertise, not just presence, continues to prove its value on the multinational stage.

As a Partner for Peace nation (PfP), Ireland contributes meaningfully to NATO initiatives enhancing international cooperation in military policing and legal operations and demonstrating our commitment to being a reliable and capable European partner.

The visit to the NATO Military Police Centre of Excellence showed how far Ireland's Military Police have come in building lasting partnerships and contributing to multinational training and development. Across the week, Irish involvement could be seen in the classroom, in discussions on doctrine, and in the exchange of experience that strengthens every participating nation. It was a reminder that professionalism and reliability are recognised qualities of the Defence Forces members wherever they serve.

The author wishes to acknowledge the continued support of the Provost Marshal, J7 (Training & Education) J4, DF Travel Office, the Defence Forces Training Centre, MP Group DFTC, and Connect staff whose backing makes ongoing Irish contribution to NATO MP COE training possible.

Colonel Richard Brennan delivering his session on the legal frameworks underpinning multinational military police operations



Sgt Major Pat Balfe (Retired)

PEOPLE OF THE DF

NAME:

FRAN DILLON

RANK:

SGT (RETIRED)

COMBINED MILITARY AND CIVILIAN SERVICE:

53 YEARS

OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENTS:

2



Can you give me a brief description of your career?

On 06 Dec 1973, I signed up in the Army Apprentice School, Devoy Bks Naas, No 18 Platoon as App Francis Dillon 828193 Fitter/Armourer, aged 16.

On completion of my trade, I passed out June 1976 as a 2-star Technician. In July 1976 I was sent to 3rd Batt in the Curragh Camp for my 3-star course and on completion was sent to my Assigned Unit, 2 Garrison Army Ordnance Corps in Cathal Brugha Bks. For the next few years, I was sent to various barracks within the Eastern Command on inspection, where with a team of Armourers, we would inspect and repair all small arms in the battalions within our Jurisdiction. I would also attend Annual Range Practices (ARP) with various units as their Armourer and would inspect their weapons prior to firing and zero each firer in Kilbride or Gormanston, in all weathers.

I attended All Army Shooting Competitions at Command and All Army level as part of an Armourer team. In 1979, myself and a few others from the Unit went on an NCO course and after completion I was promoted to Corporal in 1980. Later that year I began learning about EOD duties as it was a specialist area, and after some time I completed a basic EOD course in Clancy Barracks where the Ordnance School was based,

there was a lot of activity because of the Northern Ireland situation at the time. After completion, duties as a No 2 on EOD were my main duties in Dublin and on the Border in Dundalk, where I gained valuable experience and knowledge. I attended an EOD IEDD instructor

course and became the Unit EOD NCO. I was promoted to Sgt in 1983 and put in charge of Annual Ordnance Inspection teams, so now I had a team of Armourers under me and new guys that would learn from what I was taught as a young Armourer. I attended the Ordnance School with 8 others from around the country on an Artificer course, an extension of the Armourer course but with Artillery Weapons, 3 weeks on each weapon including 25 pounder gun (used in Gun Salutes for Dignitaries), 105 Light Gun, 120mm Mortars, L60 Anti-Aircraft, Panhandle 90, and 76mm Naval gun. On completion I was sent to 2nd FAR and 7th FAR regiments as a Tiffy for 12 year's total.

For Overseas Service we had to wait as senior NCOs got in before us young guys, it was 1993/94 when I served with the 74th Unifil Bn as EOD NCO, a very rewarding experience dealing with battlefield EOD and IEDD Threats. I again volunteered for KFOR with 29th Inf Gp as Armourer/EOD, a very rewarding experience dealing with unfamiliar terrain and extremely harsh weather conditions at -30 degrees and seeing



Preparing for the Medal Parade with the 74th Inf Bn



Off on convoy to Beirut picking up members of the section



EOD Call Out – UXO, preparing a charge for disruption with Comdt Sean O'Shea

Armourer in OBW DFTC doing 3rd echelon repairs to small Arms. I took part in the Field Evaluation of the 5.56mm gun trials, awarded to the Steyr AUG in the 80s, and then in OBW in 2014 we upgraded the AUG 1 to Mod 14, over 6000 weapons modified by a team of 7 Civilian Armourers and Military extras. The work continues upgrading and repairing existing weapons and New Weapons coming into service. I'm due to retire March 2027 after 53 years in combined service.

What made you decide to join the Defence Forces?

I was always interested in the Army as a young boy. I was in the Scouts and Hiking and Camping out were interesting to me and challenging at the time, so that really put my mindset in action, as well as attending Easter parades back in the day. The quick way in was to go to the Apprentice School in Naas as you could go in at 15yrs old instead of waiting until you were 17 as was normal.

What was your proudest moment in the Defence Forces?

My proudest moment was probably on my NCOs course—there was a Guard of Honour and the one I did was for Pope John Paul 2 when he visited Ireland back in 1979. I was in the front rank and to see him up so close, that was very special.

Why did you choose to specialise as a Fitter/Armourer?

I'd done Metalwork in Vocational school, so Fitter was my call, and The Armourer part sounded interesting at the time as both are complex and challenging.

Can you tell me about completing the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) course?

EOD is a very complex and interesting subject, and as part of duties carried out by Ordnance personnel, Officers are classified as No 1s, NCOs as No 2s. Both courses are the same and put you through rigorous training to reach a level of competence to dismantle unexploded Ordnance, military ammunition or IEDDs (Improvised Explosive Device Disposal). The course covers theory and practical skills through instruction and coaching to handle a variety of tools and equipment, including Robot assistance.

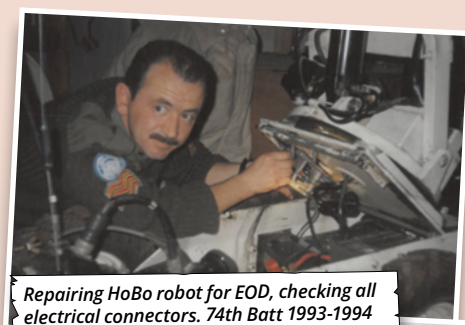
What was the most challenging part of your role, especially when working on overseas missions?

On overseas deployment you were in support of the Batt so EOD/IEDD call outs were continuous, especially after Grapes of Wrath in Lebanon. War debris had to be cleared from farmland and homes, mortar rounds embedded in walls had to be extracted with our special kit or blown up in situ. We protected the local population and our own troops, often going in first to make an area safe before humanitarian aid could get through.

Looking back over your 53 years of total service, what advice would you give to young soldiers starting out in the Defence Forces today?

To anyone contemplating joining the Irish Defence Forces I say this: We all have to do Recruit training. It's not for everyone. Infantry is front line, but there's a Logistics and Support team needed as well - Medics, Catering, Drivers, Mechanics, IT, Armourer, Signals, Engineer, etc. There's a job for you if you want it, and it will benefit you when your time is up. When the time comes to retire or leave, times can be challenging—loss of commitment, friends, going out to Civvy St, the unknown after many years in uniform -but there is assistance nowadays. I personally took up Reiki and am now a Reiki Master. A lot of men are doing it nowadays; it helps with de-stressing, letting go, and adjusting to civilian life.

I'd just like to extend a very special thank you to my family for the support and understanding of the Army Life.



Repairing HoBo robot for EOD, checking all electrical connectors. 74th Batt 1993-1994



Kosovo 29TH Inf Gp Spanish Camp Ishtsak EOD Conference



UNIFIL 74th Inf Bn Medal and Shamrock parade, St Patrick's Day

ON PARADE



Lord Mayor of Galway Mike Cubbard gave his best wishes to A/BSM John Moylan (1 Cn Cois) who retires on age grounds after 40 years of service



Comdt Richie Barber on parade for the 11th and 12th 2-3* Course passing out ceremony



The 64th Cadet Class taking a break from commissioning prep with a visit to HMS Somerset



Members of 7 Inf Bn pictured carrying out drills on the 81mm Mortar Course



The 64th Naval Cadet Class pictured outside the officer training school in Haulbowline after their commissioning ceremony



Members of the Medical Corps attended the closing ceremony of St Bricks Military Hospital



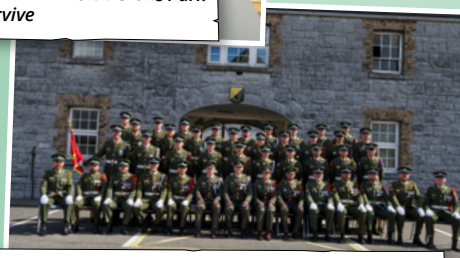
Capt Marlow briefing DCOS Ops Maj Gen Whittaker on the current situation in UNIFIL



BQMS Chapman being presented his new rank markings on promotion by Comdt O'Neill. The CIS Corps wish him all the best in his new appointment in the Digital Transformation Office, Joint Cyber Defence Command



Members of the Air Corps abseiled down Croke Park in support of Suicide or Survive



Students and Instructors of the 62nd PNCO Course recently passed out in 2BTC

ON PARADE



Members of the Defence Forces proudly took part in the Dublin Pride Parade, standing alongside more than 100,000 people in celebrating Ireland's largest event for diversity and inclusion



Members of 128 Inf Bn taking part in the Pte Sean Rooney Memorial Run



Comdt Byrne, Parade Commander, Monthly Remembrance Ceremony in UNIFIL



Cpl Sweeney covering DRWS Lenses following a patrol in Lebanon



Troops taking part in a battle PT at UNP 6-52



Pte Paige Conroy (CMU 2 Bde), during a joint Irish Polish Medical exercise in UNIFIL



DCOS OPS speaking to troops on the honour guard during his visit to Lebanon



Pte Daniel Dwyer being presented his Best Soldier award by Lt Col Courtney



PO Henry Molloy pictured with Accommodation NCOs past and present, will retire from the Naval Service after 42 years dedicated service. We wish him the best of luck in retirement



CPL Jack Ruddy and CPL Holly Kenny pictured with Lt Col Crean OC Equitation School after completing their Potential NCOs course

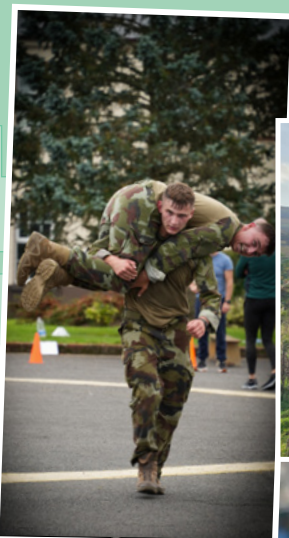


Congratulations to Cpl Craig Ratchford, Sgmn Andrew Mulligan and Sgmn Wayne O'Mahony on successfully completing the Basic Dispatch Rider Course



The 46th Recruit Platoon from 28 Inf Bn pictured at an Internal Comms brief

ON PARADE



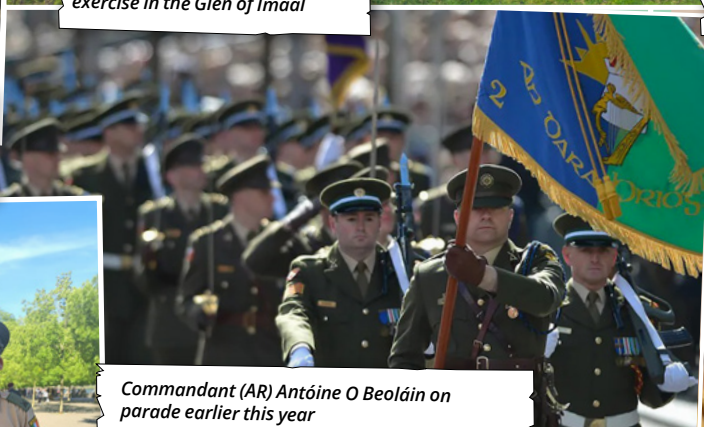
Members of 3 Inf Bn during the "Battle of the Bloods" challenge between the 3 companies in 3 Inf Bn



Members of 1ACS RDF on a Recce exercise in the Glen of Imaal



Comdt Niall Buckley and members of IRCON 32 KFOR just prior to their medal parade in Kosovo



Commandant (AR) Antóine O Beoláin on parade earlier this year



Comdt (AR) John McCandless pictured during a trip to Lourdes



Cpl Alan McCormack pictured at the Men's Health week event in Renmore Barracks



The Band of the Curragh Command through the years. The Defence Forces Band will hold a Gala in the DFTC in November dates TBC

ON PARADE



Cpl Fran Harrigan (AR) completed the Waterford Viking Marathon in Uniform carrying 21kg



DF Rowing members taking part in the Rhine Marathon Race in Germany earlier this year



Members of the 7 Inf Bn 2-3 Star Course during exercise Cú Chuillann



ARW Operators pictured during a crisis response exercise in the counter terrorism role in Emerald Park



Airmen and Women of the Air Corps marching on parade for the National Day of Commemoration in Kilmainham



Lt David Hand, Pte Sathbh McGovern and Tpr Seán Connick at an RDF recruitment stand in the equitation school



Officers of the 128th Inf Bn UNIFIL – Lt Martin, Capt London and Lt Higgins pictured on Peacekeepers Square after parade



Members of the 48th Recruit Platoon of 28th Inf Bn pictured during a recovery run

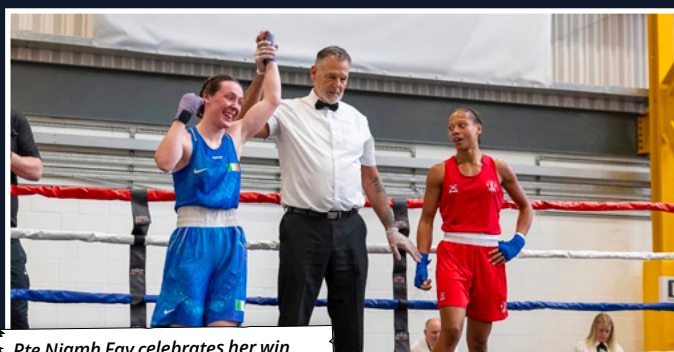


'KNOCK KNOCK' - A student on the 2-3 Star course during MOUT training in the MTF, DFTC (Photo by Cpl Mark Laffin)



The Landsverk L-180 on display at the Irish Military Vehicles Group show in Naas – Photo credit Ian Young – Military vehicle Trust

SPORTS & CLUBS



Pte Niamh Fay celebrates her win



Pte Rachel Lawless getting corner advice

DF BOXING

Defence Forces Boxers Excel at 4 Nations Championships

The 4 Nations Championships were held in Motherwell, Scotland, where members of the Irish Defence Forces delivered standout performances.

Pte Rachel Lawless (6th Bn) produced a superb display in her category. In the semi-finals she met Josie Lewis of Team Wales, winning by unanimous decision in a high-quality contest where she performed exceptionally well. In the final, Lawless faced Ruby White of Team England/Team GB and lost by a narrow split decision. Pte Niamh Fay (7th Bn, RDF) also impressed on the international stage. She defeated Ellie Cain of Wales in the semi-final before securing a strong 4-1 victory over Shassen Dutton of England in the final to claim gold.

Both athletes brought great credit to the Irish Defence Forces through their skill, determination, and sportsmanship throughout the competition.



DF BJJ

Over the last few months, the Defence Forces BJJ Club has maintained a strong training schedule with consistent sessions and steady progress across all levels.

The club enjoyed a productive visit to T45 in Cork and RGA for specialised competition training. These sessions provided valuable mat time against high-level training partners and helped sharpen techniques and strategies in preparation for upcoming events.

Looking ahead, we are excited to be entering a large team to the BJJ Nationals in September. The squad is motivated and focused on competing strongly across the divisions, with a clear goal of chasing the prestigious team trophy.

Keep an eye on their results, the Defence Forces BJJ team is building momentum! If you are a member of the Defence Forces and interested in joining, contact your Unit Gym for details.

Defence Forces Football Association Update

Coach Education

The Defence Forces Football Association continued its commitment to coach development with the successful delivery of the FAI Grassroots Coach Education Programme in Cathal Brugha Barracks. Thirty-one members commenced their coaching journey, taking part in the FAI Grassroots Coach Education pathway.

The programme began with the "Me and My Club" and "Me and "My Teammates" workshops, delivered by FAI Coach Educator Cameron Malloy Moules, before participants progressed to the Grassroots Certificate. Throughout the course, the emphasis was placed on developing better coaches to create better footballers, encouraging participants to look beyond drills and match preparation and instead focus on creating positive learning environments that support players at every stage of their development.

The workshops challenged coaches to reflect on their coaching philosophy while providing practical tools to deliver age-appropriate,



player-centred sessions. The programme reinforced the importance of quality coaching in fostering participation, enjoyment and long-term player development.

The Defence Forces was also pleased to welcome coaches from Crumlin United FC, with representatives from both the senior and grassroots sections attending the workshops. Their participation highlighted the value of collaboration between clubs and organisations, creating an opportunity to share knowledge, exchange ideas and further raise coaching standards.

The Defence Forces Football Association remains committed to developing not only capable military leaders but also knowledgeable and confident football coaches who can have a lasting impact within Defence Forces teams and their local communities. A sincere thank you is extended to Cameron Malloy Moules for delivering an engaging and thought-provoking programme that provided an excellent foundation for the next generation of Defence Forces coaches.

Referee Development

The Defence Forces Referees Section also continues to strengthen its reputation both nationally and internationally through the continued development of its officials. At the recent CISM competitions, four Defence Forces referees were selected to officiate, with two appointed to the men's tournament and two to the women's tournament. Their selection reflects the high standard of refereeing within the Defence Forces and the growing recognition of its officials on the international stage.

The section also celebrated the successful qualification of 17 new referees following the completion of the Defence Forces Referees Course. Delivered by Sgt Declan Toland of 2 BTC Athlone, the programme consisted of one day of pre-course learning followed by a one-day online course. These newly qualified referees will now officiate at grassroots level within their local leagues while also providing valuable support to Defence Forces football competitions, further strengthening the future of military refereeing.

Domestic Competitions

On the field, the first round of the Cunningham Cup is currently underway, with units from across the Defence Forces competing for one of the Association's most prestigious domestic honours.

Women's Football

The Defence Forces Women's Team represented the organisation on the international stage, travelling to Germany during the first week of June to compete in the European Qualifiers. Facing a strong group and a demanding level of competition, the tournament provided a valuable opportunity for the team to test themselves against high-quality opposition. While the competition was challenging, it proved to be an important experience for the squad as they continue to develop their players, build team cohesion and strengthen the pathway for women's football within the Defence Forces. The experience gained will be invaluable as the team continues to progress and compete at a higher level.

The continued growth of the women's game remains a key priority for the Association. Defence Forces Members are encouraged to keep an eye out for the Defence Forces Women's 5-a-Side Tournament, which is scheduled to take place September 2026. The competition will provide another excellent opportunity for participation, talent identification and the continued promotion of women's football throughout the Defence Forces.

International Competition

Looking ahead, the Defence Forces Men's Team will proudly participate in the Kentish Cup in France this November. This marks the Defence Forces' first invitation to the historic tournament, an honour that reflects the growing reputation of Defence Forces football on the international stage. Established in 1919 in the aftermath of the First World War, the Kentish Cup is one of the oldest international military football tournaments in the world, bringing together military teams from France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The invitation

represents a significant milestone and a proud moment for Defence Forces football.

Get Involved

As the Association continues to grow, opportunities are available for Defence Forces personnel to become involved as players, coaches and match officials. If you are interested in becoming part of Defence Forces football, please see the contact details below.

Contact Information

Section	Email	Ext.
Defence Forces Men's Soccer Team	Richard.barber@defenceforces.ie (Comdt Barber) Ken.Deegan@defenceforces.ie (Comdt Deegan)	6370
Defence Forces Women's Soccer Team	Margaret.hogan@defenceforces.ie (Comdt Hogan) Shauna.connaughton@defenceforces.ie (Lt Connaughton)	2509 5333
Defence Forces Referees Section	Declan.toland@defenceforces.ie (Sgt Toland) Paul.tuite@defenceforces.ie (RSM Tuite)	7891

DF HURLING

The annual DF Chaplin's and Parson Cup competition was held in The Offaly GAA centre of Excellence on Thursday the 18th June.

Over 60 hurlers from units all over the Defence forces gathered to represent their units and barracks. Some excellent games took place, and the individual skills was outstanding.

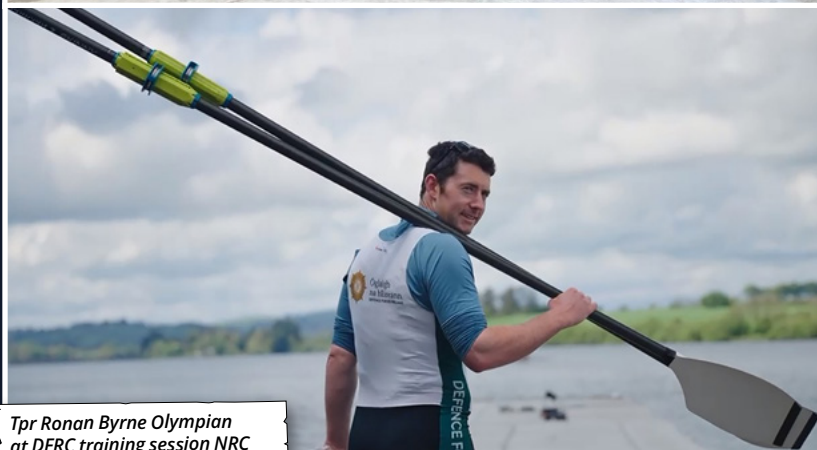
The Chaplin's Cup was won by the 3 Inf Battalion "the Bloods" who defeated 2 Bde in a thrilling final. Player of the Match was the 2 Bde Goalkeeper Private Darragh Fay from the 7 Infantry Battalion.

The Parsons Cup was won by the 12th Infantry Battalion "The Premier Battalion" who defeated the 3 Inf Battalion in a penalty shootout. Player of the Match was CQ Cormac Cullinan from the 12th Infantry Battalion who gave a exhibition as defender.

The Chaplin's cup was presented by FR Ted Sheehan on behalf of the chaplaincy service. All focus for hurlers now turns to club championships and we wish all our members they best of luck in their respective competitions.

For the DF hurling our attention switches to the Inter Brigade competition which will be held in Early September and then to the annual Defence Forces representative series where we will play An Gardaí and AIB in early November.





*Tpr Ronan Byrne Olympian
at DFRC training session NRC*

Irish Defence Forces Rowing Club

End of Season Review [2025/26]

As the sun sets on another incredible season, it's time to reflect on a year of hard work, fierce competition, personal bests, and unforgettable moments for the Defence Forces Rowing Club and its members. From cold winter mornings on the water at the National Rowing Centre to championship finals under blue skies, this season has truly showcased the spirit and strength of our club and more importantly its members.

Performance Highlights

This year saw impressive achievements across all crews which was kicked off with participation in the world famous Rhyne Marathon. Over the course of four days where the Defence Forces Rowing Club had two crews competing. Our athletes put in a considerable effort to finish as 3rd fastest international crew and 8th place for the second boat, a remarkable effort considering the weather conditions and distance of 42.2km row. The weather this season, like a lot of other

clubs, wasn't as favourable for many races planned by Rowing Ireland but when possible, the club entered and some of these races included St Michaels, Regatta, Fermoy, Munster head and the Cork Regatta with some excellent results attained.

The introduction of new members is always an added bonus to the club as it provides competition, motivation and enhanced mental focus required to be in a seat in one of our boats, combined with the gentle little shove needed to push even harder for our more established members.

Off the water, this season like last has been a quite remarkable season for the club who only some four years ago did not exist, the introduction of High Performance coach Mrs Sanita Purspora, a former three time Olympian, and two time world champion and now within our ranks is Olympian Ronan Byrne, who now juggles a career as well as rowing with the Irish senior squad is a massive boost to our club and demonstrates just how far we have come but more important how far we want to go.

Continuous improvement has been the word again this season behind the rowing scene with our newly built boat house kitted out in new rowing machines, Concepts 2 bikes and RP3rowers and much thanks must go to J7 staff led by Comdt Sarah O Regan, again for the support and belief that something unique is coming out of Cork from a sporting context.

Training & Club Development

We also introduced many new initiatives, like a winter training camp, strength & conditioning program, or mental performance workshops, which have been well-received by all athletes, as such the mental strain on the human body to undergo a 2000 meter race would be equivalent to standing up and sitting down off the floor over 1200 times in 6.30 min as a comparison is testament to the athletes. Our club plans to run its next Learn to Row camp in February next year so if Defence Forces personnel are interested, please reach out.

Community & Culture

This season wasn't just about racing either, the club will celebrate the effort and spirit this season through upcoming club events such the "Summer BBQ, where club members will no doubt discuss the long slow distance (LSD) ergometer sessions, and very cold but memorable winter training periods in a cold National Rowing Centre, (NRC). The camaraderie, support, and commitment shown by members both on and off the water have been nothing short of exceptional.

Looking Ahead

With a strong foundation and growing momentum, the future looks bright for the Defence Forces Rowing Club. We look forward to seeing Tpr Ronan Byrne of the 1 Bde Cav push on for a place at the next Olympics in what will be a challenging year ahead for Ronan, thus backed by Ms Sinita Purspora, the other club members strive to



compete at a higher faster, fitter level than ever experienced. The goal setting for the 2026/27 season involves more Rowing Ireland regattas, and a summer camp next summer in preparation for the Head of Charles river race in Boston in Oct 2027.

For now as we move into the off-season, the focus shifts to recovery, reflection, and preparation for what promises to be an even more successful year ahead full of blisters, sweat, sometimes almost tears but most important unity where the one goal is to develop our club into one of the biggest and best sports club in the Defence Forces. Here's to pushing harder, rowing stronger, and more controlled aggression in the pain cave that is rowing in the season to come.

Thank You

A heartfelt thank you goes to our dedicated coaches, volunteers, without your passion and tireless contributions, none of this would be possible.

To our athletes—your resilience, determination, and team spirit define who we are as a club. Every stroke, early morning, and blister was worth it and there was a lot of blisters!

If you are a member of the Defence Forces and rowing is a sport you have thought about trying or might just have wondered what it feels like to sit in an Olympic racing standard boat and race in a pressure environment or perhaps you just want to hop in a boat and enjoy the experience of it in a social capacity, then perhaps you should come along to our next camp or feel free to reach out dave.williams@defenceforces.ie or Robert.diffley@defenceforces.ie for further information.

DF MOUNTAINEERING

Over the past two months, the Defence Forces Adventure Management (DFAM) team has been heavily involved in supporting a wide range of courses and adventure activities across the Defence Forces.

A standout event included DFAM members expertly setting up a major abseil on Mahon Falls in the Comeragh Mountains to support the General Officer Commanding's (GOC) Challenge in 1 Brigade.

After two demanding days packed with diverse stands and activities, troops tackled the spectacular 200-metre abseil down the steep gully — a true highlight that tested nerve, skill, and teamwork in one of Ireland's most dramatic natural settings.

Looking Ahead

This year's events included a Basic Rock-Climbing course taking place at Dalkey Quarry. On successful completion, students will be eligible to apply for the CTI course starting in September.

Anyone interested in finding out more about DFAM can contact Treasurerdfam@gmail.com for details on how to join and information on upcoming courses. Alternatively, keep an eye out for future basic rock climbing and mountaineering courses.



DF Rugby

The month of May saw another international tournament for DF Rugby, with both the Men and Women's teams travelling to Agen, France to play in the 3rd International CISM Sevens Challenge. The weekend was jammed packed with competition as the Men faced off against USA, South Africa, Spain & the Netherlands, while the women took to the field against South Africa, USA, France & Spain eventually finishing in a very competitive 4th place.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

AN COSANTÓIR VOLUME 70, NUMBER 01, FEB 2010

CORPS



Engineers clear the way

By Wesley Bourke

Photographs by Armn Greg Dorney

Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) left by the roadside or a homemade bomb concealed in a car or bin are unseen enemies, lethal to civilian and soldier alike. They are a threat that is encountered both at home and overseas. When detected, it is the job of specialist Explosive Ordnance Device (EOD) teams to make safe the deadly devices. However finding, isolating and clearing a safe path to these devices is the job of the Engineer Specialist Search and Clearance (ESSC) teams. These are highly skilled teams using specialist equipment, their eyes and years of experience, who can spot explosive devices, booby-traps or detonator wires, that are well concealed to the untrained eye.

IEDs and other such devices are indiscriminate and their operators are persistently looking for new ways to avoid detection. ESSC teams are constantly in training and the Engineer Corps run exercises several times a year for all their field units. At a recent exercise in Galway, ESSC teams were tasked with clearing a route to a suspected device in a remote area, clearing a road, a rail track and making safe a building prior to a VIP visit.

At home and overseas, ESSC teams are on call 24/7. One example of their work at home happened last September when Army ESSC teams were called into a suspected device along the border. As it turned out, a dissident republican group had abandoned a 600lb homemade bomb in south Armagh because it had failed to go off. However, the bomb's command wire ran into County Louth. Working with British EOD and ESSC teams on the

opposite side of the border, an Army ESSC team had to find, isolate and clear a path to the command wire before the British could make safe the device. Though the dissidents had given the general area of the wire's location, it took the ESSC teams a couple of days before the 'all-clear' was given.

Their ongoing training and operational experience, has meant that the Engineer Corps ESSC teams are much sought after and are an integral part of Ireland's commitment to the EU Nordic Battle Group.

A day does not go by without you hearing a media report that an IED or roadside bomb has claimed the lives of coalition forces and innocent bystanders in Afghanistan or Iraq. Such devices in the past have been used against Irish troops in south Lebanon. No matter where we are deployed, ESSC teams are a part of any overseas mission ensuring the route is clear. ■





**An interview with OC ARW
by Wesley Bourke**

Over the last decade there has been a rapid expansion in the role of special forces internationally. The realisation that special forces act as a force multiplier has led to a huge growth in the number of such forces and their usage to combat many threats that have emerged in recent and ongoing conflicts around the world. While we are all aware that special forces units have been tasked to conduct insurgency and counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, their role is also expanding in peace-support operations (PSOs), such as the recent operations with the EU Special Operations Task Force in Chad.

Warfare, by its very nature, changes constantly. Therefore, we have to constantly keep abreast of the international changes in special forces' capabilities and equipment. Asymmetric warfare has become very prevalent in today's conflicts, and in these situations, where conventional forces can find themselves ill-equipped and ill-trained for the particular job, special forces step in.

To keep on top of these changes the Defence Forces has an ongoing information and personnel exchange programme with other armed forces around the world, particularly in Europe. This means we stay aware of the latest equipment and best international practices in the international special forces community, and we are aware that our equipment is on a par with our international comrades.

We maintain land, sea and air capabilities, which allow us to deploy and operate as a special operations task group (SOTG) in any of these arenas, either in a 'green' (conventional) or 'black' (anti-terrorist) role.

Our conventional role has seen us participating in large multinational missions overseas, such as those in East Timor, Liberia, and, more recently, Chad. We have operated as initial entry forces and within multinational SOTGs, and our teams are capable of operating on their own up to the strategic limits of a force's area of operations.

To be able to carry out these tasks efficiently means we have to train to be interoperable with other nations. Our personnel also have to maintain their specialist training to be able to operate in multinational special operations task forces (SOTFs). We also have other specialists that can operate in SOTF HQs and Combined Joint Special Operations Component Command HQs.

There is a compelling need today for a military anti-terrorist capability. The strategic environment is constantly changing and we have to train for situations both on land and at sea. To this end our specialists train in countering hijackings on aircraft or terrorist attacks on oil rigs for example.

Assisting us to maintain these capabilities is the very close relationship we enjoy with the Air Corps and Naval Service. Both organisations are very professional and train their personnel to carry out joint operations with us. If we approach them with a plan for a new capability we wish to develop, as has often happened, they go away and train their specialist staff in order to facilitate us in implementing the new capability. Sometimes this requires the purchase of new equipment and in such cases we conduct joint testing with our sister services to perfect the drills required for new and existing roles. Maintaining this interoperability with the Air Corps and the Naval Service is vital to maintaining and evolving our skills and roles.

There is an understanding at the highest level of the Defence Forces of what the ARW can bring to any mission area and the capability we have to deploy not just as an initial entry force but also as a standalone, niche deployment capability. With that in mind I would see the numbers of ARW personnel growing over the next number of years. ■



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