



THE DEFENCE FORCES MAGAZINE

AN COSAÍOIR



year in
review 2024



[STRENGTHEN THE NATION]



NOV/DEC 2024



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From the editor

— Cpl Eric Ryan

Hello and welcome to our sixth and final edition of 2024, as this year draws to a close we want to give a special thanks to everyone who submitted articles and images to the magazine throughout the year. We want to wish all our readers and families a happy Christmas and a happy new year. In this edition we have a year in review from the various branches within the DF. We have Christmas and New Year's messages from Uachtarán na hÉireann, The Chief of Staff, An Tánaiste, Secretary General DOD and Head Chaplain, addressed to the soldiers, sailors, airmen & women of the Defence Forces. Followed by a roll of honour for serving members that have sadly passed in service in the last 12 months. We hope you enjoy this edition of An Cosantóir and enjoy the Christmas period.

"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall" — Nelson Mandela



AN COSANTÓIR



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By Various Contributors

Back Cover

Northern lights in Stephen's Barracks
Kilkenny by Pte Derek Feehan

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PRESIDENT MICHAEL D. HIGGINS

Mar Uachtarán na hÉireann agus mar Cheannasaí Uachtarach d'Óglaigh na hÉireann, is mian liom beannachtaí croíúil a sheoladh do gach uile dhuine mar bhall d'Óglaigh na hÉireann agus a dteaghlaigh an Nollaig seo.

As President of Ireland and as Supreme Commander of Óglaigh na Éireann, may I send a warm greeting to each and every member of the Defence Forces and their families at this Christmas season.

Throughout 2024, our Defence Forces continue to exemplify dedication and resilience in service to our country, demonstrating the great sense of generous solidarity that characterises all those who offer their service to the Army, Navy and Air Corps.

The efforts of Óglaigh na Éireann ensure the continuation of Ireland's peacekeeping service with the United Nations, which has been unbroken since 1958. In so many places around the world where peace is fragile, the presence of members of Óglaigh na hÉireann brings much-needed hope.

At this time, as President of Ireland and Supreme Commander of the Defence Forces, I am thinking, as I am sure are all Irish citizens, of what an anxious time it is for all of our personnel in Lebanon, where so many members of our Defence Forces are undertaking work for peace that involves considerable risk in carrying out such vital humanitarian work, making a huge sacrifice on behalf of defenceless civilians in southern Lebanese villages.

We must all think daily of the soldiers and their families, of the importance of their safety and provisions, of our members who have taken these risks to protect some of the most vulnerable members of our shared global family, so that we might all live in conditions of peace.

I am sure that the courage being displayed by our contingent and their colleagues has the thoughts and prayers of all those who value peace, both at home and abroad.

At home, our Defence Forces played an important role in many ceremonial events across the country, including State Visits to Áras an Uachtaráin, bringing to each the

customary distinction and dignity which makes me, as Uachtaráin na hÉireann, so very proud. Molaim sibh.

I would also like to thank Óglaigh Náisiúnta na hÉireann for their important work in reaching out a hand of friendship and support to ex-service men and women, embodying the great spirit of solidarity that lies at the heart of all that our Defence Forces do.

Agus deireadh na bliana 2024 ag druidim linn, ba mhaith liom mo mholadh a thabhairt do chách atá mar bhall d'Óglaigh na hÉireann don ionchur tábhachtach agus dearfach a dhéanann sibh do shlándáil agus cosaint na hÉireann, agus an leathnú de shíocháin, slándáil agus ceartas timpeall na cruinne.

As we approach the end of 2024, may I conclude by commending all the members of Óglaigh na hÉireann for the important and positive contribution that you make to the security and defence of Ireland, and to the furthering of peace, security and justice across the globe.

To each and every one of you, whether serving at home or overseas, and your families and loved ones, may I thank you for upholding the values of courage, honour, and dedication, values that lie at the heart of the Defence Forces, for your qualities of integrity, selflessness and valour. Ireland is profoundly grateful for all that you do.

I also assure those of you who will remain separated from loved ones during this festive season that your sacrifice is greatly appreciated by the people of Ireland.

Thar ceann mhuintir na hÉireann, guím Nollaig Shona daoibh agus gach rath agus séan oraibh san athbhliain.

On behalf of all of the people of Ireland, may I wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas and a safe, flourishing and fulfilling New Year.


Michael D. Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland



TÁNAISTE AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE MICHEÁL MARTIN

As 2024 draws to a close, I want to wish all personnel of Óglaigh na hÉireann, and your loved ones, a very happy Christmas and a joyful new year.

I want to thank each of you for your dedicated service to the State in 2024. It has been another busy 12 months at home and abroad across the Army, Air Corps, Naval Service and Reserve Defence Forces.

I want, in particular, to pay tribute to the men and women of the 124th Infantry Battalion, under the command of Lt Col Tom Fox, whom I had the opportunity to visit in Lebanon in May. We are incredibly grateful for their professionalism and dedication amid incredibly challenging circumstances.

Their successors in the 125th Battalion now have a critical role in monitoring the recently agreed ceasefire.

Our soldiers are not just military personnel; they are individuals who have chosen to serve a greater purpose. With robust training and strength of character, along with the support of comrades, they are promoting peace, stability, and security in a difficult and complex region.

Our thoughts also go to the families of all those serving overseas.

In Budget 2025 in October, the Government committed to a record €1.35 billion in Defence funding. This will enable further progress on the transformation of the Defence Forces, and will allow for crucial progress on important defence projects such as military radar, subsea awareness, force protection equipment and Defence Forces infrastructure.

This year, I also launched the Regeneration and Development Plan for the Reserve Defence Force, which I regard as a vital part of the transformation process. This plan contains concrete actions to drive forward recruitment and retention, resourcing, training and education and integration and deployment.

Another important step in the modernisation of our Defence Forces in 2024 was increasing the mandatory retirement age for Defence Forces personnel from 60 to 62. This allows members who want to remain in service longer to do so, along with helping the Defence

Forces in their efforts to retain highly trained, skilled and experienced personnel.

The Oireachtas also passed important legislation in 2024. The Defence (Amendment) Act 2024 includes provisions establishing the External Oversight Body on a statutory basis, and prohibiting the use of the term “Óglaigh na hÉireann” except where such use is authorised by law.

This year, for the eighth time, the Defence Forces participated in an EU Battlegroup, demonstrating the willingness, capability and readiness to act within the framework of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy, and to further enhance our commitment towards global peace and security. 2024 also saw the continuation of the Defence Forces’ training engagement with the EU Military Assistance Mission in Ukraine.

Christmas is also a time when we remember those who have gone before us. We remember those who have lost their lives while serving with the Defence Forces, as well as our friends and colleagues who have passed away in 2024. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

Finally, I would like to wish you and your family’s good health and happiness for Christmas. Again, I want to thank you for your service and wish you all the best in the year ahead.

Micheál Martin
Tánaiste and Minister for Defence



CHIEF OF STAFF LIEUTENANT GENERAL SEÁN CLANCY

As Chief of Staff, I would like to avail of this opportunity, on behalf of both the General Staff and the Defence Board, to extend season's greetings to you, the men and women of Óglaigh na hÉireann, and in particular to those of you who will be spending Christmas Day apart from your families, either on duty on island, or on Peace Support Operations abroad.

Christmas allows us an opportunity to pause and reflect on what has occurred over the past year and also take time to consider the year ahead. Given the spiralling cycle of violence happening in the Middle East, an area the Defence Forces have operated in as peacekeepers since 1958, it may be even more difficult this year to think of Christmas as a season of goodwill, especially in what we know as the Holy Land. We can only hope that 2025 will bring some shoots of peace in the Middle East, from the vestiges of conflict, destruction and suffering that the world is currently witness to.

As I reflect on the Defence Forces in 2024, I consider once again the privilege given to me, by my appointment, to lead, represent and advocate for, such a dedicated group of professional soldiers, sailors and aircrew. On a daily basis, your continued conduct across the State, of numerous Aid to the Civil Power operations makes Ireland a safer place for its citizens, while your Aid to the Civil Authority commitments demonstrate that the Defence Forces will always be there, supporting Principal Response Agencies, when communities encounter difficult circumstances.

On the international stage, I cannot remember in recent times, when your role as peacekeepers in UNIFIL and OGL has been more at the centre of our national consciousness and discourse, both as a people and a State. The resilience displayed by our peacekeepers, in what can only be described as the most challenging of circumstances, in South Lebanon has ensured that the United Nations Security Council and the International Community have a witness to the disturbing events ongoing in that region. In Europe, our Mobile Training Teams continue to provide essential military training for members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, as they

face into, what will soon be, the fourth year of an illegal assault of their homeland. This training will continue into 2025.

Our operations and training at home and abroad are only made possible by the unending support given to us by our families. This is especially the case at Christmas when you are separated from your loved ones. I can assure you that the General Staff never take this support for granted and I want to avail of this message to also thank everyone who has had a liaison role for families or organised events that show our appreciation for them.

This will be my final Christmas message to you as Chief of Staff. Before I take up a new appointment next year, I look forward to continuing to meet as many of you as possible and thanking you for the support you have given me in my appointment, over what will be nearly four years. It has been my absolute privilege to serve you.

Finally, I want to welcome everyone who has enlisted during 2024 and is spending their first Christmas in uniform. You are our future and our most precious resource. Thank you for choosing to serve the State and its people, as a member of Óglaigh na hÉireann. An immense effort has taken place this year to prioritise recruitment, so that we can stabilise our strength, increase our establishment and deliver on the government outlined Level of Ambition for the Defence Forces. Thank you for all your efforts and support this year.

I wish you and your families a safe and happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year.

Nollag shona daoibh go léir.

Seán Clancy
Seán Clancy
Lieutenant General
Chief of Staff



SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE JACQUI MCCRUM

Dear Women and Men of the Defence Forces,

As we near Christmas, thank you to An Cosantóir for this opportunity to convey the wishes of myself, my Management Board and Departmental colleagues to you and your families. Thank you all for your commitment and excellent service during a challenging year in many regions of the world.

At this time, I am thinking of those serving in Lebanon and their families. I share the Nation's great pride in the courage and bravery of our UNIFIL service men and women. We continue to monitor the situation closely and thank all those, both at home and abroad, that are involved in this important mission.

As well as our overseas missions, the women and men of the Defence Forces have also continued their significant contributions to a number of influential postings in other regions of the world, as well as in the EU Military Assistance Mission in Ukraine. Christmas is always a particularly poignant time for those serving abroad and their families, who miss them all dearly. I join with those families in the pride we feel for the contribution each serving member makes to the cause of peace and justice.

Looking back on the year, substantial progress has been made in a number of areas, including, the signing into law of the Defence (Amendment) Bill, the increase in the mandatory retirement age (MRA) to 62, the increase in the maximum recruitment age to 39, the introduction of a range of work life initiatives, the doubling of the patrol duty allowance, the extension of the Sea-going Naval Personnel Tax Credit for a further five years, and the renewal of the Strategic Human Resource Group. Progress has also been made on the implementation of the Working Time Directive and in the area of the Reserves with the Reserve Defence Forces Regeneration and Development Plan, launched in August. These, and other actions, demonstrate the ongoing investment in our Defence Forces; in its people, infrastructure, capabilities and culture.

In a noteworthy event this year, the Defence Policy Review was published in June. This policy update addresses the significant changes in Ireland's security environment and outlines the country's defence strategy up to 2028 and sets the direction into the future. The importance placed on the Defence sector was further reflected in the recent budget, in which a record allocation of €1.35 billion in Defence funding was made - an increase of €100 million compared to Budget 2024. This significant level of funding will enable further progress in the efforts to enhance and transform the Defence Forces into a modern, fit for purpose organisation, to defend the State, and meet the challenges of today and the future.

Indeed, transformation efforts have moved apace this year, with substantial advancement made on the recommendations set out by the Commission on the Defence Forces, and as reported on through the Strategic Framework reporting mechanism, which you can access online. The significant efforts of all involved, both civilian and military, in this programme of change are greatly appreciated.

This year saw the establishment of the Tribunal of Inquiry, along with placing the External Oversight Body on a statutory basis. Following consultation with all Stakeholders, a new independent and external complaints system is being made available to all PDF members. This marks a significant step in addressing the recommendations made by

the Independent Review Group and progressing cultural change in the Defence Forces.

This year marked a significant year for the Naval Service, with the launch of our two new IPVs, L.É. Aoibhinn and L.É. Gobnait. These welcome additions, in conjunction with plans for an East Coast Naval Berth, facilitate enhancements in our capabilities at sea. Investment in infrastructure continued across the Defence Forces, with the opening of new accommodation in Collins Barracks in Cork and the confirmation of €8.6 million in funding for the construction of a new Communications and Information Services (CIS) Workshop at the Defence Forces Training Centre in the Curragh Camp.

As usual there were events and ceremonies across 2024 where I had the honour of meeting and speaking with many of you, including the visit to Kosovo in January, Cadet Commissioning in April, the UNIFIL Reviews in April and Oct, the 100th Annual State Ceremony in Arbour Hill in May, the IUNVA HQ visit in June, NS Commissioning, and Beaufort Cup in July, a visit to Baldonnel in August, the Fuchsia Campaign Launch in September, and the Inaugural Subsea Cable Security and Resilience Symposium in October. I also attended the DF Remembrance Ceremony and the 64th Niemba Anniversary in Cathal Brugha Barracks, as well as the 6th Army Reserve Commissioning in the DFTC in November. The joint civ/mil Research Technology and Innovation Unit, along with support from members, also showcased the digital small arms simulator in Newbridge and Renmore this year. I thank this Unit and the wider civ/mil Cap Dev team, who continue to drive innovation and capability development in the Defence Forces, such as the new capability 'Situational Awareness Training'.

The Defence Women's Network continued to support collaboration through networking and information events such as celebrating International Women's Day in Baldonnel. I know ASG Aileen Nolan and the Department team also greatly enjoyed the Defence Forces Women's Soccer 5-A-Side in Kilkenny in June, better luck next year team! A particular highlight for me was the Galway event in October, in which, Máire Geoghegan Quinn gave a rousing overview of her remarkable career. These events are great to develop working relationships across the organisation and always provide food for thought.

As we approach Christmas, we remember all those serving and former members of the Defence Forces including other family members and loved ones who have lost their lives and passed away. Each December marks the tragic loss of Private Seán Rooney in Lebanon, my thoughts go to his family, friends, and all his colleagues and all those remembering lost loved ones at this time.

In closing, thank you again for all your commitment and excellent work. On both my own behalf, and that of my Management Board and colleagues in the Department, I wish all of you and your families a happy and a peaceful Christmas.

Jacqui McCrum
Jacqui McCrum

Secretary General of the Department of Defence



HEAD CHAPLAIN FR PASCHAL HANRAHAN

A Chairde,

It is truly an honour and a joy to be offered this opportunity to extend greetings to the women and men of Óglaigh na hÉireann and to your families and loved ones, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas 2024. The message of that first Christmas night comes to us down through the years and is as relevant today as it ever was.

I am sure that we have all been affected by events in the Middle East and saddened by the casualties suffered there. We can be immensely proud of the positive contribution that our peacekeepers are making. The debt of gratitude owed to these young men and women, and to their families, is indeed great.

Finding hope in adversity is one of the themes of Christmas. Jesus was born into a world full of fear. The angels came to frightened shepherds with hope in their voices:

**'Fear not', they urged, 'we bring
you tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.**

**'For unto you is born this day
in the City of David a Saviour
who is Christ the Lord.'**

Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves - from our recklessness or our greed. God sent into the world a unique person - neither a philosopher nor a general, important though they are, but a Saviour, with the power to forgive. Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities and a divided world. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.

In the last verse of this beautiful carol, O Little Town Of Bethlehem, there's a prayer:

**O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us we pray.
Cast out our sin
And enter in.
Be born in us today.**

It is my prayer that this Christmas we might all find room in our lives for the message of the angels and for the love of God through Christ our Lord.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas.

Fr Paschal Hanrahan

An tAthair Paschal ÓhAnnracháin

REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN COMRADES

A SOLDIER'S PRAYER

Lord, I ask for your grace
and strength for this moment.

May I be diligent
and honourable in all things;
and show cheerfulness and courage
in the face of hardship and danger.
Be with me in my trials and struggles.

Watch over my comrades and friends.
Be with my family, friends,
and all who are special to me.

Lord, give me confidence in times of doubt,
strength when I feel weak,
hope when there are feeling of despair.

Guide me, direct me and support me
today and always. Amen.

Every saint has a past ... every sinner has a future!

Shrapnel Cross - St Patrick's Garrison Church, Cathal Brugha Barracks



Sgt
Anthony Doyle



Sgmn
Niall McDonnell



Pte
Darragh Kavanagh



Comdt
Aidan O'Reilly



Lt
Conal Sheeran



Pte
Ross Mulligan



Cpl
Terry Smyth



Rev Fr
Desmond Campion



Pte
Adrian Gallagher

*We would like to remember our comrades that passed while in service
in the past 12 months, we ask that you keep them in your thoughts. We would like
to offer their friends and family our deepest sympathies and prayers.*

May they rest in peace.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: *THE PRESS OFFICE IN 2024*

BY CAPT KEVIN KENNY

2024 was a pivotal year for the Defence Forces Press Office, as it managed the national and international media landscape on behalf of the Defence Forces. Beyond managing ongoing media relations, the office spearheaded several high profile and impactful projects that highlighted the multifaceted work of Defence Forces personnel.

A cornerstone of the year's work involved facilitating media access to overseas missions and international exercises, offering the public a deeper understanding of the Defence Forces' global operations.

In February, Justin McCarthy from RTÉ embedded with the 123 Inf Bn UNIFIL, covering the escalating conflict in the region. This rare opportunity brought viewers closer to the realities faced by Irish peacekeepers. The same month saw a first for the Press Office and Irish media: Irish journalists Niall O'Connor (Journal.ie), Conor Gallagher (The Irish Times), and Mick O'Toole (Irish Daily Star) visited the UNDOF mission in Syria for the first time to report on its final deployment.

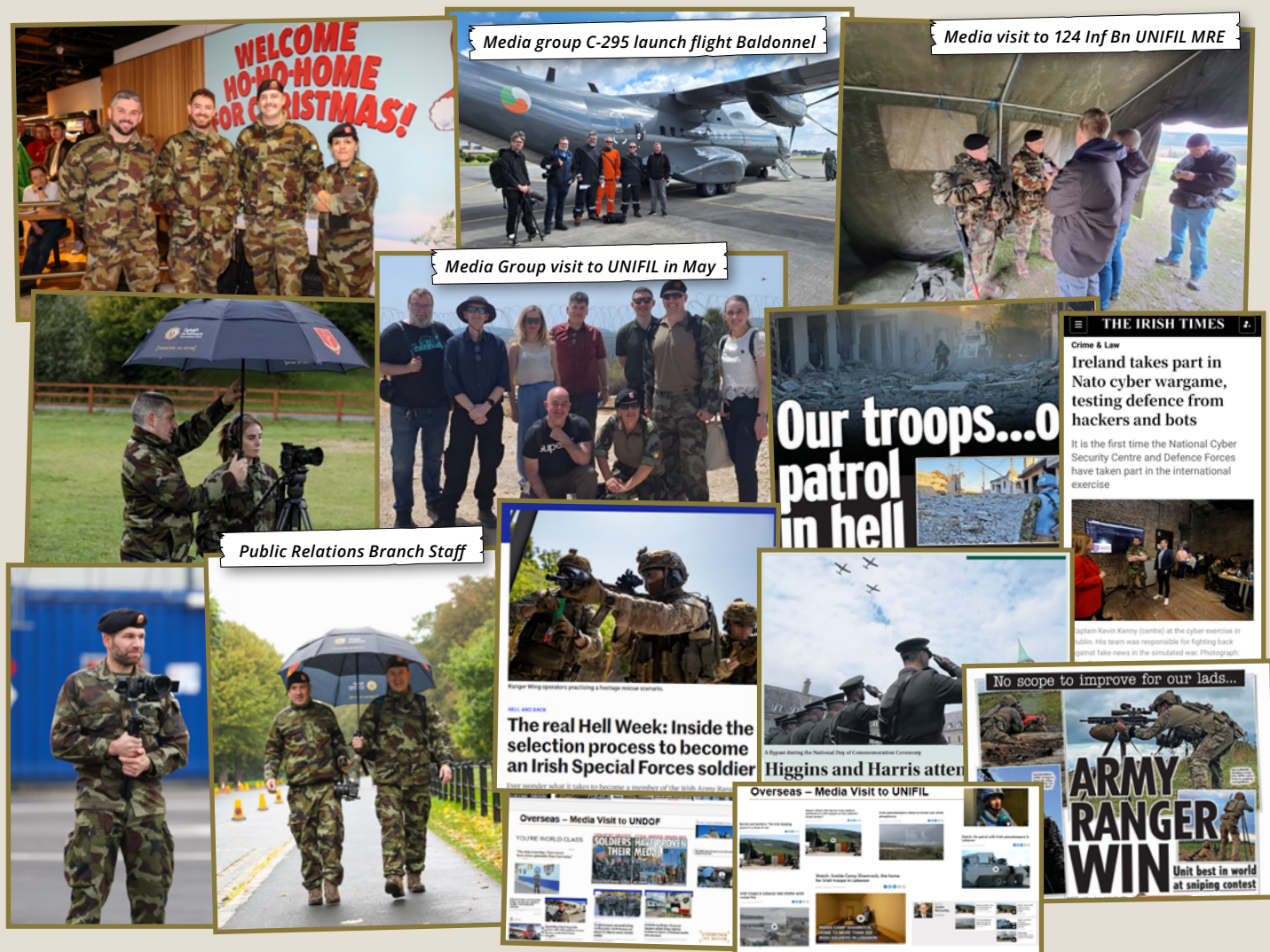
May marked another milestone when several media representatives accompanied the Tánaiste and the Chief of Staff to Lebanon, providing coverage of their visit and further emphasising Ireland's contributions to peacekeeping efforts.

On the training front, the Press Office brought members of the media to visit major international exercises, including Exercise Guardian Shield in Vienna and EUBG MilEx24 in Bergen. These events showcased the Defence Forces' participation in cutting-edge, multinational training initiatives.

The Press Office's involvement extended beyond traditional military operations. In 2024, they participated in Exercise Locked Shields, a NATO led international cybersecurity exercise conducted with the National Cyber Security Centre. Ireland's debut in the exercise saw them place in the top 20 overall. The Strategic Communications team, which included Press Office representatives, earned a joint first-place finish.

The Press Office team continued to upskill throughout the year. Capt Clancy completed both Basic and Advanced NATO PFP Crisis Communications courses in Switzerland, while Sgt Kennedy earned a Level 7 RPL in Leadership, Management, and Defence Studies. Additionally, three new students were enrolled in the MA in Political Communications at Dublin City University, ensuring the office remains at the forefront of strategic communication.

From frontlines to firewalls, the Press Office continues to play a vital role in shaping narratives and strengthening the Defence Forces' connection with the public, and they look forward to a busy 2025.



A YEAR IN REVIEW: 2024 IN THE DF INFO OFFICE



BY COMDT HELEN HOSBACK



2024 rounds off another busy year in the DF Info Office, which comprises the An Cosantóir Magazine editorial team, the Audio Visual Section and the DF Photographer. This magazine is the sixth of the year, and we are delighted to have another great edition featuring each of the Corps and Services of the Defence Forces, with a summary of the activities and achievements of each.

Notable articles this year include interviews with the Chief of Staff, as well as the Heads of Transformation and Strategic HR. We featured many of the sports and clubs of the DF including the DF Association of Mountaineers, the DF Rowing Club, DF Golf and DF Athletics. We also had some comprehensive articles on the UNDOF Withdrawal from both a Inf Gp perspective, and an overarching review of the Logistics element by J4. We featured two history series with 3 parts each – the Irish Volunteers at War, 1916 – 1923 and the Irish Deserters of the DF in WWII. Additionally we had many articles on the RDF, as well as photo features of the An Cosantóir Race and the DF Family Day in Dublin Zoo.

In early 2024 the DF Info Office started a campaign – People of the DF and it has been hugely successful. Our roving reporter, Cpl Martin Bennett, has featured more than 70 DF members including PDF, RDF, Veterans and Civilian Employees. We expanded the feature to include 'The Best of Us', focusing initially on sports. We will soon be expanding this to include academic and community



achievements. We have had a huge response to this campaign, run both from our [@ancosantoir](https://www.instagram.com/ancosantoir) Instagram account, as well as on CONNECT, and it will continue in to 2025.

The DF Info Office organised the Family Day for families of Defence Forces personnel currently serving overseas. This took place in Dublin Zoo on 20th July and was a great success. We had a huge turnout from family members who were very appreciative of the acknowledgement. This could not have been achieved without the DF volunteers who attended on the day, and the support of OC McKee Bks Coy. We hope to continue to organise these events for future overseas deployments.

Our Audio Visual Section has continued to produce some excellent videos during 2024, including Cadet and Recruit Intakes, the overseas homecoming, the 10k race and the various commissionings and passing out parades. All of our videos can be found on our YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/DFMagazine> or on DF and An Cosantóir social media.

The DF photographer, Armin Sam Gibney, attended many DF events over the last 12 months along with the AVS. All of our photography can be found on the DF Flickr page, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfmagazine/albums>

We would like to thank the AC Photography Section, 105 Squadron for all of their support during the year with attending events.

Finally, A/CQ Johnny Rossiter has just moved on from editor of the An Cosantóir Magazine to work in the DF Registrar's Office. We would like to thank him, and acknowledge all of the work he has put in to the magazine over the last few years.

J1 BRANCH



CEREMONIAL BY COMDT SARAH CONLON

The Defence Forces participated in over 30 significant military and State ceremonial events in 2024.

State ceremonial honours were afforded on the occasion of the Official Visit to Ireland of The Chinese Premier in January and the Official Visit to Ireland by The President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in October. Ceremonies were conducted in Farmleigh and Áras an Uachtaráin for these visits.

The State Funeral of Former Taoiseach Mr John Bruton (RIP) was held in February 2024, full state honours were afforded to the former Taoiseach.

The Defence Forces participated in the annual State commemoration ceremonies, including the commemoration of the 108th anniversary of the Easter Rising at the GPO, O'Connell Street; the 1916 Leaders Commemoration at Arbour Hill and the National Day of Commemoration in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham.

The Defence Forces participated in the National Famine Commemoration, held this year in Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford in May which was attended by An Taoiseach.

Units across the Defence Forces participated in ten ceremonies at Áras an Uachtaráin where a total of 22 Ambassadors presented their Credentials of Office to Uachtaráin na hiÉireann.

The Naming and Commissioning Ceremony for two Naval Service inshore patrol vessels was held at Haulbowline Naval Base in September.

Two Ministerial Reviews for overseas contingents took place to mark the Battalions departure for peacekeeping duties with UNIFIL. The Ministerial Review of the 124 Infantry Battalion took place in Cathal Brugha Barracks in April, while the Ministerial Review of the 125 Infantry Battalion occurred in Custume Barracks Athlone in October.

Commissioning Ceremonies for the 99th Cadet Class, 6th Army Reserve

Potential Officer Course and other Direct Entry Officers took place throughout the year.

The Defence Forces Remembrance Ceremony was held at The National Memorial, Merrion Square in November to remember the eight members of the Defence Forces who lost their lives in the past 12 months. As part of this ceremony the Tánaiste and Minister for Defence, the Chief of Staff and families of the deceased laid wreaths at The National Memorial.

Unfortunately, due to extremely bad weather, Defence Forces Veterans' Day was unable to go ahead in late September. We look forward to celebrating this important event in 2025.

Throughout 2024, a variety of other ceremonial and support duties were performed across the country by members of the Defence Forces in support of State and other ceremonial events.

COMO BY CAPT TOMMY MONAHAN

The Commissioned Officers Management Office (COMO) is responsible for overseeing all HR practices for Commissioned Officers within the Defence Forces. By ensuring effective management of officer movements, overseas selection, career development and promotions the office plays a vital role in providing the skilled and motivated leadership team that strives to achieve the organisation's strategic goals and supports operational readiness across the land, sea, and air domains.

In 2024 COMO continued its Human Resource (HR) planning in support of the CODF transformation appointments. The 2024 Commission appointments, approved in September, will see the creation of further permanent appointments in the establishment in addition to the creation of temporary planning appointments to support transformation. Promotion competitions conducted in 2024 addressed the ongoing requirement to fill vacancies in the establishment, at Brigadier General rank and below, and also addressed a number of specialist roles, including boards convened for the Naval Service, DF Legal Service



UNIFIL 124 and 125 Inf Bns. The selection for smaller overseas missions has also continued during this timeframe.

On a daily basis COMO performs a range of routine, but essential, HR functions from maintaining the PDF Officer Gazette, managing substitution claims, receiving and staffing annual appraisals, preparation of promotion sub-files, receiving and staffing routine correspondence and applications for inclusion on officers personnel files, coordinating EOIs for officer appointments and opportunities such as courses abroad and processing officer retirements.

2024 year marked the conclusion of a milestone promotion competition for the Army Reserve (AR), with 27 officers promoted to Captain – the first such competition since 2008. COMO's support of AR promotions reflects the Defence Forces commitment to building leadership capacity across all AR commissioned ranks.

EPMO BY COMDT TOM FITZPATRICK

The role of the Enlisted Personnel Management Office (EPMO) is to ensure that all Enlisted Personnel of the Defence Forces are served by a highly efficient and transparent management system underpinned by the regulatory frameworks. EPMO works alongside the other J1 functions and is situated within Strategic HR Division in DFHQ. In this stream EPMO works in support of the formation Personnel Cells (G1, N1, and A1) to progress and develop projects at formation level as it pertains to workforce planning. Generally, EPMO has three key pillars: Promotions and Competitions, Overseas Selection and Military Information. Each cell has both Officer and NCO staff which respectively furnish formations and DFHQ / DOD with policy and thematic advice. EPMO has long standing OfficerS and NCO staff who are subject matter experts within their area. OIC EPMO advises D COS (Sp), the Head of Strategic HR (HoSHR) and the Director of Human Resources Branch (DJ1) on matters impacting enlisted members of the Defence Forces.

In 2024, EPMO have worked extensively on progressing all service promotion Order of Merit lists across both Junior and Senior NCO ranks, to support the formations and directorates in filling vacancies in support of CAPDEV priorities on foot of the CODF recommendations. In parallel, EPMO engaged formations and directorates to review the current XYZ, in order to shape the promotion competition landscape in 2024/2025. This is an important role as it allows Directorates to shape the essential skillsets within their Corps to meet the operational needs in the future. EPMO have responsibility for the administration and conduct of both Discrete and Limited Promotion Competitions, which were used extensively to select successful candidates for key NCO appointments in the CODF Implementation appointments.



Branch, Ordnance Corp, Medical Corps and the Joint Competition for OF-5 Cyber Development.

COMO's Overseas Desk coordinated officer selections for overseas deployments in close coordination with Brigade and Formation G1 staff for

The Defence Forces continues to meaningfully contribute to International Peace and Security through our Overseas Deployments. EPMO has responsibility to force generate for our larger scale PSO, and in 2024 EPMO enabled the deployment of the 124 Bn and 125 Bn to UNIFIL. Throughout the deployments EPMO supported the unit in personnel related matters.

Currently EPMO, as the year comes to an end, have launched the Senior NCO Promotion Competition across all services which will enable DF wide promotions in 2025. EPMO, in response to challenges at Sgt Rank, have redesigned the Cpl to Sgt promotion system to expedite promotions in 2024 providing unit level and induction HR capacity, in support of strategic HR priorities.

A ADMIN BY COMDT SHANE FLOOD

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) will introduce legislation removing the blanket exclusion of the Defence Forces from the provisions of the EU Working Time Directive (WTD) and the Organisation of Working Time Act (OWTA) 1997.

The primary aim of the WTD is the health and safety of workers, recognising that excessive working hours without sufficient breaks can lead to increased occupational risks, health issues and fatigue. Implementation of the WTD will promote a healthy work-life balance and improve working conditions in the Defence Forces. Specific to the Defence Forces there is a requirement to protect serving members while ensuring the contingent capability of the Defence Forces remains.

Accordingly, activities will be classed as either in scope or out of scope. For activities deemed in scope, the provisions of the WTD will apply. It was further recognised by all parties that certain specified Defence Forces activities, such as but not limited to Overseas Service, ATCA and ATPC operations and Naval Maritime Defence and Security Operations cannot be brought into the scope of the WTD. These activities will continue outside of the scope of the WTD, with Defence Forces members gaining protections such as codified time off in lieu and improved welfare provisions to ensure their welfare is provided for while engaging in these out of scope activities.



A key foundation for the introduction of the WTD will be accurately capturing hours worked. This will be managed initially through the PMS; pilot projects to validate the use of the PMS for this purpose have taken place throughout the Defence Forces in 2024. Concurrently the Defence Forces are working on the procurement of a new system to capture hours worked. This system will be procured and implemented in 2025-2026. This system will automate time management, integrate with the existing PMS, and provide flexible, user-friendly solutions to ensure compliance and efficiency.

Comprehensive briefings will take place across the Defence Forces ensuring all members are kept informed as the provisions of the WTD are introduced.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI) BY COMDT LUKE FOLEY

The DF FOI office is responsible for providing relevant records in line with the Freedom of Information Act 2014. 2024 has been a busy year with over 200 requests being processed through the office. Training for frontline decision makers at formation level was conducted throughout the year as well as relevant training for the staff in the FOI office in DFHQ.

Information on how to submit an FOI request can be found on the DF website at <https://www.military.ie/en/public-information/freedom-of-information/> A log of all non-personal disclosure requests received by the Defence Forces can also be found at this link.

J3/5

**BY CAPT (AR) NIAL STRINGER (CURRENT)
& CAPT AODHÁN MCGUINNESS (OVERSEAS)**

As the operational hub of the Defence Forces, J3/5 branch has continued to deliver on its mission throughout the year, ensuring readiness and responsiveness to meet operational requirements both at home and abroad.

Domestically, the Defence Forces continued to support both civil power and civil authorities. Our Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams, strategically located around the country, operated on a 24-hour basis,



Defence Forces personnel secure an EOD team response

responding to calls and ensuring public safety. Throughout the year, these teams were also prepositioned at various high-profile public events, exemplifying their proactive role in safeguarding our national security.

In support of An Garda Síochána (AGS), the Defence Forces fulfilled our Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) responsibilities with professionalism and efficiency. Providing specialist capabilities, this collaboration underscores the vital partnership between the Defence Forces and AGS. Number 1 Security Company withdrew from Portlaoise Prison on 30 Sept 2024 and other legacy ATCP Operations remain under review.

Operation Fáilte continued to play a key role in the Defence Forces' contribution to the national effort to support Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTP). Personnel across the organisation facilitated accommodation, and sustainment of those seeking refuge, utilising Defence Forces locations nationwide to provide essential services.

Additionally, the Defence Forces, both permanent and reserve, stood ready to carry out Aid to the Civil Authority (ATCA) operations, providing critical support to government departments and local authorities. This year, our personnel were deployed for missing person searches, naval dive team operations, and severe weather responses. The provision of specialist 4x4 vehicles during adverse weather events demonstrated the flexibility and capability of our assets to respond effectively to emerging challenges.

While J3/5 oversaw the operational tempo on the island, our overseas deployments remained a key focus. Personnel deployed abroad represented Ireland with distinction, contributing to peacekeeping, humanitarian, and training missions globally.



Defence Forces temporary accommodation in location

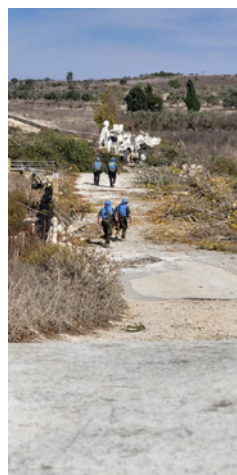
The Defence Forces continues to have the longest unbroken record of overseas service with the United Nations than any country in the world since first deploying to a United Nations' mission in 1958. In 2024, Defence Forces personnel were deployed on United Nations, NATO PFP (Partnership for Peace), EU CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) and OSCE Peace Support and Crisis Management Operations across 12 missions in 13 countries. There are approx. 450 Defence Forces personnel currently serving overseas.

The largest of our overseas deployments is with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon – UNIFIL, where approx. 360 personnel serve.

Throughout 2024, the 123rd, 124th and 125th Infantry Battalions have served in UNIFIL alongside personnel in UNIFIL HQ and UNTSO OGL.

The ongoing escalation of the conflict in the Middle East coupled with Israel's ground incursion of Southern Lebanon in late September has significantly altered the operational environment for our personnel in UNIFIL. As Israel's military activities intensify in southern Lebanon, the mission's already challenging mandate has become even more complex. IRISHPOLBATT's operational focus has naturally shifted from routine operations to specialised tasks such as route clearance, EOD tasks, and resupply efforts. The growing presence of unexploded ordnance, IED threats, as well as direct and indirect kinetic activity continue to pose a serious threat to our personnel but despite these challenges, they continue to act professionally and conduct operations within the parameters of the operational environment.

Early 2024 saw the Defence Forces withdraw as the Force Reserve Company in UNDOF. Ireland commenced participation in UNDOF in June 2013, when a number of Defence Forces personnel deployed to UNDOF Headquarters on the Golan Heights in Syria at the request of the United Nations. A contingent later deployed as the Force Reserve Company (FRC) in September 2013. The 68th Infantry Group, commanded by Lt Col Clear, was the last deployment as the FRC. A collaborative effort from the 68th Inf Gp, DJ3/5 and DJ4 ensured the successful withdrawal from the mission on 05 Apr 24.



Operational Activities in UNIFIL



The Defence Forces' ongoing involvement in EUMAM-UA (EU Military Assistance Mission - Ukraine) has provided significant opportunities for our personnel in the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and Special Training Command (ST-C). This mission has allowed them to grow and develop while sharing their expertise with the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) and EU partners and to gain invaluable experience working within a multinational headquarters. In addition, the Defence Forces continues to send mobile training teams to Germany and Poland

for specialised training in areas such as Tactical Combat Casualty Care, Drill Instructor Training, and Junior Leadership. These deployments have not only enhanced the capabilities of our personnel but also encouraged cross-cultural exchange and strengthened international cooperation, enriching their international military experience. In 2025, the Defence Forces plan to maintain their engagement with this mission, ensuring that our soldiers benefit from ongoing opportunities for skill development, professional growth, and collaboration with our international partners.

There were several significant donations made from the Defence Forces to the Ukrainian Armed Forces; in early February, two Doking Mine Flails were donated after a small team of Engineers delivered an instructional course on the equipment. June saw a large donation of vehicles including Ford Rangers, Ambulances and DROPs trucks to the UAF through the International Donor Coordination Centre in Poland following a significant operation consisting of four convoys coordinated by DJ3/5 and D Tpt. Future donations are expected in 2025.

Mine Flail Training - EUMAM-UA



January 2024 saw the commencement of the German led European Union Battle Group (EUBG). The Defence Forces are currently providing a Mechanised Infantry Company as Force Protection for the EUBG. The Battle Group is a two year commitment, divided into two distinct phases; 'STAND UP' Phase which is one year in duration involved the unit training in Ireland, a validation exercise in September and the completion of a EUBG Certification Exercise (MILEX 24) in Bergen, Germany in Nov/Dec 2024. The second phase is the 'STAND BY' phase and will last for one year commencing in January 2025. For the first six months, the Battle Group will be on 25 Days' Notice to Move (NTM), moving to ten days NTM for the last six months. An 'Alert Deploy' Exercise (MILEX 25) is scheduled for April/May 25 in Hungary. The Infantry Company of 139 personnel are commanded by a Group HQ and supported by a National Support Element to allow the Unit to conduct effective operations and maintain their personnel and vehicles. Alongside the Inf Coy, there is a Logistical Transport Section, Medical Section, CIS Section, Vehicle Maintenance



NVE AND HELMET

combat soldiers, the EUBG is arguably the best-equipped Infantry unit the Army has fielded to-date. Of particular note are deliveries of night vision equipment (NVE). For the first time each line soldier is equipped with a helmet-mounted binocular NVE and rifle-mounted laser light module (LLM). Additionally, stocks of un-cooled, cooled and fused thermal NVE have been procured for rifles, GPMGs and 84mm Carl Gustav RCL. Furthermore, the EUBG has been equipped with small un-crewed aerial systems (sUAS) for counter IED reconnaissance. This is the first Infantry unit where sUAS have been specifically allocated for close ISR. Significant efforts were also undertaken in-parallel with existing programmes to deliver a modern helmet, body armour and load-carrying equipment. In 2025 the EUBG will be the first Army unit to be equipped with section-level designated marksman rifles (DMR).

Section, Ordnance Section and Military Police detachment. Ten personnel have been deployed to the FHQ in EUROCORPS HQ in Strasbourg since January 24. These personnel, led by a Colonel, are deployed across the functions of the FHQ IOT assist in Coordination and Liaison. In late September 24, four personnel deployed to Pfungstadt, Germany to the PESCO Logistics Hub IOT maintain the vehicles and equipment for the Irish Contingent. The Irish Force package currently has an overall strength of one 191 personnel. 2 Bde is the Lead Formation; 1 Bde and DFTC are Supporting Formations.

Planning and Capabilities Section ICCW colleagues in Department of Defence, Ordnance Branch and ARW successfully collaborated to procure equipment for EUBG 2024/2025. As dismounted close



NVE AND HELMET



EUBG Inf Coy

With regard to planning and coordination with other government agencies and departments J3&5 continue to engage proactively with the Department of Defence led, Office of Emergency Planning. The engagement covers everything from involvement in Severe Weather Planning and Response to exercises focussed on building national resilience in the communications, energy and health areas. The importance of this engagement cannot be understated as the nature of threats that we face is constantly evolving. A busy programme is already in place for 2025 and we look forward to playing a part in improving national and local responses to the challenges that we face.

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT TO EUBG 2025

ARTICLE BY COL GARETH PRENDERGAST, D J4

After a year of intensive planning, liaison and collaboration, in Ireland and internationally, the Logistics Operations Team (J4) in Defence Forces Headquarters (DFHQ) successfully pre-deployed the EU Battle-Group (EUBG) equipment and vehicles into a Logistics Hub (LogsHub) in Germany. This unheralded pre-deployment is for a period of 16 months, or for the duration of the 2025 designated Stand-By period. Each EU Member State is obliged under the Common Security and Defence Policy to routinely provide troops and capabilities to the EUBG Concept for crisis management support. Due to the ongoing global security situation, the timelines for deployment of the EUBG have been shortened under the newly devised Rapid Deployment Concept (RDC) from 10 days to 5 days.

How could an island nation like Ireland, with limited strategic lift capabilities adhere to the stricter parameters of the new RDC?

This was the problem faced by the Logistics Operations Team (J4) in Defence Forces Headquarters.

Throughout the planning process, the J4 HQ Team conducted the detailed planning for this entire operation using the following planning processes: The Military Decision Making Process, the Logistics Planning Process and the Operational Planning Process. These processes were adhered to in order to ensure interoperability with our International Military Partners and a situational awareness of the ongoing Geo-Political situation. As a result of this strategic and detailed planning, numerous visits and conferences were attended including the following:

- Visit to the German Army Joint Logistics Command.
- SME reconnaissance visits to Logistics Hubs (LogsHubs) in Germany and Belgium.
- Attendance at EU PESCO Military Mobility and LogsHub Conferences.
- Fact-finding visits to Dublin and Antwerp Ports.

PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

The overall project was to logistically support Ireland's commitments to European Security through the EUBG and RDC. This was an extremely large undertaking, one of the biggest in DF History.

As previously stated, the standby period had reduced from the previous 10 Days to the newly revised 5 Days' Notice to Move (NTM). As an island nation, this was a near impossible tasking and to have a ship on standby to move DF military equipment at 5 days NTM, entailed a multi-million euro contract.

As an alternative solution and advocating innovation and initiative, the DF approached this problem using our EU partners. Through the PESCO Military Mobility and in particular, the LogsHub projects, Ireland agreed to gain full 'Participation Status' in order to get permission and international support to store our vehicles and equipment in Germany throughout the RDC standby period. This innovation using PESCO increased Ireland's military effectiveness and considerably reduced our costings/budget by 50%. Additionally, this seriously enhanced our logistical capabilities and interoperability with our EU Partners.

During Quarter 2 of 2024, the DF successfully withdrew all our equipment and vehicles out of the UN Mission in Syria, through Beirut Port, during a regional conflict. As a result of this successful withdrawal, throughout the summer of 2024, the DF compiled, manifested and stored over 30 combat vehicles (mostly armoured) and nearly 50 containers of equipment for transportation to the LogsHub in Pfungstadt, near Frankfurt Germany. After detailed liaisons with our Belgian and German Colleagues through the PESCO Project, the correct military and civilian documentation were completed in order to facilitate this extremely complex cross border move.



A large RO-RO Ship was also contracted for the sole use of this move

In late September 2024, the RO-RO ship docked in Dublin Port and using excellent co-operation and collaboration with the Port authorities, the ship was loaded for onwards movement to Antwerp.

J4 Staff preparing Mowags for the move



After loading, 40 DF Logistics personnel then flew to Belgium in order to receive and unload the ship.

Through the PESCO Project, the Belgian Army supported the Irish DF, by accommodating and feeding all Irish personnel in a Belgian LogsHub near Antwerp.

When the Ship arrived in Antwerp Port, Belgian Army Logistics and Movement Control (MoveCon) Teams supervised the unloading, liaising with all the port and customs authorities.

Traffic control measures were put in place through the EU Joint Coordination Centre (JCC). At the LogsHub, each convoy was refuelled and resupplied using the RSOM process, preparing for the long journey south to the LogsHub and eventual destination of Pfungstadt in Germany.

The results achieved using this initiative were remarkable. By land, train and river barge, the 30 mostly armoured vehicles and nearly 50 containers of military equipment were successfully moved to Germany. Understanding the hazardous nature of ammunition, and traffic restrictions in Europe, four separate convoys were organised using civilian and military capabilities from Germany and Belgium.

The measure of success of this complex operation, is that over a 48 hour period, all the equipment was successfully Received, Staged and Onwardly Moved by secure convoys nearly 400KM from Belgium to Germany.

If you include the sea move from Dublin to Antwerp, the entire journey was nearly 1,500KM.



TEAMWORK

The Teamwork demonstrated throughout this project illustrated the very best of the Irish Defence Forces. At the civilian-military level, a coordinated plan was agreed between the Department of Defence and Defence Forces in order to ensure the viability and effectiveness of this complex project. The planning process, which took place mainly in Ireland, was completed over 12 months, and the results were substantial.

This was the first time in Defence Forces history that Ireland has pre-deployed such a significant amount of military hardware, equipment and vehicles into an overseas forward staging base for such a long period of time. The support mechanisms and planning parameters to achieve this were wide, complicated and very comprehensive.



On a daily basis, the joint planning team met and overcame numerous challenges. The most significant of these challenges are outlined below:

- Political Support and Government (Dáil) approval for PESCO LogsHub Participant Status.
- Acceptance and agreement from our EU Colleagues for PESCO Membership.
- Diplomatic and customs clearance to move ammunition, weapons and military vehicles throughout Mainland Europe.

- Contracting of shipping and civilian transport companies.
- The movement of a substantial amount of Dangerous Goods (ammunition and weapons) throughout Europe.
- Route planning and permissions for four large military convoys to move through Europe taking into account load bearing and height restrictions associated with bridges etc=
- The safe storage and warehousing of all these military items in Europe.
- The correct logistical accountancy and inventory management of a comprehensive manifest of military hardware.



Enormous credit must go to the planning team who overcame these various and numerous challenges. Because this was a new project, most problems encountered required innovative and creative solutions. This was a substantial learning curve for logisticians in the Defence Forces,

and the training benefits from this substantial logistics operation are significant and robust. Resilience was the daily challenge, and as a result, DF logistical capabilities have been seriously enhanced.

The Professional Military Development and Education of all the planners, logisticians and movement controllers will bear fruit for the Defence Forces for a considerable period of time into the future.

As Europe and the world becomes less secure; training and operational experiences as encountered on this DF project are immeasurable and highly significant. The 'lessons learnt' over the last year from the UNDOF withdrawal operation out of a war-torn Middle East and the bureaucratic learnings from such a substantial logistics move into Europe are considerable.



The significant contributions that this substantial project achieved are still yet to be measured. Nevertheless, the DF has already significantly benefited from this project. The most important benefits are outlined below:

- Significant enhancements to DF logistical capabilities, especially in the areas of:
 - » Reception
 - » Staging
 - » Movement
 - » Diplomatic clearance
 - » Cross border movements
- Substantial improvements in interoperability with our EU military colleagues.
- Important contribution to Professional Military Education of DF Staff.
- Significant improvements in Civil-Military Co-operation and an understanding of the new EU Concept of a 'Whole of Society Approach'.

J7

TRAINING AND EDUCATION BRANCH

BY COL JOHNNY WHITTAKER



J7 Staff

The Defence Forces describes the delivery of training and education as a cornerstone of military life and therefore one of the most important outputs of the organisation. Accordingly, when not on operations, the primary focus of the Defence Forces is the developing and subsequent delivery of Training and Education.

During 2024 these activities continued to be central to retaining and developing capability. In total, J7 consists of Evaluation & Lessons Learned section, External Education section, Finance & Procurement section, Fitness and Sports Policy section, The DF Registrar's Office and Training Planning & Management section. In general J7 had a productive year that enhanced and facilitated many DF activities. One of the highlights in the J7 calendar was the Defence Forces Small Arms Competition which took place in Kilworth, a prestigious event for DF members.

Throughout 2024 the sections of J7 made a significant contribution to the DF's training and educational effort. Four of our sections have briefly outlined their achievements:

EXTERNAL EDUCATION SECTION

External Education section within J7 provides the DF with all forms of training and education that the organisation cannot organically provide itself. According to External Education's annual plan for external activities, Annex P, there was a 40% increase in the number of external activities undertaken by the Defence Forces between 2022 and 2024, rising from 456 to 638. 2024's figure of 638 external activities represents a budget outlay of €5.56 million.

While Annex P 2025 is still in process and remains to be finalised, there is projected to be another increase in requested activities for the year ahead, again illustrating the appetite for external education opportunities within Óglaigh na hÉireann. Requested activities cover the full spectrum of military operations and education, from medical courses, to weapons courses, to legal courses, engineering courses, and a myriad of other areas.

Given the increase in activity numbers and variety of courses, both on-island and abroad, there has never been more opportunities to undertake external education in the Defence Forces.

TRAINING PLANNING MANAGEMENT SECTION (TPMS)

Training is the lifeblood of any military, and TPMS is responsible for the planning and coordination of all internal, military training in the Defence Forces through the ATED. In early 2024, the training focus across the Defence Forces had to be significantly reconfigured in response to a direction from the Minister for Defence to significantly increase induction training across the land, air and maritime components. The Joint Induction Training Centre (JITC), set up in 2023, has greatly enhanced the ability of the Defence Forces to conduct induction training across the DF and this will be further boosted as the capacities in JITC increase. However, all locations and units across all services have played a critical role in training, supporting and sustaining the effort that has gone into training almost 700 inductees across all services in 2024.



Troops taking part in the Athletics event in Watershed Co. Kilkenny



DEFENCE FORCES SPORTS AND POLICY SECTION

Sport in the Defence Forces (DF) makes a vital contribution to DF esprit de corps, morale, personal development and ultimately, operational effectiveness. It plays an

important part in overall military life, including recruiting and retention and, in many instances, sport provides excellent public visibility of the DF, contributing to positive public image.

A few highlights throughout the sporting Calendar of 2024

- DF Men's & Women's 7 aside Gaelic Football - Galway
- CISM Golf - Germany
- DF Men's & Women's 7 aside Rugby Tournament - The Netherlands
- DF Sailing - Beaufort Cup Cork
- DF Outdoor Athletics - Kilkenny
- Cunningham Cup Final - 3 Inf Bn vs 6 Inf Bn
- DF Boxing - National Elite Championships - Dublin
- 45th DF An Cosantóir - 10km

DEFENCE FORCES PHYSICAL EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

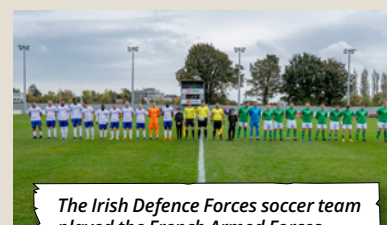
The Defence Forces P.E. Working Group was established as an expert group of qualified Physical Education, Exercise and Sports Science graduates to advise the Director of Defence Forces Training & Education on matters relating to Physical Education and Fitness in the Defence Forces. The PE Working Group meets on a quarterly basis since Oct 2006 and on other occasions as required to discuss and make recommendations on current and future physical training and education related issues in the Defence Forces.

DF PEWG was tasked in 2024 with reviewing DF Fitness standards in accordance with CODF & DIP recommendation; 'Fitness Standards reviewed and updated' and with reference to 'Required changes of the fitness standards identified; Revised fitness standards, policies and processes developed'. PEWG reviews fitness standards in the DF by examining and viewing the issues from both the sports science and the HR & Gender CODF perspectives.

As part of the scope of this process, the PEWG examined and reviewed inter alia:

1. DF Fitness tests as per DF Training Instruction (TI) 05/07, Defence Forces Fitness Test.
2. DF Combat Fitness tests.
3. DF Physical education (PE) pathways and professional Military Education (PME) in this area with specific regards to Physical Training Instructor (PTI) pathways.
4. Load carriage and associated developments.
5. DF PET and associated Culture, particularly in a training environment.
6. Wider DF Fitness application, support and education.

J7 Training & Education Branch develops training policy in accordance with current doctrine, co-ordinates training and education across the Defence Forces, and monitors standards achieved in order to ensure the highest levels of operational capability, efficiency and effectiveness. This can only be achieved by the commitment and dedication of the J7 staff and the DF on a wider scale.



The Irish Defence Forces soccer team played the French Armed Forces



The An Cosantóir 10k race in the Phoenix Park took place in October with all new categories including the loaded march

A YEAR OF PROGRESS IN THE STRATEGIC HR DIVISION

BY MR DECLAN CARVILLE

Visit to ARW



Declan & Brian at SNCO's Forum



Visit to Recruit Platoon in 1 Cn Cois



Visit To Naval Base



Strategic HR Initial Vision workshop in McKee



SHRD & DLS visit to British Army Pers Center in Glasgow



Deloitte HR Vision lab



Declan's opening address at the Men's Health day in Athlone



As 2024 draws to a close, it's a time to reflect on the progress we've made and the opportunities that lie ahead. This year has been one of growth and transformation for the Defence Forces, with considerable strides across key areas. As the Head of Strategic HR, I feel immense pride in what we have accomplished together—and even greater anticipation for the journey ahead.

RECRUITMENT: A POSITIVE YEAR

This year, recruitment was a standout success. There have been 665 inductions so far and we are on track to reach a total of 700 by year end. This is well ahead of last year's total of 415 inductions. This incredible achievement was made possible by a collective effort across the entire organisation. Increasing our Induction figures was a key deliverable set by An Tánaiste.

The Joint Recruitment Office, led by Lt Col Maeve O'Grady, deserves special acknowledgment for their leadership and coordination. But this was far from a solo effort. The Training and Education Branch, the Joint Induction Training Centre, and our formations and units all played pivotal roles in onboarding new members and setting them up for success. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this significant milestone. Your dedication reflects the strength of our team and our Values.

WELCOMING NEW LEADERSHIP

Another highlight of 2024 was the creation and filling of two senior leadership appointments: Gender Advisor and Digital Transformation Officer. Following a highly competitive selection process, which attracted external candidates, it was a proud moment to see two of our own members rise to these roles.

Congratulations to Colonel Jayne Lawlor on her appointment as Gender Advisor and Colonel Damian Griffin as Digital Transformation Officer. Your selection reflects not only your talent but also the depth of capability within our ranks. We look forward to your leadership as we continue to transform in these critical areas.

WORK IN 2024

Since June, we have partnered with Deloitte to implement the Detailed Implementation Plan for Transformation of the Defence Forces. This work is laying the foundation for our people and culture transformation. It is focused on five core areas:

- Career & Talent Management Systems
- Culture Change Programme
- Diversity & Inclusion Strategies
- Recruitment and Retention
- Family-Friendly Policies

Every project within these areas follows a rigorous four-stage process—Discover, Develop, Design, and Deliver. Much of this year involved the Discover phase. Over 400 of our members participated in 79 focus groups across these core areas. I want to thank everyone who took the time to actively shape our future. Your insights have been invaluable as we chart the course for our shared future. Together, we are designing a workplace where

everyone can thrive and be encouraged to bring your best selves to work every day.

STRENGTHENING GRIEVANCE MANAGEMENT

Trust is the cornerstone of any effective grievance process. This year, we took a critical step forward by introducing formal training for Investigating Officers and decision-makers in the conduct and investigation of complaints. These efforts represent the beginning of our commitment to improving grievance management systems. In 2025, we will build on this foundation, with further enhancements to ensure a process that is transparent, fair, and trusted by all.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025

The year ahead will be one of significant change.

A key priority for 2025 will be the implementation of the Working Time Directive, a significant milestone for our organisation. Implementing the directive will support our commitment to improving work-life balance, safeguarding the well-being of our people, and promoting a sustainable and supportive working environment. Implementing these changes will require careful planning and collaboration, and I look forward to working with all stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition.

We also anticipate rolling out redesigned promotion processes and performance appraisals, alongside delivering on key recommendations such as family friendly policies and a comprehensive strategy for supporting Defence Forces objectives with new civilian employees. These changes reflect our commitment to becoming a modern, forward-looking organisation where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. We will continue to pro-actively engage with all stakeholders, including the Representative Associations who have been supportive in the early phases of design.

As we celebrate our successes, we must also take a moment to remember the colleagues we have lost this year. To their families and friends, you have our deepest sympathies.

If there's one thing we can commit to in 2025, let it be this: let's embrace the true meaning of #ValueOurPeople and strive to treat and support each other with kindness and understanding. Mental health is an integral part of our overall well-being. Together, we can create a workplace where everyone feels valued and can bring their best selves to work every day.

As we prepare to enjoy the holiday season, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your hard work, resilience, and commitment throughout 2024. This organisation thrives because of its people, and I am proud to be part of such a dedicated and talented team.

May this Christmas bring joy to you and your families. I hope the season provides an opportunity to rest, recharge, and reflect on all we've achieved together. I look forward to continuing our journey in 2025.

*Is mise le meas,
Declan Carville
Head of Strategic HR*

DEVELOPING MILITARY CAPABILITIES THROUGH ACCREDITED MILITARY EDUCATION

THE DEFENCE FORCES REGISTRAR'S OFFICE

BY LT COL COLIN LAWLOR



The 2024 SETU Conferring Ceremony held in the Barrow Centre, SETU Carlow Campus

As Ireland's military instrument of national power, the Defence Forces have responsibilities for national security and defence and play an essential role in delivering on Ireland's foreign policy objectives. The quality of our personnel and the standard of their military training and education are fundamental to our performance on operations at home and overseas.

The Irish government is committed to supporting international peace and security by deploying Defence Forces' personnel on United Nations peacekeeping missions and EU and NATO-led crisis management operations worldwide. Over the past year, Defence Forces personnel have experienced the characteristics and dangers of the contemporary operating environment at close hand, as they perform their roles as impartial peacekeepers in Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL Force.

The primary purpose of the Defence Forces training and education system is to ensure that our Army, Air Corps and Naval Service personnel possess the necessary skills and knowledge of the profession of arms and their service domain, to perform their duties effectively. Defence Forces training and education, by necessity, focuses on developing military skills, leadership, and knowledge to deliver a wide range of military capabilities so that they can be employed when and where they are required. The Defence Forces approach emphasises that military professionals need a combination of training, accredited education, and informal learning to prepare them to operate effectively in the modern security environment.

This article aims to link military education and mastering the profession of arms, to delivering military capability.

THE LMDS PROGRAMME

The Defence Forces most extensive academic programme is the Leadership Management and Defence Studies (LMDS) Programme for enlisted personnel and officers. Since 2002, the Defence Forces have

partnered with Maynooth University to accredit career courses along the officer Professional Military Education (PME) pathway from Cadetship at Level 7 to the Joint Command and Staff Course at Level 9. With over a thousand graduates, this dynamic partnership has evolved and enhanced military education for officers over the past 22 years. The Centre for Military History and Strategic Studies at Maynooth University, led by Professor Ian Speller, works closely with the leadership of the Military College, in particular, with the staff at the Cadet School, The Infantry School, and the Command and Staff School to create and deliver innovative Professional Military Education programmes in response to the needs of the Defence Forces.

Graduation Day is a special day for Defence Forces graduates and their families as it formally marks the successful completion on an intense period of study and personal development.

On 30 October 2024, 78 officers graduated from Maynooth University:



40 members of the 99th Cadet Class graduated with a Level 7 Special Purpose Diploma in Leadership, Management and Defence Studies



20 members of the 6th Joint Command and Staff Course graduated with a Level 9 Masters in Leadership, Management and Defence Studies

The Military College graduation ceremony for the 6th Land and 6th Joint Command and Staff Courses was held on the morning of the 30 October 2024 at the Military College and was presided over by Deputy Chief of Staff, Major General Tony McKenna.

The ceremony involved the presentation of Military College Graduation parchments and awards to graduands.

The Director of Infantry award for the best student on the 6th Land Command and Staff Course was presented to Captain Kenneth Deegan by Lt Col Conor King, General Secretary, RACO. The award, a perpetual trophy, is a sword which is kept on permanent display in the Infantry School.

There are three awards associated with the Joint Command and Staff Course.

1. An Gradam Tighde na bhFórsaí Cosanta: The award for best research thesis was presented to Comdt Shane Courtney for his thesis entitled "Mentoring in the Irish Defence Forces: Opportunities and Challenges".
2. The second award, the Lt Gen Sean Clancy Award, is a perpetual award presented to the student who has achieved the best Master's Degree. Major Michael Dabeck (US Army) and Comdt Shane Courtney shared the prize this year.
3. The Lt Gen Tadhg O'Neill award for the best military mark was presented to Comdt Eoghan Carton.

18 members of the 6th Land Command and Staff Course graduated with a Level 8 Higher Diploma in Leadership, Defence and Contemporary Security



20 members of the 6th Joint Command and Staff Course graduated with a Level 9 Masters in Leadership, Management and Defence Studies



SOUTH EAST TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

The Defence Forces and South East Technological University (SETU), formally IT Carlow, have co-delivered the LMDS programme for enlisted personnel since 2012. With over 2,000 graduates to date, this programme rewards lifelong learning throughout the lifetime of a career in the Defence Forces. Implicitly, the programme also acknowledges the concept of life wide learning, understood as learning that occurs in different contexts outside of the classroom. This experiential learning may occur while on training exercises, on ceremonial duties, while deployed on operations at home or overseas, or while going about day-to-day work activities. Recognising that learning occurs in many different contexts opens up opportunities for systematic reflection and personal development through the completion of Work Based Learning and Recognition of Prior Learning Portfolios. The pre-2012 Recognition of Prior Learning Programme, now in its fourth year, continues to go from strength to strength with 17 retired and serving personnel graduating from the programme in 2024. The Defence Forces and SETU designed this programme for personnel who did not have the opportunity to participate in the LMDS programme as they completed their career courses pre-2012.



RSM Colum Slattery (Retd) Graduated through the RPL Programme. Pictured here with his son Capt Dean Slattery, Staff Officer in the DF Registrar's Office

On 01 November 2024, 211 Defence Forces personnel graduated with various academic awards:

- Master of Engineering in Ordnance, Munitions, and Explosives Engineering
- Master of Science in Communications Technology Management
- Master of Military Engineering Management
- Bachelor of Arts in Leadership, Management, and Defence Studies (Logistics)
- Bachelor of Arts in Leadership, Management, and Defence Studies (Personnel)
- Level 7 Minor Award in Leadership, Management, and Defence Studies
- Level 6 Higher Certificate Leadership, Management, and Defence Studies
- Certificate in Software Defined Communications Systems
- Certificate in Sustainable Supply Chains

Addressing the graduates and their families, Professor Veronica Campbell, President of SETU, noted that:

"Since becoming President of SETU, I have spoken on a number of occasions about the value of our Defence Forces and the responsibilities you carry on behalf of the Irish state. In recent months, I, like many others, have watched events continue to unfold in the Middle East.

The bravery of our Defence Forces has been admirable and the valuable work you do has been brought into focus. It is SETU's huge privilege to support the educational achievements of the members of the Defence Forces in the certainty that the ongoing upskilling and development of its members is crucial in creating and maintaining stability both nationally and globally."

TECHNICAL TRAINING

As the biggest public sector provider of technical training, the Defence Forces offers a wide range of technical education options and models, delivered in partnerships with SOLAS and higher education institutions, such as MTU, TUD and SETU.

The Defence Forces currently has 309 personnel in full-time technical training. There are many options for technical training in the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service including:

- Carpentry and Joinery
- Construction Plant Fitting
- Cybersecurity
- Electrical
- Heavy Vehicle Mechanics
- Plumbing
- Refrigeration and Air Conditioning
- Trainee Military Aircraft Systems Technician (TMAST)
- Armourer Artificer Instrumentation (WSET)
- Armourer (WSMT)
- Communications Information Systems
- Printing - Pre Press
- Printing - Post Press
- Print
- Engine Room Artificers
- Electrical Artificers
- Radio Radar Technician
- Hull Artificer

Defence Forces Technical Training has always aimed to produce highly skilled technicians and craft personnel so that the Defence Forces can operate effectively on Land, at Sea and in the Air domains.

On 30th October 2024, 20 Defence Forces Technicians graduated from SETU. Four (4) Ordnance personnel graduated with a BEng in Mechanical Engineering, three (3) Ordnance personnel graduated with a BEng in Electronic Engineering, and 13 CIS personnel graduated with a BEng in Electronic Engineering.

An example of the high standard of military technician produced by the Defence Forces Technical Training system is Pte Stephen Cooper. Pte Cooper's final year project as a CIS Trainee Technician and student on SETU's Bachelor of Engineering in Electronic Engineering and Military Communication Systems, received two awards at the Global Undergraduate Awards 2024 (GUA) at a summit in Dublin from 10th to 13th November. Pte Cooper was the overall winner in Ireland across all engineering disciplines. His project is also ranked in the Top 10% of engineering projects worldwide. Pte Cooper received the GUA Highly Commended Award having competed amongst a global cohort of students. He was also awarded the Ireland Regional winner for having the top performing submission in the Engineering category for his entry, "LIDAR Smart-Chair Navigator".

Congratulations to Pte Cooper on his exceptional performance during his studies. It is important to acknowledge the support and encouragement provided by the instructors at the CIS School, Comdt James O'Neill and Sergeant Keith Houlihan, and the Engineering Department lecturers at SETU, especially Dr Donnacha Lowney and Keith Smyth.

CONCLUSION

The adage that we "train for certainty but educate for uncertainty" remains as relevant today as ever. The Defence Forces acknowledges that military personnel at every level need the skills to perform their roles and the formal military education to solve problems in today's complex security environment. Training and education have an important role to play in building a joint, agile, and fit-for-purpose future Defence Forces. By investing in the development and education of its personnel, and focusing training on mastering the profession of arms, the Defence Forces ensures that it remains effective and resilient in the face of evolving threats and organisational challenges into the future.

ON PARADE

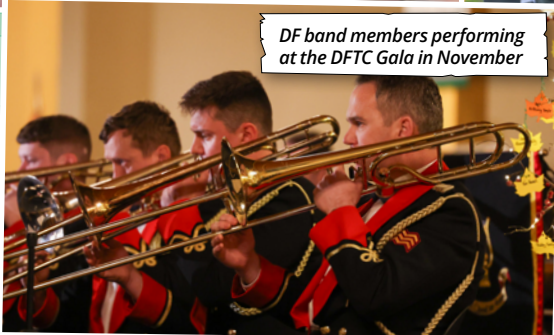


Some happy faces at SETU conferring ceremony Co.Carlow



Tri-Service members at Defence Forces Remembrance Day in Merrion Square

The DF Men's Rugby Team played the Dutch Military Rugby Team in Corinthians RFC Galway, Final score: DF 44 – Dutch Military 0



DF band members performing at the DFTC Gala in November



Lt Pierce attesting a member of the 174th Recruit Platoon in Collins Barracks Cork



DCOS OPS Major General Anthony McKenna addresses EUBG troops prior to their departure to Rapid Deployment Capability LIVEX24 in Germany



Members of the Irish Air Corps pipe band performing at the GOC's inspection in Baldonnell



All smiles at the Frontline MoBros November open day in Phibsborough Fire Station



Members of the 125 Inf Bn UNIFIL pose for a photo in UNP 6-52 after a successful handover from the outgoing 124 Inf Bn



The 124 BN were reunited with friends and family in November



2BCS conducted a unit exercise in The Glen to prepare troops for upcoming career courses in 2025



Lt Karl Bolger raises the colours for the Chief of Staff during his visit to the commissioning ceremony of the 06th Army Reserve Potential Officer's Course



Ex Military Police personnel brought up wreaths to the Niemba Massacre Commemoration mass, held recently in Cathal Brugha barracks

ON PARADE

HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM ACROSS THE DEFENCE FORCES

A Member of 2BCS during a visit to the LauraLynn campus for their "Light Up" event



Mowags all lit up for the LauraLynn event



Senior Naval Service Cadets looking forward to Christmas



Members of the Naval Service with hats and tinsel



Members of 125 Inf Bn at the Shamrock Wall in UNP-245 posing with some Christmas jumpers



6 Inf Bn SF course ready for Christmas



Flackers, helmets and Christmas Jumpers worn by members of 125 Inf Bn as they get ready for Christmas in Lebanon



NAVAL SERVICE

A YEAR IN REVIEW

ARTICLE BY LT COMDR KIERAN BREEN

Photos courtesy of NATO Maritime Command

IPVs

On the 4th of September 2024, both Inshore Patrol Vessels (IPVs) L.É. AOIBHINN (P71) & L.É. GOBNAIT (P72) were formally commissioned as State Ships by the Tánaiste and Minister for Defence, Mr Micheál Martin TD. L.É. AOIBHINN's crew have undertaken ship specific training courses and the unit has successfully achieved Initial Operating Capability (IOC). L.É. AOIBHINN is expected to achieve Full Operating Capability (FOC) in November 2024. L.É. GOBNAIT will complete national fit out requirements in December 2024. The IPVs are currently stationed at the Naval Base, Haulbowline Island, Cork Harbour but the long term plan is to develop a Forward Operating Base for the IPVs on the East Coast. On the 25th October, the Government announced that discussions were commencing with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to secure berthage space in Dún Laoghaire. The IPVs will conduct Maritime & Defence Security Patrols on the East Coast to enhance the Naval Service's presence in the area.



RECYCLING OF DECOMMISSIONED SHIPS

In April/May of this year L.É. EITHNE, L.É. ORLA and L.É. CIARA departed Cork Harbour on their final voyage. All three Ships were delivered to Ghent, Belgium under tow to be environmentally recycled. These Ships served the state for a combined period of more than one hundred years and will be remembered fondly by all who sailed in them. L.É. Eithne was the last Ship built in Verolme Cork Dockyard and was commissioned in 1984. During her 38 years' service she deployed to the United States, South America and was deployed twice on Operation Pontus in the Mediterranean. The Peacock Class formerly HMS SWIFT and HMS

SWALLOW were purchased from the Royal Navy in 1988 and were a constant presence around the Irish Coast for 34 years.

As such, for the first time in its history, the Naval Service (NS) and the Department of Defence (DoD) undertook the process of environmentally recycling the three (3) Naval Service ships. This process is heavily regulated in order to meet EU standards for sustainable vessel disposal. The project, currently in its final stages, is being conducted by GALLO Shipyard in Belgium, the successful tenderer. Through these efforts, the Naval Service/DoD supports sustainable practices, strengthens the EU recycling industry, and contributes to the protection of both people and the environment. In advance and in parallel to the recycling process it was necessary for the Naval Service to undertake the largest ever Board of Survey of military inventory and fixed assets for the three ships that proudly served the State. This process ensures that the tedious and highly governed accountancy systems deliver on strict governance of public procurement.



RETENTION & RECRUITMENT MEASURES

2024 saw significant work undertaken to ensure the retention & recruitment of our most important asset – people. NS recruitment teams were hard at work throughout the year attending career fairs, conducting school visits and attending events such as the National Ploughing Championships and National Services Day. Additionally, ships on patrol hosted a number of recruitment events around the country. These efforts yielded a total of 87 recruits & 13 cadets inducted this year to date.

A major boost for the retention & recruitment of personnel came in the form of Patrol Duty Allowance for Naval Service Personnel being doubled after 10 days at sea. This measure came into effect on the 1st January 2024 and is payable to all personnel for each day spent on patrol. On this rate, enlisted personnel serving the recommended maximum of 165 days at sea could earn €20,565 Patrol Duty Allowance for the period.

This is in addition to basic pay, naval pay and military service allowance (MSA), which for a newly enlisted able seaman, amounts to €41,418 on completion of training, bringing potential annual earnings to €61,983. Also, the naval personnel tax credit (€1,500) was included in the Finance Bill for 2024 and is guaranteed for the next five (5) years.

An area identified as important for the retention & recruitment of personnel is the development & upgrading of the Naval Base and its facilities. A lot of progress was made in this area during 2024 with major projects such as the refurbishment of Block 4 (74 Bed Accommodation) and Block 9 (New Naval Headquarters) commenced. Design teams were assigned for a new gym complex and the refurbishment of the Cadets Mess & adjacent buildings (Officer Accommodation). It is envisaged that a design team will be assigned by year end to progress the remediation of the old ISPAT site. The level of investment in the Infrastructure Development Plan (IDP) for the Naval Base can truly be understood when one notes that this represents 38% of the entire Defence Forces' expenditure on the IDP.



EUROPEAN SEMINAR FOR YOUNG OFFICERS 2024



The Naval Service had the pleasure of hosting the European Seminar for Young Officers 11th-14th June 2024. Young Officers from 21 different European Nations came to Haulbowline with the aim to promote understanding between Navies, examine issues of common and mutual interest and to increase awareness of the Maritime Domain. The central theme was "Naval Implementation of Emergent & Disruptive Technologies". Presentations on relevant subjects were delivered by NS Officers, namely Maritime Security and Defence – AI and the

Maritime Domain (Lt Cdr Brunicardi), Challenges to Harnessing Emerging and Disruptive Technology in the Naval Domain (Lt (NS) Buwalda) and Maritime Big Data Analytics (Lt (NS) Buwalda). The group, via syndicate work, had to prepare a brief on each topic, answering questions put to them by the presenters and group as a whole. The co-ordination of this



event was led by the Naval Service but would not have been possible without support and logistical assistance from 1 Bde. The event received extremely positive feedback & served to strengthen international ties for the Irish Naval Service in the Maritime domain.

NAVAL OPERATIONS

Throughout 2024 the NS, under the auspices of the Naval Operations Command Centre (NOCC), has sought to increase Maritime Domain Awareness by acquiring access to new standalone Maritime Situational Awareness tools as well as cooperating with NS CIS to augment existing positional feeds into Sitaware to provide a more informed Recognised Maritime Picture. Utilisation of the resultant information advantage

allows the NOCC to focus assets afloat where and when they are required to effect any developing situations within the Irish EEZ and its peripheries. So far this year, the NS has achieved a total of 364 patrol days, of which 109 patrol days were spent on OP TUBA operations monitoring Ireland's critical sub-sea infrastructure. During the conduct of Maritime Defence & Security Operations (MDSO), the NS has completed 65 Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) radio hails of encountered vessels. Additionally in Fisheries Protection, 109 fisheries boardings & 79 days of Joint Deployment Patrols (JDP) have been achieved. FORST (Fleet Operations, Readiness, Standards & Training) has conducted a total of 3 fleet evaluations.

On the 20th September 2024, LÉ JAMES JOYCE took part in a PASSEX or Passing Exercise with Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1). PASSEX routinely happens between the Irish Navy & Foreign Navies. PASSEX allows for opportunities to exercise in various aspects of Naval Operations, confirm interoperability & sharing of Knowledge. "The opportunity for NATO to exercise with the Irish Armed Forces at sea allowed for sharing of knowledge and enhanced development, which is beneficial for all, and is most welcomed", said Commander, Standing NATO Maritime Group 1, Cmdre. Bo Overgaard.

NAVAL COLLEGE

2024 has been a busy year cumulatively for the Naval College. In the Officer Training School, 2 Officers were commissioned, 13 Cadets were inducted, 3 Officers completed their Naval Watchkeeping and 3 Senior cadets commenced their Level 8 in Nautical Science. The Technical Training School saw 15 students conferred with MTU and 10 with SOLAS, a total of 27 career courses were delivered with a total 184 students receiving tuition and the commencement of building a full P60 Class Engine Room Simulator which will be delivered in 2025. The Line Training School (LTS) has continued to facilitate and train current service personnel in leadership and management, and have inducted over 80 General Service Recruits, in concert with the JITC Gormanston Camp. The LTS also continues to facilitate Branch Training (Seamanship, Communications and Logistics) to prepare our future service personnel for life in the Fleet. In addition, the LTS, via the Seamanship School, has remapped the training required to prepare personnel of all ranks to operate ships RHIBS safely and efficiently at sea and in harbour. This new syllabus of training aims to provide the best possible standard of training to our personnel that meets international standards and best practice.

On the 4th October 2024, the National Maritime College of Ireland (NMCI), a strategic partnership between Munster Technical University (MTU) & the Irish Navy, celebrated its 20th anniversary. Established in 2004, the NMCI has evolved into a leading institution in the field of maritime education, training, and research. Over the past two decades, NMCI has been a key enabler & centre of excellence, empowering Ireland's maritime potential on the global stage. Our partnership with NMCI & MTU has become the cornerstone of training & education for the Irish Navy, ensuring world-class skills & expertise across all ranks. It is estimated that over 13,000 Naval Service personnel rotated through a multitude of courses over the last 20 years in NMCI. Together, we are building a stronger, more innovative future for Ireland's maritime industry. This future will feature a 9 million Euro investment committed to Simulator upgrades which will greatly assist the training of our young officers moving forward. Additionally, a Naval Service Funded Maritime Cyber Exercise was run on the 25th October with the aim of reducing NS cyber vulnerabilities. Building on the success of this exercise it is intended that it will be run on an annual basis from now on.



AIR CORPS

A YEAR IN REVIEW



NO. 1 OPERATIONS WING

101 SQUADRON – SURVEILLANCE AND AIRLIFT BY LT RONAN O'LEARY

In 2024, 101 (Surveillance & Airlift) Sqn continued with the introduction to service of the Airbus C-295 MSA and retired the CN-235 from its role after 30 years unwavering service to the State.

As consolidation of our Maritime Defence & Security (MDSO) role has continued to evolve, the Sqn has also conducted logistics support to various units of the Defence Forces, delivering troops to Cyprus and various locations in support of the EUBG. 101 Sqn has taken part in all aspects of public relations activity, at home with our first display at the Bray Air Display, and abroad with a crew representing the Air Corps at the Royal International Air Tattoo in Fairford, UK.



Although our primary focus has remained on training to attain full operational capability, the Sqn has developed and continues to expand understanding of new technologies on the

aircraft. For the first time, the aircraft are capable of conducting Infra-Red analysis of pollution events at sea and we have introduced LiDAR systems for topographical and bathymetric sub-surface detection. These new systems complement our comprehensive communications suite and will ensure 101 Sqn can continue providing "Eyes Over the Sea" for many years to come.

102 SQUADRON – AIR TRANSPORT BY COMDT PETER SMYTH

2024 represented a period of transition for 102 Squadron as the current platform, the Learjet 45, approaches the end of its service life within No 1 Operations Wing. Nonetheless, the squadron remained operationally active on numerous fronts throughout the period and this included a number of notable operations ranging from EU prisoner repatriation flights with An Garda Síochána through to numerous Air Ambulance missions, a capability which remains a core and significant aspect of 102 Sqn.

Expanding on this, the squadron was directly involved with training and collaboration with the HSE Critical Care Retrieval Service to ensure maximum co-operation and to enable the Learjet 45 platform to be used as effectively as possible in this key and vital area.

In addition, the squadron was tasked with numerous service support and logistics missions in support of the wider Air Corps and Defence Forces and offered an efficient platform for timely and effective mission completion within Europe.

As we approach the end of 2024, 102 Sqn is very much building for the future and the new strategic reach platform procurement project is almost complete. This will mark a significant upgrade in capability for the State. As such, substantial preparations are underway to plan accordingly for this new platform with focus on increasing our resources and updating our SOPs to ensure we are in a position to extract maximum utility from this new platform once entered into service.

In the interim, 102 Sqn will continue to utilise the Learjet 45 and provide ongoing service and utility through the various capabilities of the platform and our personnel.

104 SQUADRON – SURVEILLANCE AND RECONNAISSANCE BY CAPT JOSEPH WARD

104 Squadron has demonstrated exceptional versatility throughout 2024, leveraging the Pilatus PC-12NG aircraft, with its 'Spectre' variant to accomplish a wide range of essential missions.

The Squadron's international operations have been diverse. Challenging resupply missions to locations such as Beirut (UNIFIL), Sarajevo (EUFOR), Kosovo (KFOR), and Germany (EUBG) have played a vital role in supporting Irish peacekeeping efforts throughout the world. These missions underscore Ireland's commitment to global stability and assistance.

On the domestic front, 104 Squadron has been active in enhancing national security. Having carried out essential Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions across Ireland and patrolling undersea cables off the coast, contributing significantly to the protection of critical infrastructure.

The PC-12NG has shown great utility in the Ministerial Air Transport role and has proven invaluable for government officials travelling across Ireland and Europe. A highlight of 104 Sqn's VIP transport duties was the honour of flying the newly appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, marking a significant moment for the Squadron.

Throughout the year, the Squadron has been tasked with multiple critical air ambulance missions, showcasing the aircraft's reliability and versatility in the role. A notable achievement in this area was the Squadron's first neonatal incubator transfer, completed successfully this year.

The PC-12NG's adaptability has been key to meeting these diverse mission requirements. Whether transporting passengers, carrying cargo, or conducting aerial surveillance, these aircraft have consistently proven their worth.

NO. 3 OPERATIONS WING

BY LT SHANE O'CONNELL



As the year draws to a close, it's clear that 2024 has been an exceptionally busy and productive period for No. 3 Operations Wing and the world of helicopter flying. From Emergency Aeromedical Service missions to expanding

aircrew training programmes, each squadron has demonstrated resilience and dedication, ensuring continued excellence in operations. From Night Vision Goggle Training to international flying off the island, the year has been ever-changing and exciting for No 3 Operations Wing. Looking ahead to 2025, the future is filled with exciting opportunities as these squadrons continue to grow and evolve, with new technologies and capabilities on the horizon.

301 SQUADRON: EXPANDING CAPABILITIES AND OPERATIONS

301 Squadron has had a standout year, completing numerous Emergency Aeromedical Support (EAS) service missions, which are vital for supporting the National Ambulance Service with urgent trauma and medical operations nationwide. Two new 301 Sqn pilots have achieved AW139 operational ratings, contributing the squadron's ongoing high operational tempo. Another four pilots are currently in the process of AW139 training, ensuring the squadron remains strong and flexible to meet future

demands. 301 Squadron also maintained firefighting capability in support of the country's fire services, and continued a strong working relationship in support of the Army and Naval Service for joint missions and training. The squadron's diverse capability was used in 2024 to maximum extent.

302 SQUADRON: TRAINING, FLEET EXPANSION, AND NEW CHALLENGES

302 Squadron has been equally busy this year, with its focus on training the next generation of pilots and instructors. In addition to this, they have managed to assist with various operations through aid to the civil authority missions, supporting the Army Ranger Wing and assisting An Garda Síochána. These essential tasks have kept the squadron flying regularly and in high demand. The squadron welcomed eight new pilots, four of whom completed EC135P2+ conversion following their Helicopter Conversion Course (HCC) with the Royal Air Force in RAF Shawbury and RAF Valley, adding new skills to the squadron's repertoire, with the next four pilots now commenced their HCC with the RAF. A reconvened Flying Instructor Course (Helicopter) is also due to be completed by the squadron for two pilots before year-end, which is crucial for supporting ongoing helicopter pilot development within the unit. The squadron is also in the final stages of securing a new light-lift utility helicopter fleet, which promises to further enhance training and operational flexibility in the near future.

303 SQUADRON: MAINTAINING AN AIRWORTHY FLEET OF HELICOPTERS

The AW139s and EC135s require ongoing and continuous maintenance to ensure all aircraft are kept in pristine flying condition, and this is enabled by a dedicated team of skilled 303 Squadron technicians. The technicians continued their crucial maintenance work and upskilling training in 2024, ensuring that all aircraft remain in optimal condition for both training and operational purposes. Line maintenance has required some challenging problem-solving of a technical nature during the year, and base maintenance took place both with home technical crews and abroad with 303 Sqn presence. In addition, 303 Sqn continued to support EAS maintenance in Athlone.

304 SQUADRON - GARDA AIR SUPPORT UNIT (GASU): EXCITING NEW DEVELOPMENTS ON THE HORIZON

GASU has also had an eventful year, with the exciting news of two new aircraft being added to the squadron's fleet: a H145 D3 helicopter and a Twin Otter fixed-wing aeroplane. Both aircraft are currently being manufactured in Airbus Helicopters headquarters, Germany, and De Havilland, Canada, respectively, and are due for delivery in early 2025. These new additions, with upgraded capabilities, will significantly enhance GASU's mission output once operational. GASU also continued its policing and air surveillance operations with the two existing EC135T2 helicopters, remaining a vital part of An Garda Síochána's internal security operations. Furthermore, a new Garda Aircrew Observer selection course is underway, ensuring a steady flow of new talent to join the ranks of the highly skilled team in 304 Squadron.

AIRCREW AND HQ STAFF: KEEPING OPERATIONS RUNNING SMOOTHLY

The aircrew have been sharpening their skills with ongoing training in a multitude of flying disciplines, ensuring readiness for the myriad of operations demanded by the unit in challenging environments, including

undertaking Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training for use during EAS missions. Balancing this demanding training with ongoing operational commitments, the aircrew remains adaptable and ready for the diverse challenges they face in both remote, rugged terrains and critical emergency situations. In addition to this, a new aircrew selection course was completed in November, with a lucky few successful individuals soon to start their General Purpose Crew Course.

And of course, none of this operational flying takes place without the hard work and support of HQ staff, be it planning operations, ensuring logistic

support to the unit, coordinating all administration and unit training, and ensuring the airworthiness of safety equipment.

LOOKING AHEAD: CONTINUED GROWTH AND SUCCESS IN 2025

As we look back on the achievements of 2024, it's clear that each squadron has made significant strides in enhancing their capabilities, expanding their fleets, and training the next generation of pilots, technicians and aircrew. With so many exciting developments already in progress, including new aircraft and training programmes, and a super-medium helicopter project about to begin in 2025, the future of the Air Corps' rotary capability is turning an exciting corner. The coming year promises more opportunities and operational output, playing a key role in supporting the Air Corps' wide range of operations both at home and abroad.

AIR CORPS COLLEGE

BY LT KEN GODDEN

2024 has been another busy and productive year in Air Corps College, with all three schools qualifying and welcoming new students.

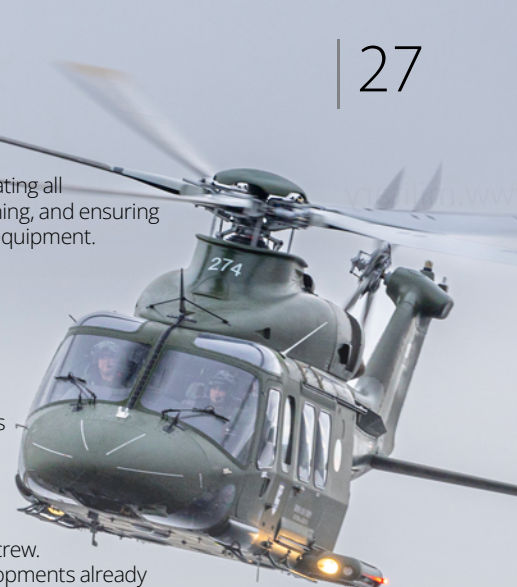
In TTS, every module of the EASA 147 course was completed across the three classes. This is a rigorous academic journey and the successes reflect the dedication of the students and the support of the staff. The 78th Apprentice Class qualified this summer after completing their dissertations, with projects including a wind tunnel and electrical systems demonstrator, and are now integrated into their respective units. We also welcomed the first TMAST (Trainee Military Aircraft Systems Technician) class, which included Defence Forces personnel and new recruits from the DFJTC.

MTS ran several courses to help personnel qualify for key roles within the Air Corps and the wider Defence Forces. A Potential NCOs course was held for Airmen and Airwomen across all Air Corps streams. Technicians completed 14 weeks of training, while Line personnel underwent 26 weeks. Thirty-five personnel qualified as Corporals in their respective streams. An Air Component Progression Course was also conducted for personnel transitioning from the JTC, where they completed Joint Recruit Training with Army and Navy peers. Additionally, a Recruit training course took place in the final months of the year, welcoming new students of all ages and backgrounds to the Air Corps.

2024 also saw impressive performances from the Air Corps Fitness Centre in the An Cosantóir 10km road race, with Sgt Conor Tiernan finishing 2nd and Lt Cloake taking 4th in the Men's Individual category. A combined block from FTS and MTS performed strongly during training and on race day. The summer saw the inaugural Defence Forces Hyrox competition at Cathal Brugha Barracks, where Cpl Morgan captained a three-man team to victory, highlighting the Air Corps' competitive ability.

In FTS, the 47th Flying Instructor Course wrapped up in March, with new instructors Lt Sean Curran and Lt Ken Godden joining the team. In April they assisted with the 29th Young Officers' Wings Course, where seven students completed their final qualification flights and earned their military pilot's wings before posting to their new Units. There was no rest for the school, as the 30th YOWC began their flying training that same month. In May, the 31st YOWC returned to Baldonnel to begin their aeronautical studies, followed by the Air Corps Pilot Cadet Class 2023 in August. The 48th Flying Instructor Course also began this Autumn, with two new student instructors to put through their paces over the coming months. In September, the Silver Swallows participated in the 2024 Sanicole Air Show in Belgium. This was the team's first display of the year and introduced Capt Dan McKeown as a new display team member. The Irish Air Corps' first display in Belgium was a great success with the Silver Swallows becoming a crowd favourite.

As 2024 ends, Air Corps College remains as busy and driven as ever, and looks forward to continuing to teach and develop both current and new students in 2025.



TRANSFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

BY COL COLM Ó'LUASA

2024 has seen the first full year of work on the Commission on the Defence Forces (CODF) recommendations, which followed the publication of the Strategic Framework in September 2023 and the publication of the Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP) in November 2023. The updated DIP for 2025 is currently being prepared for publication at the end of this year. The DIP depicts the timelines/ownership and phases for each of the one hundred and thirty CODF recommendations with a specific focus on the forthcoming year. In tandem with the publication of the updated DIP, a Transformation & Communication Network Roadshow, led by the Head of Transformation Mr. Brian Molloy will be conducted in December across the various formations to update personnel on the progress of the transformation of the Defence Forces to date and the plans for transformation going forward.

2024 marked a busy year for the Transformation Management Office (TMO) which was responsible for overseeing and reporting on the progress of the CODF recommendations as well as the strategic framework priorities owned by the DF. The TMO engages with the owners/leads of the various DF owned projects and is updated monthly or quarterly as to the status of the project by submitting an Initiation and Progress Report (IPR) which is then analysed and collated by the TMO. This process enables the TMO to identify any obstacles to progress or delays in the programme and work towards their removal or resolution. In the spirit of jointness, which the TMO firmly embraced, it is being staffed by Army, Naval Service and Air Corps personnel.

In addition to the delivery of change across the transformation programme, it is also critically important that DF personnel are kept apprised of the progress and status of the projects along the way. To that end, the Chief of Staff directed that the Transformation & Communication Network be established and would be jointly chaired by the TMO and the Press Office. Nominees were sought across the various barracks and military installations who could act as points of contact to funnel queries and suggestions to the TMO and to also be the conduit for updates provided by the TMO. A training day was conducted in the DFTC for the members of the TCN in July, with briefs

from the Head of Transformation Mr. Brian Molloy, Head of Strategic HR Mr. Declan Carville and guest speaker Scott McInnes from Inspiring Change.

The TCN makes use of all available means to communicate progress to all Personnel. The Connect app is being utilised to share information to ensure it reaches all levels, in addition to the traditional email and VTC options. Whilst the transformation process is key, has anything really transformed if people don't know about it? Whilst the TCN remains in its infancy, it is envisaged that there will be more in person information days, as well as the monthly on-line calls in 2025 and it is hoped that the network will continue to fulfil an important role in sharing the progress of the transformation as well as receiving vital feedback.

External consultants Deloitte were on-boarded in June 2024 to provide their expertise particularly within the realm of HR and cultural change. They have been working closely with the project owners and leads in order to progress these work packages and ensure that in so far as possible the milestones are met within the planned timelines. As with all large and complex projects there has been some slippage on a small number of recommendations but substantial progress has been made across all recommendations and those that miss their 2024 deadline will be delivered in 2025.

Whilst 2024 has been a busy year for transformation, with 24 additional recommendations completed (see attached list) bringing the total to 35 out of 130 completed*, it is expected that 2025 will be even busier! In addition to the 100 appointments approved in 2023, 139 extra permanent appointments have been approved so far in 2024. In addition, seventeen temporary planning appointments have also been approved*. These new appointments, representing all ranks and services, offer exciting opportunities for DF personnel to broaden their experience and potentially explore different roles within joint structures. All of these projects and appointments mean that there are exciting times ahead for the Defence Forces, but change takes time – “the secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new” Socrates.

*Figures as of 31st October 2024

COMPLETED	THEME (24)	REC #	DETAILS
January 2024	18,1	125	Establishment of new Army Force Design office
February 2024	22,1	71	Mechanism for annual progress report to minister on the RDF regeneration plan
March 2024	4,1	36(ii)	Defence Forces appearance standards updated and modernised
	9,1	19	Increased use of remote and distance learning incorporated into Defence Forces courses
	4,1	39	Fitness standards reviewed and updated to ensure they are relative to accepted standards for females and modern military roles
April 2024	21,1	121	The reduction of specific ATCP commitments commenced
May 2024	26,1	95	Increased Defence Forces engagement with national and international cyber organisations and fora to enhance Cyber capability development
June 2024	26,1	11	The Defence Forces Cyber Defence Strategy updated.
July 2024	24,1	64	A high level vision for the RDF is articulated that clarifies its core purpose as being to support the PDF in all its roles
	24,1	66	A new vision for the RDF and a regeneration plan was published
	22,1	70(ii)	A new process of auditing the deployment of RDF personnel set up
	24,2	73(i)	Work commenced on the setting up of an Air Force reserve and restructuring the current Army and Navy reserves
	1,1	63	ICTU Membership for Defence Forces representative bodies finalised
	33,1	118	The forthcoming cycle of Defence Reviews is to be based on a coherent and consistent approach to defence policy, level of ambition, required capability and budget
	33,1	83	Future Government decisions on Ireland's capacity and appetite to take on higher intensity peace support operations must be coherent with the resourcing and scale of the Defence Forces and ensure consistency between international security and defence policy
August 2024	4,1	40	Additional female specific clothing made available
	5,1	43	Mandatory gender, diversity, and unconscious bias training in place across the Defence Forces
September 2024	15,1	NA	A new Digital Transformation Officer appointed to Defence Forces
	15,1	17	An organisational leadership and development capability with the Defence Forces of the future developed to lead the transformation agenda
	5,1	28	A new GENAD (Gender Advisor) appointed to Defence Forces
	5,1	33	Consultation with communities of under-represented groups having discussed the attractions and barriers to service in the Defence Forces
	24,3	73(ii)	Efficient recruitment processes for the First Line Reserve, the Army, Air Force and Naval Reserve developed, including a fast-track system for those who wish to join the FLR on discharge from the PDF
October 2024	18,4	90	Smart metrics adopted for the Navy
	28,1	109	The Defence Forces has integrated with whole-of-government processes, with a focus on contributing to national security and national resilience through ATCP and ATCA operations

THE OFFICE OF RESERVE AFFAIRS

RESERVE STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM (RESET)

ARTICLE BY CAPT (AR) FERGAL FITZGERALD

INTRODUCTION

"A key priority of mine as Minister for Defence is the modernisation of our Defence Forces, and revitalising our Reserve Defence Forces is a vital part of that transformation process. This Regeneration and Development Plan contains concrete actions to drive forward recruitment and retention, resourcing, training and education and integration and deployment".



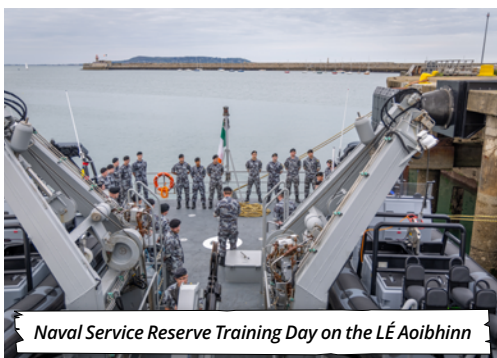
The Tánaiste and Minister for Defence, Mr. Micheál Martin, TD speaking at the launch of the Reserve Defence Force Regeneration and Development Plan on the 24th July 2024 in Cathal Brugha Barracks.

By any measure 2024 marks a significant inflection point for the revitalisation of the Reserve Defence Force (RDF). As part of the wider transformation of the Defence Forces a broad spectrum of initiatives are being implemented across all key RDF enablers including policy, regulation and resourcing. These initiatives are already yielding positive effects and are putting the RDF on a clear trajectory towards Vision 2030 – A regenerated, trained and capable RDF to support the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) in all its tasks.

This article briefly summarises the key initiatives contributing to the operationalisation of this transformation.

DEFENCE POLICY REVIEW

In July of this year the Department of Defence published the Defence Policy Review (DPR) 2024. The Review adjusted and reaffirmed our national defence policy in this era of significant change. The 2024 Review is the latest in a fixed cycle of reviews established as recommended by the Commission on the Defence Forces (CoDF). DPR 2024 has articulated our defence policy towards 2028 and states that the roles of the Defence Forces will be examined in the next review.



The DPR establishes the policy framework for revitalising the Reserve, highlighting the strategic goal "to create a reserve force that can seamlessly train, operate and deploy to support the PDF, nationally and internationally, as and when determined by the Chief of Staff that it is in the best interests of the PDF to do so". Aligned to this strategic goal, the DPR also introduces a crucial policy enabler for utilising Reservists to support the PDF, facilitating the routine deployment of reserve elements to assist with training and operations in typical situations for the PDF.

To support this transformation and reach the strategic objective, a new high level strategic vision for the Defence Forces was developed. Vision 2030 states that Óglaigh Na hÉireann will be a joint, agile and fit-for-purpose military force, postured to defend our sovereignty, protect Irish citizens, and secure Ireland's interests. Nested within Vision 2030 is a new vision for the RDF which supports the transformation of the Defence Forces and contributes to the achievement of Level of Ambition 2, defined by the CoDF as "building on current capability to address specific priority gaps in our ability to deal with an assault on Irish sovereignty and to serve in higher intensity Peace Support Operations". In this context the strategic vision for the RDF states that, by 2030, our reserve elements will be a regenerated, trained and capable RDF to support the PDF in all its tasks.

This will be achieved through the implementation of the Reserve Defence Force Regeneration and Development Plan (RDFRDP) also published in July this year. The RDFRDP seeks to operationalise the intent of the CoDF and has consolidated a broad spectrum of 27 actions into a holistic campaign to create the effects necessary to achieve the strategic end state. The plan focuses on the creation of a robust centre of gravity that has been identified as "well trained, well equipped and highly motivated Reservists". To this end, the recruitment of new personnel and the retention of existing personnel through meaningful deployment has been prioritised. Reservists will also be equipped with the necessary kit and equipment required to fulfil their roles where and when required.



Fig 1 – Overview of Reserve Defence Force Regeneration and Development Plan campaign.



Fig 2 – Campaign Plan Implementation

2024 RECRUITMENT

RDF recruitment has remained open throughout 2024. Significant gains have already been made with almost 250 new recruits inducted for the year to date with almost 18% of applications being converted to attestations. This is a considerable achievement and is testament to the significant work being undertaken by the Recruit Liaison Officers at Unit level. The liaison between applicants and a point of contact at Unit level is essential to maintain engagement despite the protracted timelines being experienced.



JOIN THE ARMY OR NAVAL SERVICE RESERVE

The Opportunities

- Be an integral part of a team and member of Oghlaigh na hÉireann.
- Gain experience in training, planning, communication and combat first aid.
- Strengthen your leadership, teamwork, confidence and fitness.
- Develop a support of Defence Forces operations and training.
- Join our sports teams in GAA, Rugby, Soccer, Boxing, Judo, Wrestling, Martial Arts, etc.
- Participate in State Ceremonial Events.

The Commitment

- There is NO contractual obligation. You can apply for your discharge at any time.
- Undertake paid training in your spare time while working or studying.

How To Join

- Apply now on www.military.ie and select Army Reserve or Naval Service Reserve.
- Candidates will complete an interview, fitness assessment, medical assessment and security vetting.



Based upon current indications, a net RDF strength increase of 15% could be achievable by year end. This is a significant scaling in a short period of time which brings its own challenges

to adequately resource induction training. The ORA are working with a range of stakeholders to mitigate the challenges being experienced. A comprehensive recruitment plan for 2025 is currently being developed to be implemented at Unit level and supported by the ORA. This plan will endeavour to balance demand with capacity and introduce greater efficiencies in the wider induction process. It is appreciated that the necessary level of scaling is ambitious and will require significant support from a range of stakeholders across the DF. The ORA will continue to engage with Brigades and Formations to support the recruiting effort throughout 2025.

2024 RDF ACTIVITY

One of the key recommendations of the CoDF was the implementation of a mechanism to monitor and report RDF activity on a routine basis. Throughout 2024 the ORA has coordinated a monthly return of all RDF activity. Significantly the data has shown a shift from the traditional focus on training, to report activity in support of PDF training and operations. Approximately 43% of all RDF activity has been in direct support of the PDF. Meaningful deployment of this nature is enhancing the integration of Reserve elements and providing a greater sense of purpose for many Reservists. This integration will be further enhanced in 2025 as a greater utilisation of Reservists is



facilitated through the development of the 'Skills for Defence' database. This system has been developed as part of an innovation project led by the ORA and funded by the Research and Technology Initiative (RTI). Skills for Defence will align Reservists with specific

skills to capability requirements across the DF. This initiative is supported by the DPR 2024 which notes "The reinvigoration of the Reserve Defence Force (RDF) will offer additional capability to the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) that should be of particular support where there are specialist gaps". The deployment of Reservists will be further enhanced with the issuing of the RDF Deployment Policy. This guidance, which is currently under development, will empower Unit Commanders to deploy Reservists where and when required as part of the single force.



THE OFFICE OF RESERVE AFFAIRS

The ORA continues to expand towards an establishment of 24 comprising both PDF and RDF personnel. By the end of this year the strength of the ORA will be 15 including two First Line Reserve Officers

assigned to special projects. Additional Officer and NCO appointments will be filled throughout 2025 as the ORA moves towards full operational capability.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2025

The continued growth in the effective strength through enhanced recruitment and retention initiatives will enable the RDF to deliver military capability where and when required. The development of protocols for the implementation of supplementary military service will take place in 2025. Such protocols will enable Reservists to serve for fixed periods in support of the PDF. Supplementary military service will also enable Reservists to deploy overseas. The ORA will also work closely with the DOD to develop enhanced employment protection measures needed to further enable Reservists to contribute to our national resilience and defence capability. With the continued commitment and devotion to duty demonstrated by Reservists 2025 will see the RDF remaining on a very positive trajectory towards Vision 2030.



"The DF's greatest asset has always been its people. During my 18 months as Director of Reserve Affairs, I've seen the outstanding dedication and loyalty of our Reservists, the skills they bring and their commitment to Óglaigh na hÉireann. The Establishment of the ORA, combined with the publication of the Reserve Regeneration Plan and the Defence Policy Review matches that commitment and ensures we are well positioned for the Reserve to meet Vision 2030."

Colonel Oliver Dwyer
Director – Office of Reserve Affairs

BY LT COL JOHN KENNY

CIS CORPS

A YEAR IN REVIEW

CYBER

Strategic relationships with national and international bodies play a vital role in developing DF Cyber Capability. A DF officer has been seconded to the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCD CoE) in Tallinn, Estonia, working with international teams to develop new Cyber Space Operations concepts. The DF also maintains regular engagement with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC).



CIS Corps pers pictured prior to commencement of build of new CIS Workshops and Stores in Q2 2024, due to be completed in Q1 2026

Participation in international cyber exercises is crucial for building DF Cyber capability. These exercises, which involve personnel from the NCSC, AGS, industry, and academia, help enhance the skills of PDF and RDF personnel. In October 2024, the DF participated in the EU milCERT interoperability exercise, MICNET 24, aimed at providing hands-on experience

in detecting, solving, and reporting cyber security incidents with milCERT specialists across Europe.

From December 2-6, 2024, the DF took part in NATO's Cyber Coalition 24 (CC24) exercise, organised by the CCD CoE, with 50 Irish participants. Two DF personnel deployed to Tallinn, while others participated from McKee Barracks. The exercise simulated cyber incidents, including mission net compromise, malware attacks on critical infrastructure, healthcare system breaches, and website defacements, providing valuable experience in responding to complex cyber threats.

DF CIRT

The Defence Forces Computer Incident Response Team (DF CIRT), based in DFHQ CIS COY, McKee, is responsible for securing the Defence Forces' CISN. This includes protecting all Defence Forces equipment connected to the network, managing Cyber Awareness, and monitoring Cyber Threat Intelligence. Security measures encompass the monitoring of the SOC, SIEM, and endpoint protection through physical and autonomous system checks. The main user interaction with CIRT occurs through the Email Gateway and Cyber Awareness campaigns.

Email Gateway: The email gateway filters incoming and outgoing mail to prevent SPAM and malicious links from entering the network and to prevent data loss. Rules are in place to protect the network from emails sent to unsecured addresses, which are vulnerable to interception. CIRT ensures data security and provides guidance to users based on the bounce-back emails they receive.

Cyber Awareness: CIRT recently launched a phishing campaign targeting 150 users with a fake Late Late Toy Show registration email. Results were shared internally. According to September 2024 research, 64% of Irish adults have experienced phishing, making Ireland the most phished country globally. CIRT advises users never to click on suspicious links or share personal or financial information unsolicited. Ongoing Cyber Awareness campaigns aim to reduce phishing risks and enhance vigilance across the Defence Forces.



CIS Corps pers graduation from SETU with a Cert in Software Defined Comms Systems

NEXT GENERATION WORKING ENVIRONMENT (NGWE)

The NGWE project aims to modernise the Defence Forces' IT infrastructure to support a more flexible workforce.

Changes to the network architecture will enable a new telephony solution, increase mobile device access, and improve connectivity with industry partners.

The new system will provide each individual with a dedicated device, with docking stations allowing remote access laptop users to connect to the full CISN desktop when seated at desks in barracks. However, many PCs will remain for roles that require desk-based work. Systems are being tested to ensure the structured rollout of these devices with minimal disruption.

A key part of NGWE is the development of a new telephony solution to replace the outdated Skype-for-Business (SfB) system, ensuring a smooth transition.

NGWE is a "project of projects," providing a framework for deploying various applications and services to enhance the CISN user experience. These improvements are designed to modernise the infrastructure and support the evolving needs of the Defence Forces.

SDR

The Irish Defence Forces have chosen Thales to supply Software Defined Radios (SDRs) to replace the SINCGARS combat radio system, enhancing communications across the Army, Air Corps, and Naval Service. This decision follows a rigorous tender process (2022-2023), including five months of tactical and technical testing. SDRs, unlike traditional radios, use software to control key functions like modulation, demodulation, and frequency tuning, offering greater flexibility and interoperability. The SDR system will provide 3,500 SquadNet tactical radios and over 2,000 SYNAPS radios. SquadNet radios, designed for dismounted soldiers, will support secure voice, location sharing, and data transmission. SYNAPS radios, in vehicle-mounted and handheld forms, will replace the SINCGARS manpack system. The initial batch of SquadNet radios is already in use with the EUBG unit, and remaining deliveries will continue until Q2 2025. SYNAPS radios will begin phased delivery in November 2024, with full deployment expected by Q3 2025.

HYPER CONVERGED INFRASTRUCTURE (HCI) 2 PROJECT

The HCI 2 project builds on the ongoing NGWE initiative, modernising ICT systems from desktops to data centres. While NGWE focuses on end-user environments such as virtual desktops and remote laptops, HCI 2 targets the application server infrastructure. This project will enhance the DF network's storage, compute power, and resiliency, enabling the organisation to meet the evolving demands of the digital landscape and ensure rapid recovery from outages or disasters.

Currently, the DF operates two data centres in an active-active configuration, ensuring continuous service availability. HCI 2 builds on this foundation, improving performance with all-flash storage and VMware-based virtualisation, enabling near-real-time replication.

The project will enhance compute power to support growing digital demands, increase storage capacity for high-volume needs like the Military Archives project, and implement a robust disaster recovery strategy. This includes automated failover, real-time data replication, and comprehensive backup solutions, reducing downtime and data loss.

While cloud services are not immediately integrated, HCI 2 will include provisions for future cloud adoption, focusing on disaster recovery, remote maintenance, and immutable backups. This prepares the DF to leverage cloud resources when operational needs require, ensuring long-term resilience and flexibility.

An update regarding the ongoing project of The Defence Forces Joint Common Operational Picture - Delivering Network Enabled Operations will follow in a later edition of An Cosantóir.



CIS pers at CR14 CCDCOE. They were EXCON in Tallinn during Exercise Cyber Coalition earlier this month.



SDR Implementation Team site visit to Thales France

INFANTRY CORPS



DF Sniper competition



2024 proved to be yet another busy year and challenging year for the Infantry Corps and all three Wings of the Infantry School. The Corps, despite many challenges, continued to develop and enhance capabilities, while also continuing to deliver its operational outputs. The focus on induction training in 2024 meant that the Inf Sch was not in a position to run as many career and weapon instructor courses as usual however the education and development of our personnel continued at both officer and NCO level. The School conducted the usual career courses including the Land Command and Staff course (LCSC) and as well as Infantry Platoon Sergeant and All Arms Standard courses during the year. This resulted in a total of 155 pers completing career courses necessary for promotion in 2024. The School also commenced a PNCO course on behalf of the DFTC with a 40 student capacity in Nov 2024 which is due to conclude in 2025.

Infantry Platoon Sgts Course. The NCOTW also commenced the 07 PNCO Course on 11 Nov 24 with a completion date of 09 May 2025. In Q3 of 2024, Capt Niall Shannon was selected to be embedded as an Instructor on the British Infantry Battle Sergeants course in the British Army's Infantry Battle School in Brecon.



The IWW continued to ensure the maintenance and development of Support Company competencies throughout the 2024. The IWW conducted a successful Live Fire Tactical Training (LFTT) course qualifying 25 pers which greatly increased the pool of qualified personnel. In 2024, the IWW supported a number of teams from Infantry units competing internationally in various competitions, representing the Infantry Corps and the wider Defence Forces with distinction. (27 Infantry Battalion – US Sniper competition, 28 Infantry Battalion – Denmark Sniper competition, ARW – German Sniper competition, 6 Infantry Battalion – UK Sniper Competition, 1 Cn Cois – US small arms competition and 3 Infantry Battalion – UK Cambrian Patrol competition). The experience and knowledge gained by a vast array of units internationally in 2024 was an excellent training opportunity for our personnel.

In September 2024, The Infantry Tactical competition was conducted by the NCOTW and supported by the IWW in the Glen of Imaal. This year's competition took place over two days with Day 1 consisting of a series of stands designed to test the individual Infantry skills of the competitors and Day 2 concentrating on Shooting. The event was supported by D COS (Ops) and 1 Cn Cois emerged victorious, winning the right to represent the Infantry Corps in the US Small Arms Competition planned for 2025.



6 Inf Bn Team at the UK sniper competition

2024 saw the withdrawal of our unit contribution to UNDOF with the return of the 68 Inf Gp in April 2024. Two Infantry Battalions assumed the role of "Lead" Battalion for overseas deployments to UNIFIL, and underwent the associated Mission Readiness Evaluations before

their deployments. The deployment of the 124 Inf Bn UNIFIL, under the command of Lt Col Tom Fox, took place with the backdrop of ever increasing volatility in the Mission Area which has since deteriorated into open conflict. Our troops have relied heavily on their Tactics, Techniques & Procedures (TTPs) during this challenging time and have continued to perform their duties to the highest of standards. The 125 Inf Bn UNIFIL, under the command of Lt Col Shane Rockett, is currently in its deployment phase and we wish the unit every success for their deployment. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the families of our troops serving overseas, without your continued support our soldiers would not be able to continue to perform the necessary peacekeeping work they do.

The withdrawal from UNDOF afforded the Defence Forces the opportunity to commit a Mech Infantry Group to the German led EU Battle Group 2025. The Group, under the command of Lt Col Donal Burke, will begin its 12 month standby period on 01 Jan 2025, having completed a significant period of training in 2024, including a challenging National Certification Exercise in September 2024. As I write this article, the group is preparing to deploy to Germany for a three week exercise with partner nations with a further exercise planned for Hungary in 2025.

The NCOTW conducted a number of career courses including the 19th All Arms Standard Course and the 10th



US Small arms competition

BY COL ANTHONY CORCORAN

MEDICAL CORPS



2024 has continued to be a time of high operational activity for the Defence Forces Medical Corps, both from the service delivery perspective of the Central Medical Unit and the policy & governance development of Medical Branch. On island, the CMU has delivered primary care, occupational medical, and pre-hospital emergency care services across all Defence Forces' installations, as well as at exercises, DF sporting events, and other operational taskings. Overseas commitments were also met by the Medical Sections in UNIFIL, the EUBG, and in UNDOF, prior to the withdrawal from that mission.

A significant focus for the Medical Corps during 2024 has been the ongoing Medical Services Review being conducted by an external consultancy firm. This review arose out of one of the

year's competition, beating 14 teams from across the UK, the US, Norway, and Serbia in the process. The victory is a testament to the high standards of the clinical and military skills of DF medical personnel, which are the result of quality training and ongoing professional skills maintenance.

Other notable highlights, that again reflect the professionalism, skill, and dedication of DF medical personnel, included Pte Nicole Carroll winning the Capt Dara Fitzpatrick Award from the Irish Paramedicine Education and Research Network, Comdt Tom Branigan and Capt Shane Brady winning the Clinical Poster Competition at the International Conference on Disaster and Military Medicine in Germany, Sgt Mick Barry joining the National Ambulance Service Paramedic Course Faculty, and members of the DF Mental Health

Team and the DF Senior Physiotherapist being nominated for the DF Innovation Awards and the Irish Healthcare Awards (results not known at time of printing).

The DF Medical Corps is looking forward to meeting the challenges of 2025, including the continued delivery of high quality care and medical treatment for DF patients, and the implementation of the recommendations from the Medical Services Review.



Exercise Ardent Serpent winners 2024


recommendations made in the Commission on Defence Forces Report. Personnel from across the Medical Corps have played a key role in informing the review, and helping to shape and develop the future medical services. The final report is expected to be produced towards the end of 2024, and a new focus for the Corps will be the implementation of the recommendations in 2025.

One of the highlights of the year came at Exercise Arduous Serpent, which is the UK's Army Medical Services Tactical Training Exercise (AMSTTE). After many years of competitive participation, including numerous top three placings, the DF Medical Corps team won this



Members of The National Ambulance Service and DF on an exercise in DFTC

TRANSPORT CORPS


Delivery of EUBG Stores to Antwerp

It was a busy year for fleet replacement and service provision within the Transport Corps. Subhead A10 procurement business started early, with the delivery in February of the last batch of '2024-pattern' Scania G500B 8x8 Dismountable Rack Offload & Pick-up System (DROPS) trucks. 22 of these soft-skinned vehicles have now been delivered to the Corps, and complement the 10 armoured variants already in service.


Troops on parade for the Transport Corps Centenary parade

Also in February, the Corps enhanced the zero-emissions proportion of the DF's saloon fleet by taking delivery of 10 Kia EV6 electric saloons for use by 1+-star General usage.

In March, cold northerly weather struck parts of the country and our 4x4 TCV fleet converted over to snowplough operations to clear roads in some of the worse snow and ice-affected areas.

Also in March, the field training element of the Corps' combined YO's and Std NCOs Cses successfully culminated in a week-long tactical replenishment exercise in the Glen of Imaal.

After participating in a Drawdown Technical Work Party in mid-March, the Corps undertook the repatriation in April of ex-UNDOF armour & stores from the mission area, to the various stores of DF Logs Base Curragh.


Convoy in truck park outside Dunkirk

Between 10 June and 12 July, the Corps initiated and undertook Op CAROUSEL I – a multi-convoy movement of materiel across the continent for eventual reprocessing and induction into the UKR Armed Forces. Building on a previous


Diesel Reach Stalker 'Up Lift' delivered to NSRC

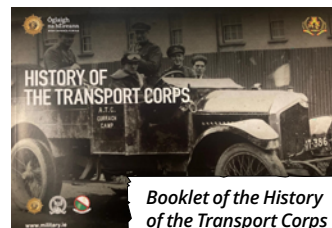
Haulage lined up Rec'ing UNDOF Offload in Dublin

Poland in mid-February, the Corps conducted a series of five convoy movements in June and July to deliver a total of 32 ex-service vehicles donated by the Transport Corps to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

During the month of August, the Corps delivered a further four vehicles to Germany for use by DF training teams and HQ staff working with the EU Battle Group, in advance of the EUBG's full activation in 2025.

Also in August, the Corps took delivery of its first ever, all-electric, heavy-duty forklift.

On 12 September, the Corps was proud to celebrate its Centenary with an open day of ceremonial, music, and static equipment displays in the CVBW/VBTS Compound and on Connolly Square, Curragh Camp. The day formed a fitting salute to all those current and past members who have made An Cór Soláthair the specialist and professional service provider it continues to be today.

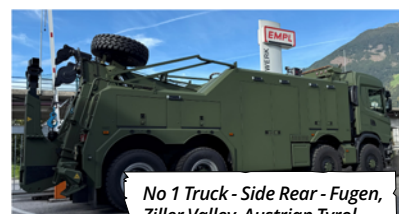

Booklet of the History of the Transport Corps

Iveco DROPS on Lowloader in Ferry

In September and October, the Corps RSOM'd both vehicles & stores to Germany in preparation for EUBG Live Exes expected to be conducted on the continent later in the year.

In early October, Transport Corps also took delivery of a new all-terrain Container Reach-Stacker to enable a more expeditious capacity for TEU logistics going forward.

Also in October, the Corps completed the final factory acceptance testing of the first of four new Scania 8x8 Heavy Recovery Trucks to be inducted into the Corps. These vehicles will mark a step-change in capability for effecting organic recovery of heavy Formation assets by individual Tpt Coys.


No 1 Truck - Side Rear - Fugen, Ziller Valley, Austrian Tyrol

Snow Plough clearing the way for vehicles

The Corps looks forward to a continued level of investment in both its personnel and capabilities in 2025, and wishes all readers of An Cosantóir a warm, happy and safe Christmas. Ar agahaidh linn go léir.

BY LT COL EMMET KEELEY

ENGINEER CORPS

The last two years has seen a significant increase in infrastructure spending in the Defence Forces with the Capital programme now delivering over €80M worth of projects in the last two years alone, an increase of over 100% on previous single annual allocations.

The ongoing Infrastructural Development Plan (IDP) has been in place since 2022. It sets out an approved list of Capital projects worth over €350M scheduled to be delivered before 2028. As part of this plan, the Defence Forces has seen the delivery of major Capital projects like new gymnasiums in both Stephens Barracks and Sarsfield Barracks, new accommodation blocks in Collins Barracks, Haulbowline, and McKee Barracks. This includes a new University Student Accommodation Centre (USAC) with over 70 individual en suite rooms in Renmore Galway.

Several Defence Forces locations are also enjoying a very visible transformational change with the scale of infrastructural improvement affecting several buildings concurrently. This can be seen at McKee Barracks, with the delivery of a new Medical Aid Post,



DFTC CIS workshops

ramped up to support this with the delivery of a new gymnasium, new dining complex (one of three planned that also includes Aiken Barracks and Finner Camp), new locker block, and other vital training infrastructure at JTC Gormanston, and the planned construction of a new ARW HQ commencing in 2025.

There has also been a significant construction effort to improve Defence Forces storage facilities. Several new storage facilities have been constructed and more are planned in the coming years. As part of the Defence Forces ambition to meet LOA 2 there will be a significant investment in military equipment. To support and protect this valuable equipment appropriate storage facilities need to be provided. This is something the Corps of Engineers have been proactive about by ensuring that new storage facilities are provided across the country, including new facilities planned for Fort Davis, the DFTC, and Coolmoney Camp.

From 2022 to 2027, the IDP is expected to deliver over 80 Capital Projects valued at €350M. As of October 2024, there are currently 12 IDP Capital projects on site worth over €70M with a projected spend of €24M of that alone in 2024. There have been 18 Capital projects completed in the last 24 months' worth €22M with €5M of that spent in 2024 and 12 projects that were carried over from 2023 valued at €48M with over €23M of that paid in 2024. Over all in 2024, €42M was

Ongoing works on F Block in McKee Barracks



New locker block in McKee Barracks



McKee Barracks Officers Mess Restoration

Director of Medical Offices, Locker Block, H Block Accommodation, East Terrace, Printing Press, F Block, Electrical Upgrades, and other ongoing heritage and RIAI award winning restoration works.

This array of work includes the facilitation of the Defence Forces move from St Brice's Hospital which requires the construction of a new purpose built Military Medical Facility at Casement Aerodrome, a project that is expected to break ground in Q1 2025. The ongoing cluster of development is also gaining momentum at Haulbowline with several major projects underway including the completed Block 8 accommodation building, the ongoing refurbishment of Block 4 as new accommodation, Block 9 as new Naval Service offices, a new gymnasium/strength and conditioning centre, and remediation of the former contaminated Irish Steel site.

Coupled with all this development is the ongoing tendering for masterplans for each location of the Defence Forces. The masterplans will be replacing the IDP after 2027 and set out plans for each location identifying their infrastructural needs for the near future. The first of these plans was piloted for the airside of Casement Aerodrome, that plan will enable the further development of the base to facilitate the Air Corps transition to an Air Force under the Commission on Defence's (CODF) Report Level of Ambition (LOA) 2.

As part of the development of Casement Aerodrome, new aircraft hangars, a gymnasium/strength and conditioning centre, and accommodation block is planned.

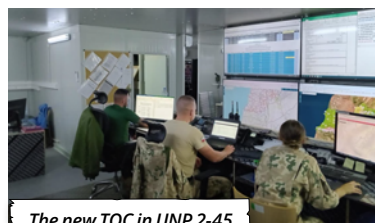
Other new facilities that are growing out of the increase in infrastructure output is the JTC and the Army Ranger Wing Compound. Both featured in the CODF report for enhancement and development in order to meet LOA 2 and the infrastructure has been

Subhead had the highest allocation in its history of €56M for Built Infrastructure, Construction and Maintenance.

Along with the larger IDP projects the Corps of Engineers is actively delivering on minor delegated works too, placing over 80 minor works contracts since January 2023.

Overseas has seen significant investment as well with over \$1.5M invested in a new Cookhouse, \$0.4M in a new hardened TOC facility at UNP 2-45, and \$0.4M on a new CST facility in Naquora. This is the most significant investment in overseas infrastructure for nearly ten years. This important infrastructure has been delivered just in time to be available to the UNIFIL personnel based at these locations in advance of the escalating situation there.

In the transformation of the Defence Forces, and the effort to achieve LOA 2, there has been a step change in the delivery of infrastructure. At the heart of that delivery is the organisations commitment to deliver fit for purpose, compliant, modern built infrastructure that can enable the Defence Forces achieve its ambition in a sustained way that offers quality for the organisation and value for money for the tax payer.



The new TOC in UNP 2-45



Ongoing works in USAC, Renmore Barracks

ORDNANCE CORPS



Members of 1ACS and DFTC detachments firing ARP's during uniform trials

A member of 1ACS changing gear during possible uniform trials on Braveheart Hill in DFTC



weapons firing on military ranges, ordnance equipment safety certification at home and overseas as well as major equipment and weapon repairs. The Corps continued the technical support and oversight to the DF for the procurement, storage, distribution, inspection, maintenance, repair and disposal of all items of Ordnance equipment. The Corps also maintained its logistics role through Subhead A14 to provide the day-to-day sustainment from arming, clothing, feeding and force protection. Technical advice and project management was also provided to Subhead A8 projects in 2024.

Procurement Section, Ordnance Branch Subhead A14.1 projects included procurement, calibration and recertification of small arms and crew served weapons, ground to air systems repairs, camp field equipment replacement, tent repairs & replacement and EOD / CBRN consumable and first responder equipment replacement. Customs and Vat Control Section continued to facilitate import / export and to manage the DF bike to work scheme.

Subhead A14.2 which provides for the multi-annual clothing requirements of the DF including Air Corps and Naval Service saw new tenders awarded for the supply of NS DPM Uniforms; Sportswear; Bespoke Tailored Uniforms (EOH and DFSM) and Embroidery, Badges and Lanyards. These contracts will see the introduction of improved specification items of clothing and will see the first introduction of female specific garments for both the NS DPM and sportswear offerings.

Work on the Ceremonial Uniforms contract saw the development of improved fitting shirts and blouses for all three services with rollout expected in Q1 2025. Work has also commenced on research and development of improved cloths and garment designs for use in future service dress tunics, trousers and skirts.

In 2024 the Ordnance and Supply Corps continued to maintain its operational role to train for and provide the State's EOD / IEDD capability. It also supported all DF Units by attending

Tactical uniform trials on the Curragh plains



The Defence Forces Combat Clothing System (DFCCS) tender has progressed throughout the year culminating in the receipt of final tenders in November 2024. A detailed assessment of the submissions included a qualitative award criteria evaluation, a garment technical assessment, laboratory testing, wearer trial and cost assessment involving personnel from 1 ACS with additional DFTC attachments. It is planned to have contract agreement in Q1 2025 with the rollout of the DFCCS in the new Irish Transitional Multicam® Pattern (ITMP) to commence in Q1 2026. The DFCCS aims to provide the soldier with the required gender specific clothing items that makes this uniform

Quick change of socks after a patrol during uniform trials in DFTC



an integrated system of different layers that the soldier can modify to the prevailing operational environment. New personal kit procured in 2024 include cold weather gloves, tent pegs, signal mirrors and bivvie poles.

The planning and management of Subhead A14.3, which provides for the food and catering requirements for the DF, continued in 2024. This included the sourcing and supply of fresh rations and Operational Ration Packs, the payment of overseas rations and the provision of Front of House services for the Defence Forces. The Daily Ration Rate was increased to €8 in 2023 to allow for greater flexibility and efficiency from all involved in the food cycle and this increase has seen a notable improvement this year.

Throughout the year, the Corps and in particular the Ordnance School when not engaged with teaching the next generation of Ordnance personnel endeavoured to maintain strong and established links with both academia and Industrial partners, including Science Foundation Ireland and Defence Research, Technology and Innovation (RTI) in its capacity to incorporate new and emerging technologies.

The work of the Ordnance Corps above would not be possible without the dedication and continued effort of all personnel within the Corps. The Corps also welcomes feedback from the end user / soldier from all areas across the DF, as they remain the single most important capability in any Defence Forces.



END-OF-YEAR REVIEW CONNECT APPLICATION 2024

BY CAPT AUSTIN DOYLE

INTRODUCTION

The Connect application has improved how information flows through our organisation, bridging the gap between General Staff and grassroots personnel. Launched with the goal of enhancing internal communication, Connect has streamlined information sharing, fostered engagement across ranks, and reinforced alignment with organisational goals. This year has seen significant progress in adoption, innovative use cases, and continued commitment from leadership and staff alike.

SIGN-UP AND ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS

Sign-Up Growth

Connect experienced remarkable growth in 2024, with over 2,000 new users signing up by the end of October, bringing total registered users just shy of 5,500 at the time of writing. Despite challenges such as personnel leaving the Defence Forces, the platform has maintained steady growth. Notably, new recruit platoons and cadet classes contributed to this upward trend, with the on boarding efforts continuing into 2025.

Demographic Insights

- The highest adoption rates were seen among senior ranks like Regimental Sergeant Major (85.37%), Commandant (75.93%), and Lieutenant Colonel (75.54%), reflecting strong leadership engagement.
- By brigade, DFTC leads with 70% adoption, followed by the Air Corps (63%) and Naval Service (61%), underscoring the role of targeted engagement strategies.
- Age demographics reveal the highest uptake among those aged 20–29, with 56% of this cohort active on the platform.

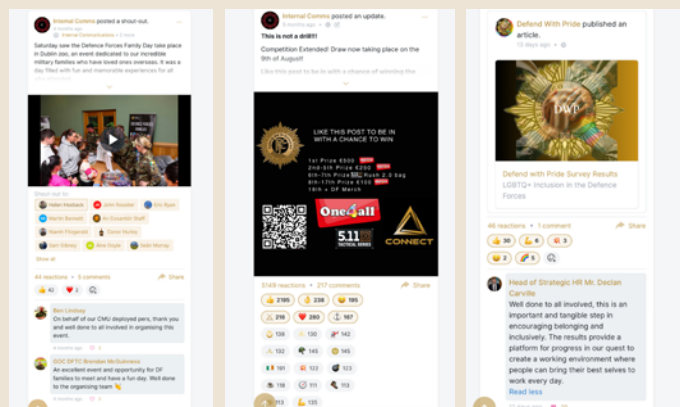
Engagement Benchmarks

Monthly sign-in rates averaged 70%, exceeding industry benchmarks of 55–58% for comparable organisations. Daily logins peaked during push-notified announcements, such as the MRA message in March, which prompted 50% of users to sign in on the same day.

CONTENT PERFORMANCE

Connect's content has been a cornerstone of its success in 2024:

- **Top Performing Posts:** Internal Comms accounted for four of the top 10 posts, alongside contributions from the Chief of Staff, Head of Strategic HR and others. Key topics included uniform and equipment updates, reflecting the platform's role as an information hub.



- **Push Notifications:** These have been pivotal in driving engagement. Notable successes include the MRA announcement and other General Staff Updates, which resulted in login spikes of up to 50%.

LEADERSHIP INVOLVEMENT

Leadership engagement has been critical to Connect's success:

- **DF Board Activity:** Several board members consistently contributed to Connect. Goals of one weekly post, two comments, and three reactions are a focal point for future improvement.
- **Chief of Staff Contributions:** With 31 posts this year garnering over 120,000 impressions, the Chief of Staff has demonstrated how impactful leadership-driven content can be.

Leadership's consistent participation highlights the potential for greater influence and adoption across all levels of the organisation.

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUCCESS STORIES

The adaptability of Connect has shone through in various units:

- **Air Corps:** Leveraged spaces for recruitment, flight ops guides, and course EOIs, showing innovative use of quick links and public/private spaces.
- **Galway and Dundalk Barracks:** Maximised calendar features for course scheduling, improving orderly room efficiency.

These examples showcase how units are using Connect not only for communication but also for operational enhancements.

CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

While Connect has delivered significant value, challenges remain:

- **Staff Feedback:** Some units perceive content posting as an added workload. Streamlining this process, alongside continued training, is essential.
- **Underutilised Spaces:** Monthly space audits and retraining initiatives have revitalised inactive spaces, but further efforts are needed to sustain engagement.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Compared to IKON, Connect has delivered transformative improvements in accessibility and analytics. While IKON was limited to desk-based personnel, Connect ensures all members, regardless of location or rank, have access to critical updates. However, unlike many Workvivo customers, our non-auto-enrolment model requires additional effort for on boarding, a challenge we continue to address.

FUTURE PLANS

As Connect evolves, exciting features and strategies are in the pipeline:


- **New Features:** Digital applications for leave requests and mess bookings, Workvivo TV pilots, and chat functions are all under consideration for 2025.
- **Engagement Drives:** A Christmas competition and new surveys aim to boost sign-ups and gather user feedback for content improvements.

These initiatives are designed to make Connect the one-stop shop for organisational information, stream.




BY COL DAMIEN COAKLEY

THE MILITARY POLICE CORPS



Members of the MP Corps put under pressure during a Riot Control exercise in Spain

The last twelve months have been a busy and varied time for the Military Police (MP) Corps. MP support to formation commanders as well as training and capability development have made up the bulk of this time period.



Irish Participants of NATO Military Police Exercise Angel Guardian in Spain with exercise staff

OPERATIONS

The MP Corps provided support overseas to the 124 Infantry Battalion commander in UNIFIL and also to the 68 Infantry Group commander in UNDOF prior to & during the withdrawal of the Irish contingent from the mission area.

At home, the MP Corps continues to provide support to formation commanders in the form of investigative operations, mobility support, security, detention, and provost operations as well as ceremonial duties.

TRAINING

Upskilling, education and professional development continues of critical importance to the MP Corps. This ensures that the MP Corps embrace national and international best practice and that personnel are adequately prepared to conduct military police operations to the highest possible standards. Effective governance and management of MP operations is enhanced through targeted education and the development of MP personnel.

Nine MP Corps personnel participated in the annual Exercise 'Angel Guardian' in Spain in June 2024. This included seven PDF personnel & two RDF personnel led by Capt Muiris O'Murchadha (2 Bde MP). This International Military Police (IMP) exercise trains and exercises MP units on NATO TTPs in relation to the conduct and execution of MP operations & promotes the strengthening of ties among MP services of NATO Allied & Partnership for Peace countries.



Capt Ashley O'Connor (back row, 3rd from left) on Completion of the UK Royal Military Police Close Protection Course

MP personnel have also successfully participated in several other international courses and forums including the UN Military Police Course in Denmark, the NATO MP Command Senior Enlisted Forum and the NATO MP Junior Officer, Junior NCO, & Senior NCO course in the NATO MP Centre of Excellence (COE) in Poland.

Domestically, the MP school continues to facilitate and run courses in coordination with An Garda Síochána, in order to upskill personnel and ensure best practice. These courses include scene of crime examiners courses, and the sexual gender based violence interviewing course.

The MP school also successfully concluded the 69th MP Probationers Course in May 2024, which made up a total of 26 students & commenced the 70th MP Probationers course in October 2024, which consists of 32 personnel drawn from all services of the Defence Forces. The 26th MP Officers course & the 39th MP Standard NCO also took place during the year.

Third level education is a key aspect of career development in the MP Corps, this year several personnel have commenced a number of courses in third level institutions ranging from areas such as financial crime investigation & photography to forensic psychology and criminology.



CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

The MP Corps continues to strive to develop its capabilities in order to offer increased support to Defence Forces operations.

The MP Corps is currently planning on conducting its first Close Protection (CP) course in Q3 of 2025, having recently received approval for its CP syllabus by the Defence Forces Academic Council (DFAC). This syllabus was developed by MP Corps personnel who underwent the Royal Military Police Close Protection Course in the United Kingdom. The course aim is to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to provide CP to a designated person who may be at risk of any direct or indirect harassment, harm, or attack.

MP Army Reserve (AR) personnel in coordination with the MP School are in the process of developing a military law manual for the MP Corps. When complete, this manual will offer a legal guide to MP personnel in the conduct of their duties.

MP Operations will be supported with the introduction of upgraded equipment as part of the MP Corps procurement plan.

124 INF BN UNIFIL

ARTICLE BY LT JEFFREY FLOOD

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY LT JEFFREY FLOOD

BACKGROUND

The 124th Infantry Battalion deployed to UNP 2-45, Camp Shamrock, Lebanon on 16 May 2024, as part of the ongoing Irish contribution to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). This deployment, which involved 323 Irish personnel under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Tom Fox, marked the culmination of several months of intensive pre-deployment training. The majority of this training was conducted at the home base of the battalion's lead unit, the 7th Infantry Battalion, known as The Dublin Battalion, at Cathal Brugha Barracks.

Despite 7th Inf Bn being the lead Unit, 124 Inf Bn is made up of personnel from across the three services of Defence Forces, spanning the length and breadth of the country. Each individual brought unique skills and perspective to the mission, which fed into the unit's overall operational capabilities. The Battalion was also supported by nine members of the Armed Forces of Malta, whose presence served to further enhance cooperation and interoperability between both nation's armed forces.

The Battalion ethos of "Professional Attitude, Giving Maximum Effort" were rooted in four fundamental principles: Navigate, Operate, Communicate, and Medicate. These core principles were drilled into the personnel through rigorous exercises, throughout pre-deployment training and subsequent deployment. As Lt Col Fox emphasised, "Mastering the basics is key; when you get the simple things right, the complex becomes manageable."

DEPLOYMENT

Upon arrival in the IRISHPOLBATT Area of Responsibility (AOR), the 124 Inf Bn faced a host of challenges. The Battalion were fortunate, however, that the outgoing 123 Inf Bn shared valuable insights and lessons from their own experiences in the AOR. Since 8 October 2023, tensions between Israel and various non-state actor (NSA) groups had escalated, with cross-border exchanges of fire becoming increasingly frequent.

The 323 personnel of the Irish contingent joined with the 234 members of the Polish IX rotation, supported by members of the Hungarian Armed Forces, who had been serving in the AO alongside the 123 Inf Bn. The close cooperation between the two contingents ensured the Battalion was ready and equipped to face any challenge.

Upon the Take Over of Authority (TOA), 124 Inf Bn immediately began to carry out the mission laid down for the in United Nations Security



124 INF BN conducting resupply to UNP 6-52

Council Resolution 1701, which created the foundation for all tasks the Battalion were to carry out.

Its mission was to:

- Monitor the cessation of hostilities in the AOR.
- Assist the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in the AOR in the performance of their duties.

Engineers of 124 INF BN conducting operation Fág an Bealach



- Support the Government of Lebanon (GOL) to ensure the AOR is not used for hostile activities of any kind.
- Protect civilians under immediate threat of physical violence.

The Battalion used this mission as the foundation of its operational tasks, conducting independent and joint patrols throughout the AOR by day and by night, providing training to LAF personnel in the areas of Crowd Riot Control (CRC) and UXO/Counter Improvised Explosive Device (C-IED) and through the delivery of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) projects aimed at assisting and improving the wellbeing of the local civilian population in an escalating security environment.

Concurrently, the battalion maintained a rigorous training schedule consistently evaluating and enhancing capabilities to ensure that operational readiness remained high and the Unit was well positioned to face of an unpredictable and volatile security environment.

RECENT AND SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

On the 23rd of September 2024 there was a significant and dramatic deterioration in the security situation when the IDF launched "OPERATION NORTHERN ARROWS", an air and ground campaign against HZB across Lebanon. The initial air campaign was followed by ground incursions on 01 Oct, with IRISPOLBATT being the primary axis of advance for IDF armoured and mechanised infantry in the UNIFIL AO.

This situation presented a broad range of new, complex and extremely challenging situations for the Battalion, as what was to that point 'normal' life in IRISHPOLBATT changed overnight.

Despite these challenges, the Battalion remained committed to its core mission of monitoring the AOR and reporting on violations of UNSCR 1701. Key to achieving the mission were the Blue Line Posts at UNP 6-50 and UNP 6-52. These UNPs played a critical role in providing detailed reports of what was happening on the frontlines, essentially being the "Eyes and the Ears for the International Community". As the IDF operations intensified the protection and resupply of these vital outposts became an immediate priority.

Having been cut off for in excess of three weeks, IRISHPOLBATT on 19 October 2024 successfully executed Operation FÁG AN BEALACH (Clear the Way), a deliberate Search and Clearance operation, and reopened and re-established lines of supply from UNP 2-45 to UNP 6-50 and UNP 6-52. The operation involved IRCON organic engineering assets supported by manoeuvre companies providing



security and over-watch. Engineers were tasked with sweeping the road on foot with metal detecting equipment and rebuilding sections of damaged road with armoured heavy machinery in order to clear routes of any potential threats to the safety of personnel, primarily Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) that littered the AOR as a result of the conflict. Furthermore, the operation allowed the personnel on 6-52 to rotate back to UNP 2-45 and supplies brought out to ensure and enhance sustainability of the position. This operation showcased the professionalism of the various components of the Battalion and both validated and verified the benefits of long hours of rigorous training.

CONCLUSION

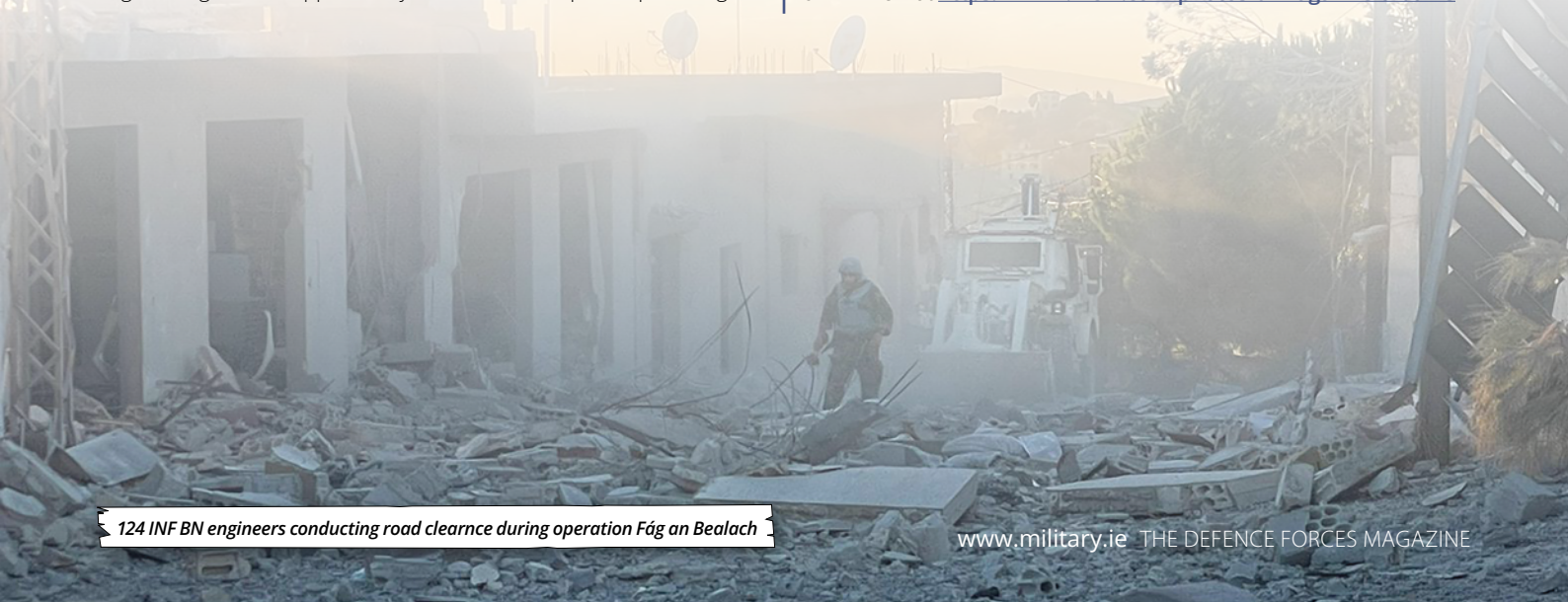
Despite the stresses and difficulties presented by the escalation of hostilities throughout South Lebanon, the personnel of the 124 Inf Bn more than rose to meet the challenges. In what was a highly kinetic and dangerous operational environment personnel of the 124 Inf Bn proved to be consummate professionals displaying excellent levels of motivation, resilience and calmness under pressure.

The Battalion lived the values espoused by the Defence Forces, showing loyalty to one another in the face of difficulty, displaying the moral and physical courage needed to continue its mission in the face of potentially dangerous circumstances and the integrity to ensure the evolving situation was continuously monitored and reported.

Through a combination of teamwork, professionalism, and dedication, the battalion succeeded in overcoming the many challenges of this complex mission, maintaining its operational readiness, and fulfilling its mandate to the highest standard.

The second chalk of 124 Inf Bn returned to Ireland having completed its deployment on 25 Nov 2024. Photos of their homecoming can be found on DF Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfmagazine/albums>

124 INF BN engineers conducting road clearance during operation Fág an Bealach



BY LT COL JOHN MARTIN, OC PSS

HEADSPACE & TIMING



Christmas is a time of being together, of celebrating friendship and family, of rest and a bit of excess. It is a beautiful thing to be able to meet with the people that we love and care for, and to share the joy of the Christmas experience after a difficult and eventful year. As with everything else in life, it is important to be careful and to be prepared. We all want to get the most out of this period and to emerge happier, healthier and just a bit more tired on the other side. In the next few paragraphs, I would just like to flag a few issues and to offer a bit of signposting to available resources to help ensure the best possible result for us all this Christmas.

Apart from everything else there is real pressure to spend our money! Of course, we want to buy the best presents that we can afford, and to provide the best food and entertainment that we can. But it is important that we avoid creating problems for the future by planning our spending and by making sure that we remain within our budgets. There is a lot of pressure to over-extend. From almost September onwards we are bombarded by advertising, which creates expectations with children and with adults alike. There is always the danger of borrowing too much, or from the wrong place, or of losing control of our credit cards. It is always useful to establish a reasonable budget for our Christmas and then to make sure that we stick as much as we can to it. If you would like a bit of advice and information regarding personal finances, you can visit the money hub at ccpc.ie. Your local PSS team are always available to point you to where you can get the best advice and support in your local area.

They say that Christmas is a time of good cheer, and in Ireland this can always be associated with having a few drinks. Whether it's a glass of wine with our food, or a beer or a cocktail or two with our friends on a night out, we have a fine tradition of celebrating with each other. It isn't unknown for someone to break into song, or to tell

a long story without too much persuasion. This is part of our culture and can be a wonderful and positive thing. At the same time there can be a downside to alcohol, where use turns into abuse. Alcohol abuse damages our health and can destroy our finances, our sense of self, and our most precious relationships. It is a good idea to be prepared and informed about alcohol before we head fully into the Christmas period. Make your decisions and set your limits in advance so that you get the most out of your celebration. Take a few minutes to visit drinkaware.ie. It is a super resource which informs you and helps you to get a clear picture of your own drinking habits. Your local PSS team can also help you to find the right information in your area.

I know we will all think of our Defence Forces colleagues who will be spending Christmas away from home. 125 IRISHBATT are in position in UNIFIL in SOUTH LEBANON, as are our colleagues serving in UNDOF and in UNTSO, and in many other places throughout the world. Here at home some of us will have to perform security and other duties, and of course the Naval Service will continue to





maintain a presence at sea. It is a great opportunity to show just what being in the military family is all about. If you can take a few minutes to check in with your colleagues overseas or on duty and wish them well. It is also a good idea to make sure that the families of our deployed people are ok, and to help them if we can. It may be just a cup of tea, or a bit of help transporting and putting up the Christmas tree, but every little helps, and is always appreciated. I would like to mention the people of 124 IRISHBATT who returned home recently, and to wish them the very best in settling back home after a difficult deployment.

Christmas is not always a great season for everybody. In the middle of all the hustle and bustle some of us may be having a difficult time. Mental health problems, health issues, relationships, finances and life events can all affect our ability to enjoy Christmas as much as we would like to. It is a great time of the year to check in with anyone of our friends or family who may be having a tough time. We

can seriously underestimate the value of a simple phone call, or a short visit, in helping people feel better and stronger. In the end it's all about taking care of each other. The INSPIRE confidential counselling service will be available throughout the Christmas period. The service is also available to the spouse and partners of serving military people, and to any of their children over the age of 18 who are living at home. The number to call is 1800 817 433. The INSPIRE Hub is a super free resource available at inspiresupporthub.org. You can access mental health tools and information that can be of assistance in planning your Christmas.

Your Personnel Support Service (PSS) is a team of trained military people and senior occupational social workers, available in all locations within the Defence Forces. We offer a free, professional and confidential service to all members of the Defence Forces and to their families all year round. Please feel free to contact your local PSS team at any time, to get some advice, information or guidance, or just to say hello.

Whatever Christmas means to you and to your family, I hope that it is a time of joy and rest, of meaning and of fun. And on behalf of all the team in the Personnel Support Service I would like to wish you happiness, success and peace in everything that you do in 2025. If anything that you have read in this article has caused upset, or if you would simply like more information on any of the points made, then please feel free to contact pss@defenceforces.ie. The Samaritans are always available at 116 123. God bless you and protect you and your families this Christmas.

Useful Resources over the Christmas Period

Getting started on the hub

With just a few simple steps you can create your personal profile and start using the Inspire Support Hub.

- **Step One**—Visit: inspiresupporthub.org and on the homepage, click the "Sign Up" button in the menu.
- **Step Two**—Where prompted, enter your company/organisation's unique PIN as below
- **Step Three**—Sign up using your email address and create your password.

Visit the hub today

Your unique PIN: DEFENCE

For technical support, contact us at: hubsupport@inspirewellbeing.org

inspiresupporthub.org
Freecall 1800817433

CCPC

Coimisiún um Iomaíocht agus Cosaint Tomhaltóirí

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

www.ccpc.ie
The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

ALCOHOL & YOU

GET THE FACTS YOU NEED TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT ALCOHOL

EXAMPLES OF ONE STANDARD DRINK

HALF PINT LAGER (4.5%, 284ml)	GLASS WINE (12.5%, 100ml)	FLUB MEASURE OF SPIRITS (40%, 35.5ml)
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HSE low-risk guidelines

Up to 11 standard drinks (110g alcohol) spread out over one week

Up to 17 standard drinks (170g alcohol) spread out over one week

HAVE AT LEAST TWO ALCOHOL-FREE DAYS IN THE WEEK

DRINKAWARE

Web: drinkaware.ie
Email: info@drinkaware.ie
Registered Charity Number: 2020460

www.drinkaware.ie

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

AND BEST WISHES FOR 2025
FROM AN COSANTÓIR



www.military.ie

STRENGTHEN
THE NATION