

NAVAL GAZING



The Voyage of *LE Niamh*

By Robyn Hessinger

The Naval Service, in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Foreign Affairs, have launched the State's most ambitious overseas trade promotion to date, with the despatch of the Naval Service patrol ship *LE Niamh* on a 25,000-mile mission to Asia.

The voyage was undertaken to provide a platform for Irish trade promotion in Singapore, China, Korea and Japan in line with the government's Asia Strategy published in October 1999 'A strategy for long-development of foreign earnings in Asia'. The ship is hosting a large number of promotional events designed to support the

export efforts of individual Irish companies and the promotional work of the state development agencies. It is hoped to attract 2,000 Asian decision-makers over the course of the voyage, to interact with Irish companies and agencies. More than 70 Irish companies are represented in this deployment and it is anticipated that up 5,000 business contacts will be fostered by this mission. The Asia mission will also provide an important training opportunity for the navy and its personnel.

The *LE Niamh* set sail from Haulbowline in Cork on the 10th February last, on a route that would include Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Inchon

in south Korea, Tokyo in Japan, and Penang in Malaysia. Along with the trade promotion, the ship's initial task was a re-supply mission to Irish soldiers serving with the United Nations in Asmara, Eritrea in north-east Africa. On departing Cork harbour, the ship travelled across the Mediterranean, transited the Suez Canal and into the Red Sea, arriving at the port of Massawa to meet up with the Irish contingent serving in the UN Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE).

LE Niamh is the latest vessel to be commissioned into the Naval Service and is under the command of Lt Commander Gerard O'Flynn. This mission represents an

operational and logistical challenge to himself and his ship's company of 44 men and women. On Day 87 of the voyage of *LE Niamh*, SIGNAL spoke to Lt Commander Gerard O'Flynn about their adventure and accomplishments.

"The deployment itself has been both historic and significant. It's historic because it is the very first time that an Irish Navy ship has been east of the Suez Canal, and crossed the Equator. And it's significant because Ireland as an entity recognises that the whole Asia Pacific market is so important. By the year 2015, half of the world's trade will go through that entire region. So it's very important for Ireland to be recognised in that part of the world. Because this visit has been coordinated very professionally through the Department of Foreign Affairs and their various entities and Enterprise Ireland, everything has been very well coordinated. So I think we've put on a pretty professional show and that has been important. It is also important that we have been very well received and of course first and foremost it is a good will visit and it's a statement of good relations between Ireland and the various countries we visited."

"This is by far and away the longest that any of our ships have been away from Ireland. Prior to this our ships would have gone to European countries or to the United States and Canada. So it's the very first time an Irish Navy ship has gone through the Suez Canal and further east. We will be back in Irish waters late May, so overall you are looking at a 100-day commitment."

"It's important to emphasise that this is a two-part mission: the first part of it was to take supplies to the Irish troops serving in UNMEE. Today we are actually on our way back to the UNMEE mission, which is based in Eritrea in Africa, and we are taking equipment back to Ireland for them. The second part was the trade promotion in the six Asian ports.

I suppose the other thing is that a ship in itself is a unique symbol of diplomacy. And it reflects an increased recognition by government of how to make better use of ships. I think the Navy really has three roles: one of policing, one of diplomacy, and a primary military role. So what you are seeing here is using the ship in a diplomatic role." "We have had the opportunity to experience vastly different cultures and by virtue of wearing uniforms it has opened up a lot of doors for us. The other thing is how positively everyone has responded to the task in



Lt. Cdr. Gerry O'Flynn, Officer Commanding LE Niamh on the bridgeway prior to departure from Haubowline.

hand. You normally go into a port to relax, but the crew really has entered into the whole spirit of things and endeavoured to project Ireland in a positive light at all times."

The following are excerpts from LE Niamh's Diary:

On Wednesday 19th February, *LE Niamh* became the first Irish Navy ship to transit the Suez Canal. For much of the passage all that could be seen were the banks of sand deposited on either side when the canal was dug, with frequent glimpses of the flat desert to the west over Egypt and the arid mountains and desert to the east over Sinai. But as the sun rose on a clear morning, the raw beauty of the desert was seen for the first time. Such a sight is truly unique to sailors used to the very different beauty of the west coast of Ireland. On a rather poignant note as daylight broke at about 0600, one of the first impressions was the exodus of Egyptian people to their workplaces and markets in various forms of transport. At a particular stage several trains were to be seen moving along the canal banks. Sadly we were to learn

later that day, that fire broke out on a similar train in Egypt that morning, resulting in the horrific death of over 350 people.

There was a further change of pilot at the Ismail before the midpoint in the canal and then we entered the Great Bitter Lake. There was a noticeable increase in military presence along the banks of the canal and one was reminded of its strategic importance and the canal's history of conflict. In addition to military posts, there was a frequent appearance of special pontoons, to facilitate a crossing of military equipment and personnel, should the need arise. At the Port of Suez we again changed pilots and bid farewell to our friendly electricians and boatmen - all sporting Irish Navy baseball caps. Here our final pilot boarded whose job was to provide navigation advice as the ship departed the canal for the Red Sea; or as one crew member put it 'another day, another sea'. Thus ended the first transit of the Suez Canal by an Irish navy ship.

On Saturday 23rd February *LE Niamh* berthed in Massawa in Eritrea in order to offload supplies to the Irish troops serving there with the UNMEE Force (United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea).



Lt. Cdt. Micheal Malone, Engineering Officer on LE Niamh, pictured in the Machinery Control Room.

Cadet Dominic Kelly outlined his impressions: after supplies and ammunition were offloaded to the Irish convoy, our colleagues from the Army were good enough to provide a briefing of the Mowag Armoured Personal Carrier (APC) and a guided tour of Massawa. Travelling around the hot Eritrean town seeing all the destroyed buildings felt like being on the set of *Black Hawk Down*. I saw the innocent victims of war first hand,

war-torn country and to see at first hand the suffering experienced by people living in such horrendous conditions, the consequence of a prolonged conflict. We all hope UNMEE will help this country rebuild itself and promote the growth of prosperity that the country requires, to fully re-develop, and give these most friendly and welcoming people a quality of life which they deserve. I have little doubt that everybody onboard

struck up some jaunty sea faring tunes, and the official welcoming party could be seen lined up on the pier beside them. Among them stood the Ambassador of Ireland to Japan, His Excellency Mr. Pdraig Murphy, Enterprise Ireland representative Mr. Declan Collins and Naval Service Liaison Officer Lt Cdr Jim Shalloo. We were to berth ahead of a Japanese frigate *Sawayuki* whose crew was lining the ship's side, the traditional sailors greeting. The *Sawayuki* had been appointed host ship for the visit.

The following day, fourteen members of the ships company were given a rare treat, visiting Shimofusa Naval Airbase, where they were given a detailed briefing on Japanese Maritime Air patrol craft, and their training facilities. An opportunity to fly P3C Orion aircraft in simulation was included.

Meanwhile back onboard *LE Niamh*, the work of promoting Ireland and Irish interests aboard had commenced in earnest with a lunch hosted by Enterprise Ireland for business contacts. That evening the first of several receptions, attended by 200 guests, was hosted onboard on behalf of IDA and BFE. The efforts of the crew had once again turned the flag deck from a grey metal ships deck, into an attractive garden, complete with grass green carpets, flowerpots and plants, traditional Irish music and fare. Local Japanese musicians Isao and Masako Moriyasu, (known as Paddy and Bridgid in West Clare, where they are regular visitors), provided musical entertainment ably sup-

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some of them living in small huts constructed from cut branches, cut up grain sacks and corrugated iron.

I was both impressed and saddened by what I saw in Massawa, but it was great to meet the Irish troops who have been in Eritrea for the last three months, especially several of our naval colleagues, as well as soldiers from my hometown of Drogheda. Also while we were there, proving that the Irish can be found anywhere in the world, I met an Irish lady who is there with the organisation Concern - she came to visit when she heard there was an Irish ship in port for the day. It was an experience of a lifetime to visit a

who visited this war-ravaged country had an eye-opening experience, and took great pride in seeing Irish troops help restore peace to a part of the world that has suffered for too long.

On Monday 8th of April, looming out of the morning haze, the structure of Tokyo's famous Rainbow Bridge greeted *LE Niamh's* arrival. Its massive structure towered over the ship as she slid through the waters of Tokyo Bay. Beyond the bridge we could just make out our berth at Harumi Pier, crowded with people awaiting us. As the Captain made his approach to the quay wall, the band of the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force

ported by flautist, Cadet Niamh Nì Fhatharta and singer A/Sea Siobhan Fennell. The relative peace of the Tokyo evening was broken by the tones of Leading Steward Frank Goss's Bagpipes, as he saluted the 200 astonished Japanese guests with some stirring marching tunes. Following speeches by the Flag Officer, the delicious sushi prepared onboard by local caterers was supplemented by *LE Niamh's* cooks. Later in the week further lunches and receptions were hosted onboard *LE Niamh*, on behalf of organisations such as Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, Tourism Ireland, various Irish-based language schools under the auspices of MEI/RELSA, and companies in the IT sector.

Monday 15th April, the sad day of departure from Japan had arrived, a hundred years since the last visit of a Japanese naval ship to Ireland. (Two Japanese warships had visited Cobh during the Cork International Exhibition in 1902). The crowd on the pier waved farewell as the last line was slipped. The Jack was struck, and *LE Niamh* slipped slowly away under the by now familiar Rainbow Bridge.

On 22nd April 2002 the crossing of the equator by *LE Niamh* marked a significant and historical attainment on the part of all the ship's company. Although many people would have crossed the equator as airline passengers, there is a special significance attached to doing so onboard ship. More importantly, everybody appreciated that they would be the first to do so onboard an Irish naval ship.

Traditionally any members of a ship's company, who have not previously crossed the Line, are initiated at a special ceremony, held to mark the occasion. On the day the equator is crossed one of the ship's company appears on the forecastle (front end of the ship) suitably attired as King Neptune, encrusted with barnacles, wearing a golden crown and flowing beard, and clasping a trident. The novices are then initiated by King Neptune and receive a good ducking. This procedure earns them a certificate that exempts them from a repetition of the treatment on any future crossing of the line that they may undertake. The ceremony undoubtedly owes its origin to ancient pagan rites connected with the appeasement of the sea god Poseidon or Neptune.

This tradition left *LE Niamh* with a problem as nobody onboard had previously sailed across the equator, so the traditional ceremony required some modification. Chief Petty Officer Owen O'Keefe as the oldest (if



Naval vessels docked in Haulbowline, Co.Cork.

not wisest) man onboard was considered the ideal King Neptune. His wife Queen Amphitrite normally accompanies King Neptune. With no females of a suitable age

coction. Neptune then ordered the Captain to walk the plank into the sea. Given the need for a thorough wash, and the possibility of escaping further censure, he was probably



One of the ship's company appears on the forecastle suitably attired as King Neptune wearing a golden crown and flowing beard.



onboard (or acceptable males to play the role), Ordinary Seaman Sharon Darby assumed the role of Neptune's beautiful daughter, Ariel. Engines were stopped one mile south of the equator, and the initiation ceremonies began. King Neptune was now firmly in charge and immediately summoned the Captain. A distinctly worried but wisely-clad captain was unceremoniously dragged in front of Neptune. Thriving in his new role, King Neptune made three demands of the Captain.

The Captain was dejectedly unable to accede to any of the demands. A furious King Neptune ordered his daughter Ariel to plaster the Captain with the prepared con-

relieved to do so. The remainder of the ship's company soon followed in his wake, leaving a few hardy souls to mind the ship, and tend King Neptune. With a seawater temperature of 32°C everybody quite enjoyed the swim. King Neptune himself was last into the water.

Niamh had an arrival deadline to meet for Penang in Malaysia, and the beautiful clear and warm waters of the southern hemisphere were abandoned. *LE Niamh* set sail for a return to the northern hemisphere once again. So ended a unique chapter in the short but action packed history of *LE Niamh*. We are and always will be the first Irish naval ship to 'CROSS THE LINE.'

There may be trouble ahead...

Comdt Liam Campbell, Secretary of CAOGA, the Defence Forces Group Assurance Scheme points out some hard truths on the benefits of ensuring that members have adequate cover for their particular circumstances.

"Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness.

"Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery."

Mr. Micawber in David Copperfield by Charles Dickens

Anyone working in a staff appointment in the Defence Forces will realise very quickly that statistics and returns are the bread and butter of their working lives. We are all

ment on death for all members, irrespective of their individual needs or circumstances. There is a world of difference, for instance, between the needs of a single officer who decides to leave his or her small fortune to a niece or nephew and a married officer with a large family, one of whom perhaps has special needs.

The key message is that there is no room for complacency when it comes to the welfare of your family. Every day brings seven new widows and four new widowers under the age of 65 to this country. Officers and their spouses inevitably form part of that statistic. For most of us our CAOGA policy, mortgage protection and our statutory entitlements from the Department of Defence and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, form the basis for making adequate provision for our families in the

know where the will, and documents such as personal insurance policies, are kept. It is not uncommon to find the beneficiaries of a will conducting a form of treasure hunt in trying to locate these documents.

Officers should be aware that the cost of raising a child to his or her 18th birthday is estimated to be in the region of €120,000. By that calculation my children owe me almost half a million euro which, I am assured by them, I have very little chance of recovering. But if my wife was left to raise our children on her own, could I be sure that she could meet that kind of financial burden? Could you in similar circumstances? So, how much cover is needed to replace the loss of income caused by a bereavement? In reality you need to be able to replace more than the income, as raising a family by a single parent is far more costly than if both parents were present to do so. There is no shortage of estimates available from the insurance industry on the level of cover required. According to their figures, this varies from between ten to

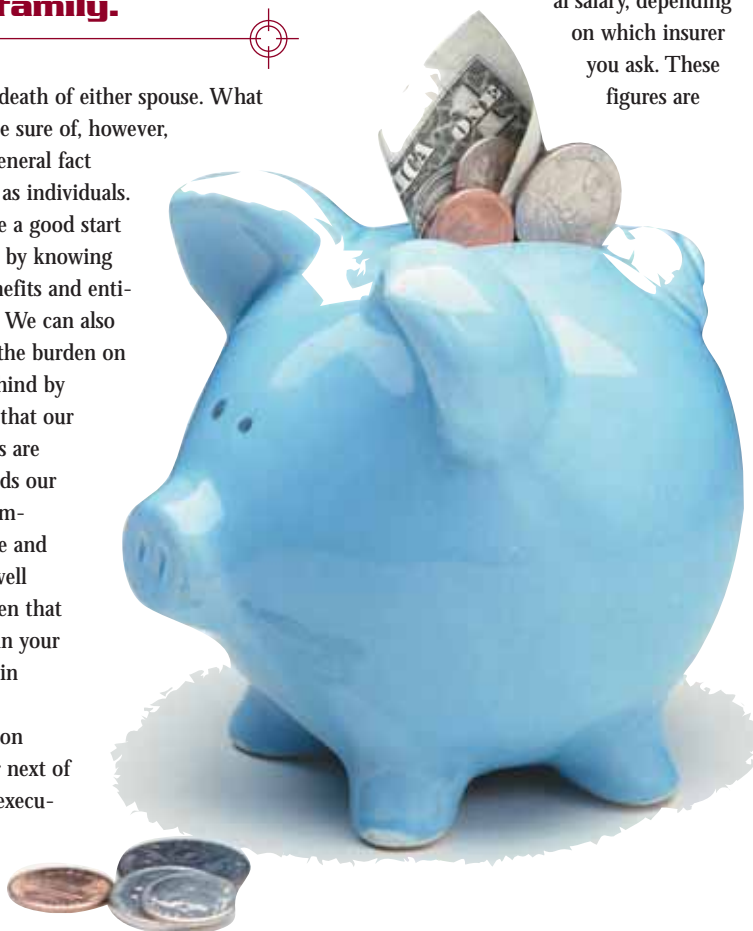
fifteen times your annual salary, depending on which insurer you ask. These figures are

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familiar with that urgent plea from on high for gems of information such as, 'how many married officers have you in your unit under the age of 25?' (Believe it or not there are actually only six in the Defence Forces). Let me assure you very quickly that we are not alone in this practice and compared to some, we are positively restrained. Take the insurance industry for example. Meet anyone working in that industry and immediately he, or she, will regale you with facts and figures, many of which will put your hair standing on end.

It is a fact, for instance, that only half the adult population of this country has any form of life assurance. Of those individuals that do, many are seriously underinsured. At this point officers will heave a collective sigh of relief and bask in the knowledge that they are members of CAOGA and its Group Assurance Scheme and are therefore among the few who can safely tick that box. Or can they? The Group Scheme, as its name implies, provides the same lump sum pay-

event of the death of either spouse. What we need to be sure of, however, is that this general fact applies to us as individuals. We can make a good start in doing this by knowing what our benefits and entitlements are. We can also help to ease the burden on those left behind by making sure that our personal wills are geared towards our current circumstances. Time and events may well have overtaken that will, lodged in your personal file in Officers' Administration Section. Our next of kin and our executor should





Remember that other policies, such as that for your car, may have added life cover benefits. It is well worth checking these out.

somewhat daunting and do not take account of additional sources of income. For instance, some of that lost income will be replaced by pension and social welfare payments. The sum is further reduced by the fact that any mortgage will be paid off by a protection policy. The balance left, after all these sums have been factored out, is the net loss of

basis. Remember that other policies, such as that for your car, may have added life cover benefits. It is well worth checking these out. These are the basic steps of the review that you need to conduct.

We are frequently asked why individual members cannot use the group assurance policy for mortgage protection. CAOGA's

primary goal is to provide you with the means of protecting the long-term financial security of your family in the event of the death of a key family member. If the group policy was used as mortgage protection, there would be no lump sum available with which to generate an income. In these circumstances the financial security of the family could not be said to have been adequately secured. The fact is that mortgage protection and life assurance are both needed to achieve the aim of providing long term financial security for your family.

Life assurance is not a new product; it has been around for at least four hundred years. The experience of the insurance industry has shown that the successful policy is one that is cost effective, adequate, and easy to understand. These are the principles that CAOGA adopted in setting up its own Group Assurance Scheme. It helps to provide our members with 'peace of mind'. However it is only by completing a check of your own personal needs that you can honestly say that this 'peace of mind' applies to you as an individual.

THE CAOGA SCHEME SUBSCRIPTIONS

Member	€8.25 per month
Spouse Member	€3.81 per month
Benevolent Fund	€1.27 per month

GROUP ASSURANCE SCHEME - IRISH LIFE PREMIUMS

Member over age 35	€40.63 per month
Under age 35	€33.01 per month ¹
Cadets & 2/Lt's	€22.86 per month ¹
Spouse Member	€22.35 per month

¹Commencing in 2002

CAOGA's primary goal is to provide you with the means of protecting the long-term financial security of your family in the event of the death of a key family member.

income that needs to be replaced. This is where the lump sum provided by the life assurance policy comes in and it is usually invested with a view to replacing that lost income. The return on the lump sum will depend on a number of factors including its size and of course the level of risk the investor is prepared to take. Any gratuity due will add to this lump sum. You should also take into account any life assurance policies that you may have taken out on a personal

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