

11th RACO ADC

The 11th RACO ADC was held, in the Brandon Hotel Tralee for the second time, on the 11th and 12th of November 2003. The format of the conference consisted of addresses by the Minister for Defence, Mr. Michael Smith T.D., the Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) Major General Jim Sreenan and the President of RACO, Lt Col Paul Allen.

On the second day of the conference the General Secretary, Lt Col Brian O'Keeffe presented his report to conference as did the Honorary Treasurer, Capt Graham Heaslip. The Secretary General of EUROMIL, Mr. Andreas Prüfert, a retired Captain in the German Armed Forces, also addressed the conference. He gave a comprehensive insight into the principle issues facing EUROMIL as well as an explanation on the workings of the organisation. On the Tuesday night the Association hosted its traditional annual banquet where the guest speaker was Mr. Sean Power TD.



▲ RACO President Lt Col Paul Allen



▲ Mr David O'Callaghan, Secretary General, Dept. of Defence and Minister for Defence, Michael Smith TD.

RACO President's Speech

In his speech to Conference the President of RACO, Lt Col Allen, highlighted the advances made in the Defence Forces over recent years. He spoke of the €54 million invested in new equipment, the increase in training, up 325% between 1999 and 2002, as well as the advances the Naval Service and Air Corps have made. He pointed to the closure and sale of six military posts, the rationalisation of many more and the reduction in personnel as source of the funding that generated these changes. Lt Col Allen also referred to the organisation's pay to non-pay expenditure ratio, which was now more favourable than the ratio set out in the White Paper. Lt Col. Allen then asked the Minister for Defence, Mr. Michael Smith, when would the Defence Forces be rewarded for the sacrifices that they had made.

Speaking to guests, including the Minister for Defence and the Secretary General in the Department of Defence Mr. David O'Callaghan, he said: "What we have achieved is modernisation in real terms. This is real productivity, delivering a better



service for less cost. But what has been our reward to date? In 2002, as belt-tightening began, the Department of Defence was the first Government Department to offer up savings and returned almost 42 million to central funds. Last year at this Conference I expressed fears that this may be a taste of things to come and my fears were well founded. This year, 2003, the Defence Forces must again implement personnel cuts of 250 members, this being on top of the 1,500 cuts in 1998 and the 1,000 White Paper cuts in 2000. The most recent cut represents 2.3% of our strength. Next year it gets worse, again resources will be

◀ Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) Maj Gen Jim Sreenan, Minister for Defence Michael Smith TD and RACO General Secretary Lt Col Brian O'Keeffe.

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▲ Vice President of RACO Comdt John O'Keeffe.



▲ Capt Cathal Esler, Comdt John Fitzmaurice, Comdt Brian Daly and Comdt Kieran Reid.

reduced. There is little point in blaming the economy - promises were made, we took the pain during the good times of the Celtic tiger in this country, why must we continue to take the lions share of the pain now?"

Lt Col Allen highlighted further the discrepancies between the performance of the Defence Forces and the lack of credit given to the military as a whole. In addition, he addressed several other issues of pertinent concern. On the issue of officer recruitment, the RACO President highlighted the organisation's views that "various ad hoc systems used to train and commission officers are inherently divisive and inequitable." He stated that RACO would proactively engage in any reforms in this area but that there are two items which it would not compromise on; "there will be no reduction in the educational standard



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also spoke about the Independent Monitoring Group under the chair of Dr. Eileen Doyle and congratulated RACO's General Secretary, as a member of the IMG, for his constructive approach to tackling the issue of bullying and harassment within the Defence Forces. Concluding the speech the Chief of Staff asked RACO to "continue their commitment to the Defence Forces as a whole as well as to individual members

▲ Senator Geraldine Feeney.

required, and any quota system for various groups is out of the question. Officers candidate selection will be based solely on merit in open, transparent competition." In addition to other matters, Lt Col Allen highlighted the desperate state of the Defence Forces medical services and accused the Department of Defence of blatantly ignoring the issue. He urged the department to engage openly in the upcoming review of the medical services.

COS Speech

The Chief of Staff, Lt Gen Colm Mangan, was represented at the conference by Major General Jim Shreenan (currently Chief of Staff designate). Reading the speech prepared for the Chief of Staff, Maj Gen Shreenan spoke at length on the subject of change within the Defence Forces. Speaking on the overall results of this change, the Chief said that the military's commitment to change had resulted in real benefits in terms of training, command structures, Air Corps and Naval Service reorganisation, devolution of financial control and equipment modernisation. He



▲ Lt Col Paul Allen, President of RACO and Mayor of Tralee Councillor Terry O'Brien at the official reception for RACO by Tralee UDC.



and assist my successor in providing the Government and the people of Ireland with a value for money service of the highest quality and a Defence Forces which is cherished and held in the highest esteem."

Minister's Speech

In tune with the other keynote speeches at the ADC, Minister for Defence Mr. Michael Smith, T.D., focused on the changes within the Defence Forces, the implementation of the White Paper recommendations, the issue of bullying and harassment, modernisation, recruitment, equipment and overseas missions. On the Defence Forces mission to Liberia, the Minister reiterated that all possible precautions to ensure the safety of Irish personnel had been taken;

◀ Minister for Defence Michael Smith TD.

The Minister said his department remained committed to providing members of the Defence Forces with the required medical services.



▲ Lt Laura Fitzpatrick, Lt Louise Conlon, Sub/Lt Marie Gleeson, Lt Gemma Kiely, Lt Aine Flynn, Capt Louise Keane.



▲ Lt Laura Fitzpatrick, Lt Aine Flynn, S-Lt Paul O'Brien and S-Lt Marie Gleeson.

"I have been assured that every possible precaution will be taken, including the education of those deployed to ensure risks are kept to a minimum and that the necessary services to deal with any eventuality will be in place." Speaking on the issue of the provision of medical services within the Defence Forces the Minister said that his department remained committed to providing members of the Defence Forces with the required medical services and promised to address the issue within the coming months. On equipment, the Minister stated that although "significant investment has taken place during my time as Minister, due to the changed financial situation, expenditure programmes will have to be prioritised." Concluding his speech, Minister Smith said

that he "looked forward to continuing to deal with RACO constructively in a manner which will enable both sides to achieve our shared goal. I want to thank your Association's officials as well as the staff in the civil and military conciliation and arbitration branches for their contribution over the past year."

Motions To The Conference

Motions presented to conference were held both in open and closed sessions. Among other motions, **the ADC voted unanimously to change the system of ADCs from annual to biennial conferences.** The conference decided that in the year when an annual conference is not being presented a seminar for elected reps would be held which must also include the Honorary Treasurers report.

With regard to the Naval Service the conference decided **that RACO should negotiate with NS (DF) Command the introduction of an Internal Customer Charter.** The aim of such an Internal Customer Charter should to set out the same levels of consideration for personnel as SLA's do for External Customers

With regard to overseas selection the conference voted that **RACO should seek to ensure that the General Staff should approve all formation/unit policies in respect of selection of officers for overseas appointments.** This motion is designed to ensure that specific policies regarding selection are established in the Military College and elements of DFHQ where officers can be denied overseas service for an extended finite period of service in that unit.



▲ Capt Seán White, Comdt Gerry O'Leary and Sub Lt Marie Gleeson at the banquet.

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▲ Delegates at the conference.