

Obituary



John Lucey, General Secretary of PDFORRA and dedicated campaigner of servicemen's rights.

The tragic death of John Lucey on January 6th at the age of 56, robbed members of the Irish Defence Forces of one of their most long-standing and well-respected advocates. John had served in the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service and had tirelessly championed the rights of enlisted personnel throughout his lengthy career.

John's military career began on enlistment in August, 1963. He joined the Air Corps after initial training and then moved to the Army, joining the 1st Battalion in Galway in July, 1964. He served a six-month tour with the UN in Cyprus in 1964-1965. In February 1966, he moved to the Naval Service in Haulbowline, and served on the *LE Maeve*, *LE Cliona*, *LE Macha*, *LE Deirdre* and his last ship, *LE Aoife*, which he left in 1979. He was promoted Chief Petty Officer in 1980 and to Warrant Officer in October last year.

John Lucey was one of the driving forces behind the foundation of PDFORRA and was responsible for drawing up that organisation's constitution. In 1991 he was elected PDFORRA's first Deputy General Secretary, succeeding Michael Martin as General Secretary in 1994.

John was a dedicated and resourceful advocate on behalf of his members. Under his leadership PDFORRA succeeded in securing significant improvements in the terms and conditions of enlisted personnel of all Services. He was imaginative in his approach, particularly when faced with a stone wall at the negotiating table. An example of this was his week long "press conference" outside the gates of the Department of Defence.

The Minister for Defence, Mr. Michael Smith, T.D. said "John Lucey had the rare gift of being able to act as a forthright advocate on behalf of his members while at the same time maintaining the friendship and respect of all those with whom he had dealings. John made a major personal contribution to the development of representation in the Defence Forces. He will be remembered as an able representative of his members and will be deeply missed by all who knew him in the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces".

In the mid-1990s, John successfully fought off an attempt to introduce a new system of short-term contracts for recruits which could see them lose their jobs after three years' service. One of his greatest suc-

cesses on behalf of his members, however, was in the institution of a military ombudsman. Over a number of years he was singular in his determination to see an Ombudsman system introduced here. The Bill to establish the Office of Ombudsman for the Defence Forces was recently published and is expected to be enacted later this year.

In Europe, he became a highly respected figure in EUROMIL, the European organisation of military associations, and helped win European Parliament support for the introduction of health and safety regulations for soldiers in peacetime. With his colleagues in EUROMIL John Lucey also championed the institution of the international Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, making the murder of UN personnel on peacekeeping duties punishable by international law as a war crime.

Eamonn Lafferty, President of PDFORRA said, "John Lucey was an outstanding General Secretary of our Association. He was a tireless worker who made a huge commitment to improving the pay and conditions for soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Defence Forces. He will be sadly missed by those who worked and associated with him over the years."

John had always been a very avid hill-walker and had twice climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Over the past several years, John became actively involved in raising funds for those working with underprivileged children in East Africa. During his visits he made contact with missionary teachers and decided with friends to set up a charity, Child Aid, to raise funds for schools in the county. He was in training for a third visit to climb Kilimanjaro to raise funds when he fell to his death on the Magillicuddy Reeks.

Comdt. Brian O'Keeffe, General Secretary of RACO, said, "John was simply exceptional. As a General Secretary he was tireless in his efforts and extremely effective – tough but pragmatic. His many achievements on behalf of his members stand as testimony to his dedication and ability. He was also great company, quick with a smile and had a tremendous sense of humour. He was someone you always looked forward to meeting. He will be greatly missed."

John Lucey is survived by his wife Bernadette, children; John, Pauline, Colm, Brian and Gráinne, brothers; Diarmuid Paul, Oliver and Rory, and sister Nessa.