



ADVANCE VISION

Signal talks to Lieutenant Colonel Paddy McDaniel, Battalion Commander of the Irish Troops in Chad, and Commandant Garry McKeon, Second in Command and leader of the Irish Advance Party to Chad, about their key roles in the Irish deployment.



LIEUTENANT COLONEL PADDY MCDANIEL
Officer Commanding, 97 Infantry Battalion.

1. This mission is a United Nations Chapter 7 peace-enforcing mission in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1778.

How are you executing the UN mandate?

The mission of the Irish/Dutch battalion is to protect civilians in danger, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and free movement of humanitarian personnel through improved security and protect UN and associated personnel. The mission is designed to contribute to the establishment of a safe and secure environment thereby creating conditions for the voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin in the Dar Sila region.

We achieve this firstly by securing a logistic pipeline to allow the unit conduct operations; clearly, because of the geographical location of the mission area and, within that the specific location of our camp coupled with the very poor infrastructure this task is demanding and continuous. We then patrol throughout our Area of Operations (AOO) and through liaison with the Aid Agencies and NGOs we determine the areas most at risk from armed groups, specifically those transiting from Sudan to Chad via the Central African Republic. We routinely patrol to all refugee camps and IDP sites in our area frequently and regularly. We inform the local population of EUFORs purpose and intentions through leaflets and talking to officials and community leaders – and, as with all our activities, we respect the customs, traditions and practices of the local population taking every effort not to offend. Nevertheless, the UN mandate provides us with robust rules of engagement that allow us use lethal force to defend civilians, humanitarian workers and ourselves.

2. What is the current situation with Internally Displaced Persons [IDPs] in your area?

There are currently 170,000 IDPs spread throughout dozens of IDP sites in Chad. With the agricultural season approaching, many IDPs with the presence of EUFOR feel safe enough to return to their village of origin to commence farming. To assist this movement, we have found that some NGOs are distributing agricultural tools to aid in this process and as such have seen some voluntary resettlement commencing in many areas. This will continue to be the trend at least until the end of the rainy season.

There are currently 35,000 refugees in our AOO. Refugee camps remain well administered and supplied by various agencies including UNHCR and INTERSOS and policed by the local police force (CNAR). The Refugee camps in our AOO are currently at maximum capacity and the return of these refugees to their place of origin is not foreseen for the immediate future.

3. Who are the Chadian anti-Deby rebel factions and what threats do they present within the Irish area, and are the Sudanese government-backed militias, the Janjaweed, operating in Eastern Chad?

There are many anti-government militias in Eastern Chad that coalesce and split frequently. By way of example, during the engagement on 14 June last, we identified at least three different rebel factions, and although they do not represent a direct threat to EUFOR, there's no question but that they do destabilise the area and are, and have been, linked to banditry and criminality.

Clashes between Chadian government forces and the rebels lead to heightened threats to refugees, IDPs and humanitarian workers, which in turn also result in a plethora of Unexploded Ordnance (UXOs) that our ordnance disposal [EOD] team must destroy.

As you know, the Janjaweed are a militia backed by the Sudanese government and there have been no reports of them conducting hostile actions in our AOO since 2006. Some local Arab factions, also called Janjaweed, operated up to March 2007 in one area in eastern Chad. There have been recent reports of a recurrence of this activity and we have to be vigilant at all times – so our patrols now regularly visit this region. One of the major difficulties in tracking



Right: Lieutenant Colonel Paddy McDaniel.

these rebel groups is the frequency with which these groups, or factions of these groups, change sides. What is classified as a Chad rebel today, can very often be classified as a Chad ally next week.

4. You have Dutch soldiers under your command and co-located with you – what is their function?

I have under my command 60 Dutch marines who are organised as a mechanised reconnaissance platoon together with their essential support elements which includes vehicle maintenance, communications and information technology as well as medical support. They are well trained and experienced and are equipped with ten tracked Viking APCs. They are affiliated with our Recce Company and have fitted in very well.

5. Camp Ciara is designed to accommodate up to 100 UN personnel; what is their role in the area?

We have only two lonely UN observers with us in Camp Ciara at the moment but this is expected to increase to 100 after the wet season and the camp was designed by us to cater for this number. Their role is to assist in training the local Chadian police force and to prepare for the UN follow on force due in March 2009.

6. No doubt the heat, dust and, shortly, the rainy season present a physical challenge to each individual; but they also influence your operations and tactics. How have you adapted to these environmental factors?

The effect of the heat, 45C –50C at midday, is mitigated by the accommodation which is excellent by overseas standards, and the equipment and clothing available to our troops, and once any individual has acclimatised it is not a major constraint.

The principle effect on operations of the wet season is that of mobility, and hydrological studies of our AOO indicate that when the rains come and the wadis fill road transport will be very difficult if not impossible. Even using our eight-wheel drive and tracked Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) during this period we do not expect to have the capability to project our force as widely in the AOO as we do at present. But the weather effects that may inhibit our mobility will severely inhibit the various rebel factions and as a consequence their activity diminishes significantly in the wet season.

Nevertheless, we will be as active as we can be and in this regard the upcoming deployment of two Mi-8T 'Hip' utility helicopters to Camp Ciara greatly improves our mobility and reach and will allow the conduct of operations throughout the wet season. Their tasks will include insertion and extraction of patrols, medical evacuations, reconnaissance and logistic sustainment.

7. Where did the name Camp Ciara come from?

My eldest daughter is named Ciara. Like all of the families of personnel serving with the 97 Infantry Battalion, my own wife Katrina and our three children have supported me throughout all of the overseas missions that I have undertaken with the Defence Forces to-date. Therefore, I feel that in naming it Camp Ciara, I am paying tribute not only to my own family, but also to all family members who are supporting loved ones serving with the 97 Infantry Battalion in Chad and in the many missions in which members of the Defence Forces are serving in throughout the world at this present time.

Family support at home is fundamental to the success of the mission abroad as it enables us all to remain resolutely focused on the challenging job at hand while we are serving abroad. So, to the family members of personnel serving with the 97 Infantry Battalion, I wish to extend my appreciation and gratitude to you for supporting your husband, wife, son or daughter who is serving with me in Chad and we are looking forward to meeting you all in Dublin airport at the end of September.

Comdt Garry Mc Keon and the Irish Advance Party in Camp Ciara.



COMMANDANT GARRY MCKEON
Deputy Commanding Officer,
97 Infantry Battalion.

The Second in Command [2 i/c] of the Irish Battalion in Chad and commander of the Irish Advance Party to Chad with specific responsibility for building the Irish Camp, Camp Ciara.

Camp Ciara is now a secure base, similar almost to a small village with a water supply, fuel farm, generator power, a kitchen, gym, living and office accommodation for over 400 people. How long did its construction take & how many members of the DF were involved?

The camp is and will continue to be under construction for some time. My primary focus and responsibility as commander of the Advance Party was to ensure that the camp would be able to cater for the life support of over 400 personnel. The camp was designed to cater for this number and our task was to prepare the facilities to accommodate this number and to provide the essential services like arranging the water supply and purification, security, shelter, working and living accommodation, dining and catering, ablutions, etc, that would adequately cater for the conduct of operations.

The numbers employed were 147 in total. This was broken down into two categories; an initial 30 primarily made up of the principle section heads, the engineer officer, ordnance officer and other specialist personnel. Their task was to prepare a site layout and effectively plumb the site so that when the remainder of the Advance Party arrived work could commence immediately.

“Family support at home is fundamental to the success of the mission abroad as it enables us all to remain resolutely focused on the challenging job at hand while we are serving abroad.”

What was your daily routine during the construction phase?

The camp routine was initially based out of the Forward Operating Base [FOB] where the Army Ranger Wing [ARW] was located. The daily routine began with a 4.30am start for breakfast with work commencing at 5.30 continuing up to midday when we broke for lunch. Work would never recommence until after 3 in the afternoon due to temperatures rising to over 50 degrees Celsius and would go on until 6 or 7, followed by dinner and bed by 9pm for all. So it was important for a number of obvious reasons that the work was planned and scheduled in a pragmatic and efficient manner that was achievable, while at the same time reasonable and bearable on the people doing the work. But this is not the first time that the Irish Defence Forces have had to establish operating bases from scratch in Africa, so we knew what to do and how to do it.

What were the biggest challenges in building and equipping the camp?

There were a number of significant challenges. Certainly, operating under such extremes of heat in a harsh environment required careful management. We had to ensure that personal administration was very disciplined – for example, that everybody had their head covered while exposed to the sun and that we all consumed at least 8 litres of water each day. We were constantly monitoring individuals for sunstroke, heat exhaustion and dehydration and rotating work parties and resting people to ensure that we avoided these problems.



In addition, even though we had most of the containers we requested and needed to commence the camp build there were areas where we required stores and equipments that were en route. Knowing when these containers would arrive would prove to be a guessing game largely because of the immense size of the country, vehicles breaking down or unforeseen delays. One of the difficulties was that while our containers were sequenced in supply convoys in a particular order from the port in the Cameroon, the contractor was unable to deliver them to us in Goz Beida in the same sequence. These difficulties were compounded by occasionally having to try to source and purchase certain materials such as cement, timber or piping in this part of Chad – there is no Woodies to go to! But we overcame all of these problems and improvised in order to meet our schedules and deadlines which we did.

The Army Ranger Wing deployed to the mission area ahead of your advance party; what assistance were they to the Irish Advance Party?

The ARW were not required to find a suitable site for the Irish Camp; officers from the Force Headquarters [FHQ] did this, along with representatives from the Irish Defence Forces, including our Battalion Commander Lt Col Paddy McDaniel, the engineer officer and logistics officer. The ARW were of enormous benefit to our deployment, particularly when we arrived, as they were able to provide us with essential life support, such as food, water, and ablutions. Of course, they provided the vital role of security that would otherwise have necessitated us diverting valuable human resources while trying to build a camp to meet exacting standards and timelines. They also provided valuable insights into the operational situation both generally and locally within the Irish area of responsibility. They were able to advise on the local political situation, as well as what the UN field service and UNHCR were doing. The deployment of the ARW greatly enhanced our ability to speedily erect and construct camp Ciara.

A supply flight to the EUFOR mission in Chad.

“One of the difficulties was that while our containers were sequenced in supply convoys in a particular order from the port in the Cameroon, the contractor was unable to deliver them to us in Goz Beida in the same sequence”



Sourcing water was obviously very important to the camp – how was this achieved and what volume of water does each individual require?

A third party contractor sourced the water by digging wells in the environs of Goz Beida and the contract required that these wells had to be sustainable year round. This supply is now able to feed 2.3 cubic meters of water per hour on a 24-hour basis. Nevertheless, while we have access to a good supply of water we are very cognisant of using water wisely and so we limit showers and advise everybody to be constantly vigilant. We must be conscious of the long term needs of the local community and for that reason, and to keep our 'carbon' footprint at a minimum, we recycle up to 70% of water in the camp through a complicated network of recycling processes and, although the recycled water could be consumed for drinking as a result of the state of the art Burrow purification system that we have, we are continuing to drink bottled water for the present. I think that in total we are consuming fewer than 70 litres of water per day per individual. But this is not a limit – it's a result of good management all round.

What types of creature comforts have been incorporated into the camp?

Creature comforts are minimal at present, but improving every day. We have access to exercising along the runway, which gives people a distance of 500m to either walk or run. We also have a gym to exercise in and of course the tents are now all air-conditioned. This week we laid out a soccer pitch and a volleyball court, so we are always trying to improve the facilities available and are conscious of the need for variety. But maintaining contact with family at home is very important for our soldiers and their families and friends at home. We do all that we can in this regard and we have contact with home by a number of means such as telephone and the internet and we can also either phone or text on the local mobile cellnet.

Below: Comdt Rory McCann with COS, Lt Gen Dermot Earley, & Minister for Defence, Willie O'Dea TD at Camp Ciara.



Career Resumés

Lieutenant Colonel Paddy McDaniel, Officer Commanding, 97 Infantry Battalion.

Paddy McDaniel was born in Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan, but he now lives in Teesan, Sligo. He is married to Katrina and has three children, Ciara, Airt and Katie. He served in the 28 Infantry Battalion in the early part of his career, before moving to the Command and Staff School in the Military College in June 2003. He returned to the 28 Infantry Battalion in November 2005 as Officer Commanding, where he remained until taking command of the 97 Infantry Battalion. Lt Col McDaniel has extensive overseas experience: he served as a Staff Officer in Joint Land Operation Command Joint Logistics Operations Centre. Planning, Force HQ, UNMIL in Liberia from November 2005 to June 2006; as Officer Commanding, Operations Group, UNMEE in Ethiopia and Eritrea from December 2002 to June 2003; as an Observer in MINURSO in Western Sahara from September 1997 to February 1998; as Second in Command, C Company, 67 Infantry Battalion, UNIFIL in Lebanon; and as Military Police Officer, UNIFIL from October 1983 to May 1984. He is a former member of RACO's National Executive and a Trustee of the Association.

Commandant Garry McKeon, Deputy Commanding Officer, 97 Infantry Battalion.

Garry McKeon was born in Trim, Co Meath, but he is now living in Salthill, Co Galway. He spent the early part of his career in the 1 Infantry Battalion, Galway, in a variety of appointments, but more recently he has been a Staff Officer in Human Resource Management Section, 4 Western Brigade Headquarters, Athlone. Comdt McKeon served in Afghanistan with NATO-led ISAF from July 2005 to January 2006; as the Welfare Officer with the 90 Infantry Battalion, UNMIL in Liberia from November 2003 to May 2004; and as a Weapons Platoon Commander with the 89 Infantry Battalion, UNIFIL in Lebanon from April 2001 to October 01.