

# 2002 RACO Annual Delegate Conference



*Members of the RACO National Executive and professional staff at a reception held by Tralee Lord Mayor Johnny Wall. Also featured is Comdt Ger O'Connor and Capt Damien Murphy of Tralee Barracks.*

**T**he 13th annual RACO delegate conference was held on November 12th and 13th last, in the Brandon Hotel in Tralee. The main issues highlighted in the keynote speeches of the conference included the repercussions of the Benchmarking Report, the involvement of RACO in the negotiation of national pay agreements, the overseas role of Irish Defence Forces and of course the cancellation of the medium-lift helicopter contract. In addition to the formal aspects, there was also an evening banquet on the 12th November.

## Speeches

The conference opened on the afternoon of November 12th, with the address to conference by RACO general secretary Comdt Brian O'Keefe. Comdt O'Keefe expressed general approval of the PSBB report by the association. He also highlighted RACO's disappointment with certain aspects of the

report, notably the relatively low awards for junior line officers. He took time to express his thanks to those officers involved in the evaluation process: "The bottom line is that we could make all the submissions we liked but if the job evaluations did not reflect and verify what we were saying about the officer's job, we could not and would not have got the generally positive result we did." On the subject of national pay talks, Comdt O'Keefe criticised the fact that the Defence Forces were excluded from this process. "Members of the Defence Forces are citizens and are entitled to equal status with the other social partners. RACO must have representation at national level when the National Agreements are being decided. This is a basic right."

The repercussions of The Challenge of a Workplace Report, the fallout of the report by Dr Eileen Doyle on discrimination and harassment in the Defence Forces was also highlighted in Comdt O'Keefe's speech, as was the swift response of the military



*Minister Michael Smith addresses the conference.*



RACO General Secretary Brian O'Keefe and Association President Paul Allen.

authorities. "The all important initial response by the military authorities was firm, it demonstrated an acceptance of the findings and did not seek to justify an unaccept-

able situation. It made it clear that bullying, discrimination and harassment are unacceptable in the forces and will not be tolerated." Comdt O'Keefe also spoke of a serious prob-

**Members of the Defence Forces are citizens and are entitled to equal status with the other social partners. RACO must have representation at national level.**



RACO President Paul Allen at the banquet presentation to Comdt Tom Cox.

lem facing junior officers, the deplorable living quarters that they were being allocated. "At last year's ADC we asked the Chief of Staff to urgently address the matter. There has been some progress, in the DFTC and Cathal Brugha Barracks, but in a number of barracks the junior officers' quarters remain far below the minimum acceptable standards." He added that an endemic part of the problem was the allocation of the better accommodation to officers of senior rank, even if those officers are commuting and only require accommodation a few nights per week. "This is totally unacceptable. The accommodation in messes should not be allocated on the basis of rank."

The current state of the medical services was also highlighted by the RACO general secretary, as was the tendency of the Department of Defence to 'cherry-pick' the recommendations in the the Dunbar Report on the Defence Forces medical services. One of the major topics, which figured in all speeches, was the development of the Human Resource project known as the IPMS (Integrated Personnel Management System), a long awaited development. "The IPMS is of fundamental importance to the development of the forces. It has the potential to represent a shared strategic vision and human-resources road-map for the future. But it also has the potential to be extremely divisive and an industrial relations battlefield."

### **The Global Role For Irish Defence**

The address by the Deputy Chief of Staff, Maj Gen Jim Sreenan, was primarily concerned with the global role of the Irish Defence Forces in a world irrevocably changed since September 11th. "We are now in a situation where the worlds only super-power is engaged in a war against no visible enemy, a war with no battlefields." The challenges facing Irish troops in the Middle East, where the situation has deteriorated rapidly, as part of UNTSO or UNSCOM missions have become increasingly hazardous. "The fact that troops may wear the blue helmet of the UN is sadly no guarantee of safety." He went on to say that demand on the Irish military to provide troops for overseas missions is huge, but that the standard of personnel serving overseas and the quality of the job they are doing remains of an exceptionally high standard. "Our personnel are deployed in volatile and dangerous places where the conduct and prestige of our officer's are key to successful missions." On the

subject of the Doyle report, Maj Gen Jim Sreenan said that proper HR management is vital for ensuring that our personnel commit themselves to the Defence Forces. "In order for them to successfully fulfill their roles, they must be well served by their officers. In a hierarchical organisation, where the mission is paramount, it must be remembered that military structure does not give a carte blanche to those in authority to abuse their power."

Following a brief adjournment, Association President Paul Allen addressed the Minister for Defence Michael Smith, reiterating earlier comments made by Comdt O'Keefe regarding the benchmarking awards for lieutenants and captains. "The Captain rank is the workhorse of the Defence Forces and accordingly expectations were greater."



*Comdt Ollie Barbour, Comdt Kevin Byrne, Lieut Col Sean O'Meara and Lieut Cdr Martin Brett.*



*Lieut Kevin O'Riordan, Lieut Louise Conlon and Lieut Shane Rockett.*



**President Paul Allen also paid tribute to Cdr Gerry O'Flynn and the crew of the LE Niamh on their completion of the successful trade mission to Asia.**



He also questioned the imbalance between the patience of the public and private sector when it came to reaping the rewards of a successful economy. "The public service, like all other sections of the workforce, accepted constraints when times were bad. This contributed in a major way to the economic miracle of recent years." He went on to say; "IBEC now wants a pay freeze with annual pay rises in line with the EU average of 2-3 per cent. Acceptance of these proposals would in real terms represent a pay cut of over 2 per cent. Let us see IBEC control their members greed before preaching to the public sector. We waited for the Benchmarking body's report, it is now time for payment. The employers have had their prosperity, it is now time for fairness. We have met our obligations, our employer must



*Lieut Col Peter O'Grady / DFTC Curragh and Comdt Pat Moore / DFTC Curragh.*

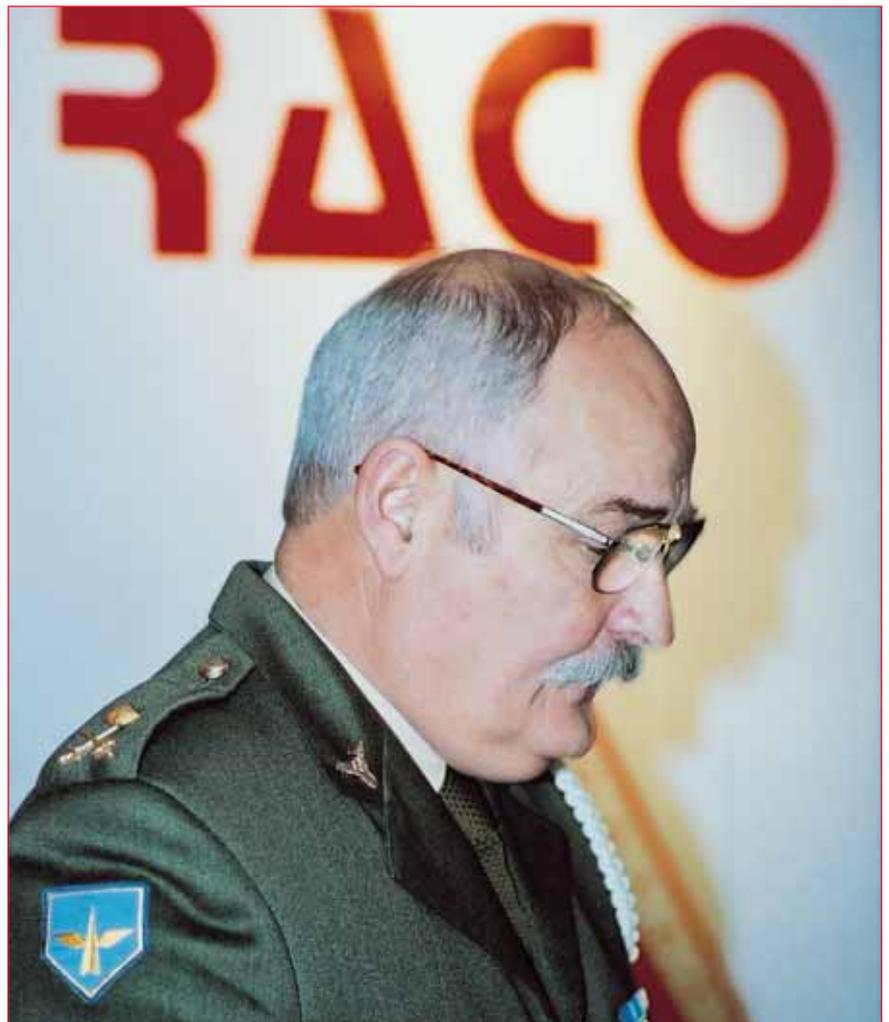


*RACO delegates at the 13th ADC in Tralee.*

now meet theirs. We want our just rewards.” President Paul Allen also paid tribute to Cdr Gerry O’Flynn and the crew of the LE Niamh on their completion of the successful trade mission to Asia and their resupply of Irish troops in Eritrea. “This is an example of how the Defence Forces can contribute to the economic well being of the state. The use of a state ship for this mission was an



*Lieut Sharon McManus.*



*RACO President Paul Allen addresses the conference.*



Lieut Col George Kerton and Capt Paul Keeney, Naval Service.

pilot service incentive scheme and the possibility of introducing a similar scheme in other disciplines within the Defence Forces. However, he criticised the anomaly which prohibited wives or children accompanying their partners on overseas missions in the Middle East from being able to submit their vote in national elections by post. The Minister vowed to tackle this problem in his return speech.



Comdt Kieran Butler.

inspired decision and I would like to congratulate the Minister on his vision in promoting this matter." The RACO president did however criticise the department over their handling of the medium lift helicopter competition: "Minister, the Defence Forces depend on you to fight our corner at

the Cabinet table to ensure that the promises made last year continue to be honoured and that the remaining steps necessary on the path to a world-class military organisation are not interrupted." He also mentioned welcome developments such as the MA in defence studies at NUI Maynooth, the new



Capt Graham Heaslip, Lieut Col Mick Daly and Lieut Joe Gleeson.



*Tralee Lord Mayor Johnny Wall in conversation with RACO President Paul Allen.*

The Minister's speech began by listing the developments within Irish defence that represented the cornerstones of his second term with the defence portfolio. In addressing the situation surrounding the medium-lift helicopter project, the Minister described the decision he had to take as 'painful.' "The decision was an extremely difficult one for me to take as I am committed to the long term future of the Air Corps in a SAR role. I was conscious of the huge effort that had been put into the procurement process by Air Corps personnel and of the acute disappointment that they would feel when the decision was announced." He said that the leasing of the Sikorsky 61 represented his commitment to the future of the Air Corps in a SAR role. He added that the current priority for the Irish Air Corps is the purchase of fixed wing training aircraft. He added that the policy of continuous recruitment would be maintained and that the successful recruitment advertising campaign would be continued. On the subject of bullying or harassment within the Defence Forces he reiterated that such conduct has absolutely no place in a modern military force but said that he was impressed by the speed to which recommendations made in the Doyle report had been acted upon. He spoke also on the overseas roles of the Defence Forces, reinforcing the government's adherence to neutrality and to their responsibilities within the UN. "We see no conflict at all between

this position and our participation in the European Security and Defence Policy."

Following the speeches the first day of the conference concluded with a financial report followed by motions from the floor. That night saw a banquet with key guests including the Minister for Defence, local politicians and dignitaries, the US military attaché and representatives from other public

service representative associations and unions. The dinner was followed by a presentation to Comdt Tom Cox, who was leaving the military after many years distinguished service. Wednesday's agenda dealt with the debate and voting on the 63 motions to conference and the election of the standing orders committee. The conference officially concluded at lunchtime.



*Comdt Tom Cox, Maj Gen Jim Sreenan and Comdt Mick McCarthy.*