

Commander Tom Tuohy

The ongoing work at the National Maritime College of Ireland at Ringaskiddy represents without a doubt one of the most exciting and progressive educational developments in many years. SIGNAL reports.

When completed, this mammoth project will ensure that the Irish Naval Service has a state-of-the-art training facility at its disposal. The project is also a fine example of the positive results of a public private partnership, in this case the Naval Service worked alongside Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) and FOCUS Education (NMCI) Ltd.

Just from looking at the plans of the new Maritime College at Ringaskiddy, it is apparent that it is going to be something truly special. Custom built for marine education and training, it is a benchmark of education architecture that will take some equaling. The college will boast the most modern training facilities available. These will include a fully equipped survival training pool, working engine room, jetty and dedicated workshops. The simulator facilities are most impressive. These include simulation of ships bridges, engine room, radio communications, liquid cargo handling and damage control. The 360-degree and 270 degree 'full mission bridge simulators' will provide a realistic ship's

bridge environment for training students. The Maritime College when completed will consist of three connected blocks. One will be the workshop area, which will include the training pool, workshops and engine room. The central block will include classrooms, laboratories, the simulation facilities and staff offices. The third block will house the library, the canteen, IT facilities and the management and administrative offices. Outdoors will be the damage control and firefighting training facilities as well as a jetty and slipway for launching and landing boats.

Commander Tom Tuohy of the Irish Naval Service says that the new college will provide a quantum leap in terms of training and facilities. "It's really going to be invaluable, in terms of space, facilities and the sheer convenience of having our own dedicated training environment."

The Background

"About 23% of the Irish Naval Service is involved in training at any one time. There is a turnover of personnel and a high degree of upskilling is required at all times. At the



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moment the training is done here at the Naval Base at Haulbowline, which is not really suitable for a variety of reasons. The Naval Base here was never designed for or functions solely as a naval school. The Naval College as it exists at the moment is scattered throughout the Base utilizing old married quarters, portakabins, etc in order to meet its training requirements. It's just not at all suitable for modern training.

"The genesis of this project goes back to the mid-eighties when the Naval Service vacated nearby Spike Island, which housed the Naval School, as the Department of Justice required it for a prison. The Naval School was then moved back to Haulbowline with a training element located at Murphy Barracks in Ballincollig. Of course, the main problem with Murphy Barracks in terms of naval training is that there is no access to the sea. This meant that we could only conduct some courses there and had to come back to the Naval Base to carry out significant parts of training. The sheer logistics of it was difficult. Eventually all training was centralized in Haulbowline." In 1993, a 10- acre site was aquired following a deal between the Department of Finance and the Department of Defence. Plans were submitted for the development of a Naval School on the Ringaskiddy site, adjacent to Haulbowline Island, but funding did not materialise. "For some years the project lay dormant, but the development of a new

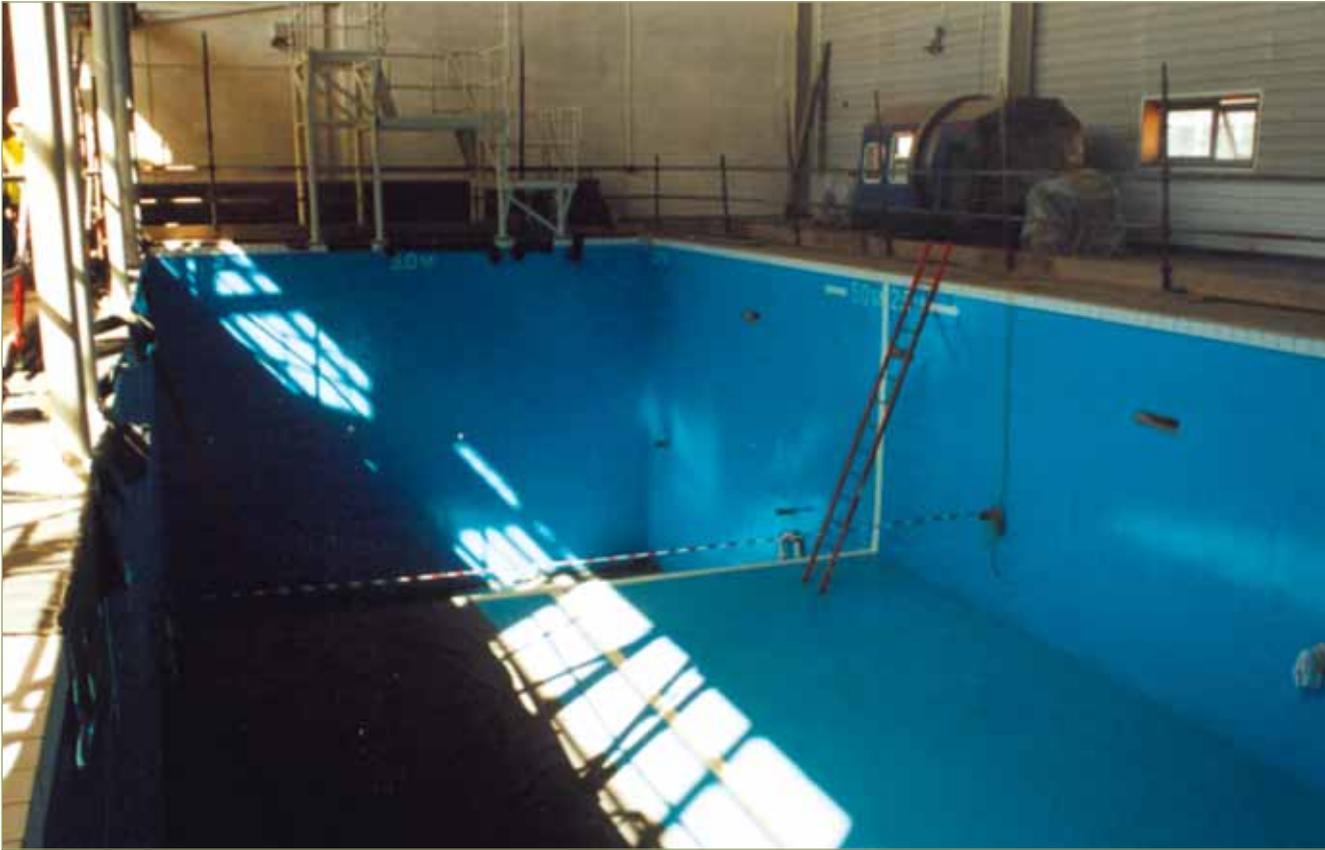
Custom built for marine education and training, it is a benchmark of education architecture that will take some equalling.



The Engine Rooms At NMCI under construction.

training facility remained a key naval service strategic objective," according to Cdr Tuohy.

One of the first happenings that instigated change within the project occurred in 1995 when the International Maritime Organisation overhauled their previous regulations which relate to the Standard of Training and Certification on Seafarers (STCW). "One of the key aspects of this change was the fact that there would be a revalidation of these certificates every five years." One of the points of the new regulations was the recognition of simulation as a vital element in training, both as an educational and assessment tool. "This regulation posed a dilemma to the Naval Service and to our colleagues in the Nautical Studies Department of Cork Institute of Technology, as both were faced with substantial upgrade of training facilities in order to meet STCW 95 requirements." The concept of fusing the training requirements of both organisations, the Naval Service and CIT, made sense when you consider that apart from the military training, both the Navy and the merchant navy have very similar training requirements. The next step in this project saw a joint submission made to the Government task force on seafarer training and employment, which was established in 1997. The main recommendation was that a Maritime College should be established at Ringaskiddy to meet the requirements of a changing world, in regard to the new STCW stipulations. But the actual chance of the college becoming a physical entity was still



The impressive dive pool under construction at the National Maritime College.

not guaranteed, according to Cdr Tuohy. "We still needed approval from government for the project to go any further. It was a good sign when in 1999, inter-departmental Expert Working Group under the Department of the Marine was established to examine the viability of the proposed Maritime College to meet STCW 95 training and education requirements. "This was a crucial part of the whole process obviously," remembers Cdr Tuohy. "The inter-departmental group found that the establishment of a National Maritime College to meet the non military training requirements of the Naval Service and the training requirements of the Nautical Studies Department of CIT was a positive and viable proposition. Significantly, and it's another interesting aspect to the college, the group also recommended that the college should be developed under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. It must be acknowledged that both the Military Authorities and the Department of



Michael Delaney, Head of Development CIT.

Defence were supportive of the project at this crucial stage. Funding for the new Maritime College was to be made available from the Department of Education and Science which then took over sponsorship of the project from the Department of the Marine.

When SIGNAL visited the site of the Maritime College, we found a construction operation in full swing. "It's always instructive to come out to the site," says Michael Delaney, Head of Development at CIT, "whenever we visit we always notice developments on some significant aspect of the college. It's progressing at a very impressive rate and we're well on target for our October 2004 completion date." The college is large, in scope, scale and ambition. The 14,000 square metre building, at a cost of €52 million is architecturally and aesthetically very appealing. It is designed as three, 2-3 storey linear blocks with a link element incorporating an entrance foyer and multi-

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Ship fire training simulator and DRU.

functional sports hall and gym. The three main blocks are aligned on a north-south axis on the site and incorporate classrooms, laboratories and workshops. Examining the extensive and impressive plans of the college on display at Haulbowline Naval Base, Commander Tuohy explains the scope of the new college. "In all, the Maritime College will have 19 classrooms, with a capacity ranging from 20 to 50 persons. The student capacity at the college will be approximately 750, with a staff of 60, drawn jointly from the Naval Service and CIT. One of the most impressive elements of the new facility must surely be the simulation

suite, one of the training requirements that established the need for the college." Although still in the construction phase at the time of writing, the simulation facilities are at the cutting edge of the latest technology. Cdr Tom Tuohy and Michael Delaney are both very proud of the college's facilities in this respect. "When completed, this simulation suite will be one of the best in Europe," explains Cdr Tuohy. "It will be very comprehensive and the technology will be provided by Kongsberg Maritime, a Norwegian company leading the field in the provision of simulators. The Full Mission Bridge Simulators (FMBS), one with 360-degree visuals, the second with 270-degree visuals, will replicate both Naval and Merchant ships. To make the simulation

experience as relevant as possible for our students we have also completed the digital mapping of large parts of the Irish coast. This will enable students to conduct a coastal passage, navigate a ship into Cork harbour and then for example berth the ship at the Naval Base." Three Auxiliary Bridge Simulators (ABS) and 12 other simulator suites are to be used in the

college for training in Search and Rescue coordination, Vessel Traffic Systems and fleetwork. "In addition to these navigation simulators there will also be a full Engine Room Simulators, damage control/cargo

handling simulators, and GMDSS (Radio) simulators."

One of the most striking aspects of the new Maritime College is the new 20m state of the art survival pool, which, although still in the construction phase, is highly impressive. "The pool depth will range from 5 metres to 2.5 metres and will be used for training personnel in sea survival techniques and life-raft drills." The Naval Diving section will also use the pool for basic diver training. The pool itself is also complemented by a number of additional features, both visual and audio, designed to replicate a range of marine conditions, including storms. This is to ensure that the survival training environment is as authentic as possible." Also HUET (Helo. Underwater

Escape Training) training can be conducted in this pool.

In addition to world-class simulation facilities, attention has been dedicated to ensuring that Engineering Training Facilities are first class and comprehensive. "In the college we will have a fully-fitted engine room with main engines generators, pumps in addition to mechanical engineering workshops, welding workshops and heavy electrical workshops. These facilities are designed to ensure that apprentices, technicians, trainee officers and officers receive the best available training." Cdr Tuohy and Michael Delaney emphasise that the NMCI will be promoted on the international stage with a number of links with international institutions already established.

The completion and the implementation of the National Maritime College represents a massive leap forward in terms of training for the naval service and indeed the Defence forces as an organisation. The fact that it is also an outstanding example of a successful Public Private Partnership process is an added bonus. "It is a massive boost to the organisation," reiterates Cdr Tuohy. "This facility will give us the capability to adequately fulfill our training requirements within the optimum environment. The Maritime College is a major step forward in projecting Ireland's standing as a maritime nation, and as a centre of excellence in the provision of training for seafarers."

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How The Maritime College Will Function

To run the college, tenders from development and facilities management consortia were invited. FOCUS Education, collaboration between Bovis Lend-Lease and Halifax-Bank of Scotland, were the eventual successful bidders. FOCUS' role is to build, fit out, maintain and operate the college, guaranteeing availability for designated times to the Naval Service and CIT. Outside of the specified availability hours the facilities may be marketed to third parties. A percentage of these additional earnings will accrue to INS/CIT to be set against ongoing costs. These costs are made up of a unitary payment (mortgage) and operating costs (heat, light etc). After 25 years, the college will revert to state ownership.