



Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and Minister of State Tom Kitt with Lt Col Gilleran and the Military Police Detachment.

MILITARY POLICE

At Government Buildings

Out of sight and out of mind? There is a fully-active unit on Irish soil, with a designated area of operations, that works day-in, day-out, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and as Officer Commanding (OC) Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Tony Gilleran says: "There are elements within the Defence Forces itself who aren't aware of our role in this location." Lt Col Gilleran has been with the unit for seven years as its Commanding Officer and he retired soon after this interview bringing to an end over 36 years of service with the Defence Forces.

There has always been a Military Police (MP) presence at Government Buildings and the surrounding complex. Its presence has been discussed and evaluated throughout the history of the State. The earliest record is from 1925 when Mr

Tom Kitt, Minister of State, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and Dermot McCarthy, Secretary General to the Government, make a presentation to Lt Col Tony Gilleran.

Darrell Figgis TD asked the house if the President could state "when it is proposed to remove the armed military guards at present on duty at the Oireachtas buildings". He was informed that it was "not yet considered advisable." In 1929 a committee was formed which comprised representatives from the Department of the President, Department of Defence, Department of Finance and the Office of Public Works. Its brief was to advise the Minister for Finance "upon all matters

relating to the safeguarding against trespass, violence, fire or other risks to government buildings." The Military Police presence in Government Buildings continued without a properly defined capacity until 1964 when a board of officers was convened by the General Officer Commanding the Eastern Command to consider the security problem at the government buildings complex. Their report was forwarded to the Adjutant General of the Defence Forces. A recommendation was





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made by the deputy Adjutant General that a new establishment consisting of three field officers and thirty MP NCO's be provided for the security of this complex. This was copperfastened by the Chief of Staff in 1966 when he directed that security at the complex be based on a MP element. In 1974 a letter to the Department of Defence from the Clerk of the Dail stated that: "it was considered that the security of Leinster House would be best served by the presence of a full-time military unit." The Minister for Defence outlined the security concerns at the complex, which the military could address, in a memorandum to the Dail in 1974 and later that year a security review of the complex was carried out following discussion by the Inter-Departmental Group on National Security. The result of this was a recommendation that armed military personnel should be based in Government buildings. However, it was stated that "the primary responsibility for security within the complex would remain with An Garda Síochána." Proposals for the setting up of the Military Police unit were approved by Government in 1976 and on May 18th the Chief of Staff signed a letter of instruction which authorised the formation of the First Garrison Military Police Company.

The Military Police presence in Government Buildings is one of the longest serving deployments since the establishment of the Defence Forces. Prior to a dedicated Military Police unit, the Military Police element was supplemented with infantry from the Eastern Command, Dublin area. The Fire Picket, who were part of the Eastern Command Training Depot used to be located in Leinster House and upon the formation of the First Garrison Military Police unit, the Fire Picket was moved from Leinster House to Government Buildings. On November 1st 1998 the First Garrison MP unit was disbanded and the unit became a Detachment of the 2nd Eastern Brigade Military Police Company. However, an independent garrison Military Police unit dedicated to Government Buildings will be re-established shortly as an establishment has been recommended by the military authorities and is currently awaiting Ministerial approval.

Roles

The military unit stationed at Government buildings comprises two of components, a Military Police element and a Fire Picket element. The units' area of operations is within the State Group of Buildings on Merrion Street. This surprisingly large area is

comprised of (i) the Houses of the Oireachtas (the Dail and Senate), Leinster House 2000 and the Committee Rooms – these are collectively known as Leinster House; (ii) Government Buildings containing the Department of An Taoiseach, the Department of Finance, the Office of the Attorney General and Ministerial offices; (iii) the Department of Agriculture; (iv) the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions; (v) the National Arts and Antiquities Museum and the Natural Museum; (vi) the National Library and (vii) the National Art Gallery.

"Like all military units we have our mission. Taking note of the fact that the primary responsibility for security in the State Group of Buildings complex is with the Garda Síochána, our mission is to protect Government Buildings and Leinster House and to provide general security and a Fire Picket in conjunction with the Garda Síochána and the Dail Ushers."

Lt Col Gilleran explains: "the armed Military Police element carries out its mission by providing manned static posts while the various entrances to the complex are open, providing mobile patrols over a 24 hour period, monitoring CCTV cameras, providing quick response to alarm activations and providing a backup to the



Gardai. Furthermore, when Heads of States, or other such dignitaries, visit Government Buildings we provide a ceremonial element at the main entrance. The Fire Picket element's duties consist of the monitoring of the various fire alarm panels, providing mobile patrols, the daily inspection of fire fighting and rescue equipment, providing a quick response in the case of an activation of a fire alarm or in the case of an actual fire. Furthermore members of the Fire Picket assist all the various departments within the complex when they carry out their fire and evacuation plans and rehearsals. They also conduct lift-rescue when required – in which instance they are assisted in this action by the Military Police element." For obvious reasons the military has direct communication with Tara Street fire brigade and unhindered access to every office and area within the State Group of Buildings. "This, in itself, places great responsibility on the military and accordingly we try to maintain a professionally discreet profile."

Powers & Challenges

SIGNAL poses the question as to how busy the unit is. Lt Col Gilleran replies that simply carrying out its daily missions and

tasks keeps the unit very busy. "Our duties and our routines keep our personnel very active. In addition, I have to have a certain number of people available to respond to a security or fire emergency. The role of the unit is essentially an aid to the civil power (ATCP) function, meaning that the primary role is to provide support to the Gardai. For example, if there is a security breach within the perimeter of our area of responsibility we apprehend the perpetrators and hand them over to the Gardai."

There is a realisation and an acceptance that the MP protects buildings of the highest significance; the security of which, were it compromised, could represent a threat to the State. "Having a dedicated presence here is very important. Like any other military duty, it is preferable to have personnel who are familiar with the area which they patrol and for which they are responsible and that's why we need personnel with the requisite expertise in a unit dedicated to this purpose. I personally believe that it is of utmost importance to re-establish the unit in the configuration as recommended to the Minister for Defence by the military authorities."

This is an area where you can't relax according to Lt Col Gilleran. "Vigilance is so important because it is our function to ensure that assessed risks or potential problems do not materialise that could present a danger or pose an embarrassment either to the Defence Forces or to the State."

Moving On

As Lt Col Gilleran prepares to retire, he freely admits that he will miss the Defence Forces. "Meeting former colleagues is something I always enjoy. And so first and foremost I will of course miss the people I've worked with and the friends I've made; that's where my fondest memories come from. There's a strong bond between military people even when they are retired from the Forces and I find that former colleagues are always keen to keep in touch with the organisation and the people in it."

He has also been continuously involved with RACO from the Association's earliest days in 1991, taking on the role of Returning Officer for all RACO elections. "I'm of the strong opinion that all officers should become active members within RACO. It's their association and it's there for their own good. RACO itself will be improved by more active involvement of its membership. A comfort zone is easy to fall into and we must continue to give RACO our full support." He was particularly grateful for the presentation made to him at the RACO Annual Banquet late last year.

With 36 years service in the Defence Forces behind him, commissioned in 1970, Lt Col Gilleran has seen many postings within the organisation, including some very interesting overseas deployments. His first posting was with the 2nd Infantry Battalion in Cathal Brugha Barracks in Rathmines with regular periods in Dundalk employed on border operations: "Busy times, good times for a younger officer." Most of his career was spent in a variety of command and staff postings in the Dublin area.

He has always been passionate about a variety of sports both within the Defence Forces and outside it too. During his playing days he played Gaelic, soccer and basketball competitively. However, Gaelic football has been his lifelong passion and he has continuously been involved in some capacity at local level. He is still a keen golfer, playing off a "safe" 11 handicap and for the last few years he has been chairperson of the Defence Forces Golf committee.

Lieutenant Colonel Tony Gilleran

Tony Gilleran started his cadetship in October 1968, graduating as 2nd Lieutenant in 1970. His first posting was with the Second Infantry Battalion in Cathal Brugha Barracks. In 1972 he was promoted to Lieutenant. His first overseas posting was in 1979 when he served as Second in Command, HQ Company, 46th Infantry Battalion with UNIFIL in the Lebanon. He served with UNIFIL again in 1990. Tony was promoted to Captain in 1976 while serving as adjutant of the 2nd Infantry Battalion. He was promoted to Comdt in 1983 and in 1989 he was posted to one of his most interesting duties, in Afghanistan with UNGOMAP (UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan & Pakistan). He was stationed primarily around the Afghan capital Kabul. This was, even by the standards of recent Afghan history, an especially turbulent, chaotic and dangerous time. The Soviets had just withdrawn and the country was being plunged into yet another nightmare as it was carved up into various fiefdoms by ruthless warlords. Kabul was frequently subjected to rocket attacks and outside the cities, tribal gun law was the only authority. "The failure of the Afghans to agree on their own future after the Soviet withdrawal ultimately led to the rise of the Taliban and the following events which are still being played out. He spent ten months in the country in a Military Police capacity. He has served at home with the military police since 1984 and his current posting at Government Buildings commenced in 1997.