**Media Release – 07.00pm, Sunday 31 January 2023**

**Óglaigh na hÉireann Year in Review Statement 2023**

End of year summary of Defence Forces domestic, training and international activities throughout 2023. To access our ‘Best of Albums’ for the Army, Naval Service, Air Corps and Overseas in 2023, please follow the links to our Flickr account at the end of our statement.

**Domestic Operations 2023**

**Land Operations 2023**

The Defence Forces conducted a wide range of Defence & Security Operations during 2023. Our deployments included Aid to Civil Power (ATCP) and Aid to the Civil Authority (ATCA) operations, supporting An Garda Síochána, Local Authorities and other key agencies of the States. Examples of these activities are:

The Army conducted over 101 Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) Operations in support of An Garda Síochána involving Explosive & Ordnance Disposal (Bomb Squad) call outs, Prisoner Escorts, Explosive Escorts, Cash Escorts, Specialist Search Operations and VIP visits including the visit of US President Joe Biden in April.

In addition, members of the Defence Forces continued to carry out a 365 day armed guard at Ireland’s only maximum-security prison, Portlaoise Prison, as well as the Central Bank, Irish Industrial Explosives and a Military Police Detachment at Government Buildings.

Stationed across the country, our military personnel were both on standby and deployed throughout the year to assist civil authorities (ATCA) during multiple operations, utilising the skills of our highly trained personnel, specialist search equipment and off road vehicles for numerous different tasks including firefighting, flood relief and missing person searches. Significant activities in this area included, in April, assistance to the Department of Foreign Affairs Emergency Civil Assistance Team to assist Irish citizens, residents and visa holders being evacuated from Sudan amid an evolving situation in the country. In October we conducted flood relief operations in Cork.

**Maritime Operations 2023**

The Naval Service conducted one hundred four (104) fisheries boarding’s resulting in five (5) detentions. The Naval Service patrols 220 million maritime acres of sea (over twelve times the land mass of Ireland) representing 15% of Europe’s fisheries. Fishing vessels from Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, and Belgium were boarded and inspected in 2023.

The Naval Service Dive Section (NSDS) was deployed on fourteen (14) occasions. Operations included Joint Task Force Operations, Quay Wall Clearance Operations, EOD Operations, Search & Rescue and Recovery of missing persons and routine mechanical engineering work on Naval Service Fleet.

Search and Rescue (SAR) - There were two (2) separate search and rescue responses from the NS in 2023.

The NS carried out three (3) foreign visits in 2023 including the UK, NETHERLANDS & EUNAVFOR Op IRINI

**Air Operations 2023**

The Air Corps conducts a variety of roles in the air domain and supports other Defence Forces components in the maritime and land domains through the provision of air assets. In addition to national operations, the Air Corps also continued to conduct international operations in support of the Defence Forces and Government Departments using its fleet of fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft.

The following summary outlines some operations that were conducted in 2023:

The Air Corps responded to more than 344 Emergency Aeromedical Services (EAS) missions supporting the National Ambulance Service (NAS) in providing a medical service for seriously ill patients.

The Air Corps conducted 50 maritime patrols totalling in excess of 177 hours of Maritime Surveillance Patrol (MARPAT) flights.

The Air Corps conducted 29 inter-hospital Air Ambulance tasks both nationally and internationally to the UK and mainland Europe.

The Air Corps conducted 4 resupply missions in support of UNIFIL.

The Air Corps responded to forest fire requests in June and provided aerial fire-fighting in Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland in order to protect property in an ATCA role.

The Air Corps continued to support Garda Air Support Unit operations.

The Air Corps continued to improve their aircraft and capabilities by receiving our first Airbus C295 in June and our second in October to replace the C235 after 31 years’ service. The C295 will become fully operation in 2024 significantly enhancing the capability of the Air Corps and the wider Defence Forces.

**Joint Operations 2023**

Operation PIANO

On Friday 22 SEPT a multi-agency Counter-Narcotics Joint Task Force (JTF) was formally stood up. The JTF was operational and is a combined effort involving the DF, Revenue and AGS. The DF commitment consisted of Army, Navy and Air Corps assets who jointly engaged two (2) vessels of interest (VOI) which were attempting to import large quantities of illegal drugs though Irish waters.

On 24 SEPT, a dynamic security situation developed off the South East Coast of Ireland when the ship CASTLEMORE ran aground off the WEXFORD coast in inclement weather. Two suspects were rescued from the trawler in poor weather and escorted to the LE WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS where Garda personnel were present to take them into custody.

On Monday 25 SEPT, the JTF contacted DFHQ Operations Branch and requested assistance from Air Corps (AC) and Army Ranger Wing (ARW) assets to conduct surveillance operations and possible fast-rope insertion to board an ARW Task Unit.

Intelligence received indicated that a second ship, the cargo ship MATTHEW be designated the primary Vessel of Interest (VOI) for the JTF. This VOI was a ‘bulk carrier’ with 20 crew on-board, sailing under the flag of PANAMA. Customs, as the lead agency in the JTF, formally requested DF assistance to board the MATTHEW. The JTF had intelligence that this larger Vessel of Interest (VOI) may contain greater quantities of illegal drugs.

A plan was developed to deploy Army Ranger Wing members on the VOI utilising AW139 Rotary wing aircraft with CASA and PC12 top cover. The plan unfolded as follows:

The LE WB Yeats tracked the VOI throughout the morning and afternoon of 26 SEP.

The ARW deployed by Fast Rope Helicopter Insertion and gained control of the vessel, preventing the destruction of any potential contraband or evidence on-board.

Upon reaching calmer waters, both AGS and Customs Legal Enforcement Detachments (LEDET) boarded the VOI and a handover was conducted with the ARW Team Leader, handing over to the Civil Authorities. The Operation resulted in the largest ever drugs seizure in the state.

**International Operations 2023**

The Irish Defence Forces continues to have the longest unbroken record of overseas service with the United Nations than of any country in the world since first deploying to a United Nations' mission in 1958.

In 2023, Defence Forces personnel were deployed on United Nations, NATO PfP (Partnership for Peace), EU CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) and OSCE Peace Support and Crisis Management Operations across 11 missions in 12 countries. There are currently 546 Defence Forces personnel serving overseas.

The largest Defence Forces deployment overseas is with the United National Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), where 353 Irish soldiers currently serve. This includes an Infantry Battalion, who patrol along the Blue Line (line of demarcation between Lebanon and Israel) in the South in order to maintain a safe and secure environment. Since November 2019, Ireland has partnered with Poland on this mission, enhancing and developing our interoperability with Partner Nations. The Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) and the Hungarian Armed Forces also contribute personnel to IRISHPOLBATT.

The second largest deployment for the Defence Forces is with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights, Syria, where 134 Irish soldiers currently serve. This current deployment is the last deployment as Ireland is withdrawing from its role as the missions’ Quick Reaction Force (QRF) upon completion of this deployment in APRIL 2024. Irish staff officers also serve in UNDOF HQ.

The Defence Forces has up to 30 Irish soldiers who serve with European Union Military Assistance Mission (UA), delivering medical, demining and counter IED education and training to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. In Sep 2023, the Defence Forces concluded its participation with the European Union Training Mission to Mali, ending a ten year commitment to the mission.

The Defence Forces also has a number of soldiers deployed to missions such as EUFOR in Bosnia & Herzegovina and KFOR in Kosovo. The Defence Forces has one staff officer deployed to the EU Military Assistance Mission Ukraine EUMAM UA. This Staff Officer is part of a planning cell co-ordinating the delivery of training to the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) with the EU Military Staff in Brussels.

The Defence Forces currently has three personnel (2 x Naval Service, 1 x Air Corps) deployed to the Operational HQ of the EU Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFORMED) Operation 'IRINI' (Greek for 'peace') in Rome. The operations core task is the implementation of the UN arms embargo on Libya through the use of aerial, satellite, and maritime assets. One if its secondary tasks is to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks. The Defence Forces deployed 1 x Naval vessel, the William Butler Yeats to the Mediterranean as part of Op IRINI in July 2023 for approximately one month.

Between 23 April and 01 May 2023, the Defence Forces provided military support to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFA) counsellor assistance mission to evacuate Irish citizens and their dependents from Sudan through Djibouti and Cyprus. In total over 250 Irish citizens/ dependents /passport holders were identified, processed and evacuated. The Emergency Civil Assistance Team (ECAT) operated in Djibouti and subsequently Cyprus, and was composed of diplomats and Defence Forces personnel. The operation involved elements from across the DF including Air, Logistics, Special Operations Forces, Intelligence and Operations.

Since joining the United Nations in 1955, Ireland has served on the Security Council on four occasions: 1962; 1981 - 1982; and 2001 - 2002. On 01 January 21, Ireland began its fourth term on the Security Council, playing a constructive role to help prevent conflicts and build peace around the world.

**Training & Education 2023**

The 2022 Commission on the Defence Forces report describes the delivery of training and education in the Defence Forces (DF) as a cornerstone of military life, and therefore one of the most important outputs of the organisation. Accordingly, when not on operations, the primary focus of the Defence Forces is the development and subsequent delivery of Training and Education.

During 2023, these activities continued to be central to retaining and developing capability. The table below summarises the outputs delivered by the Defence Forces’ Training and Education Branch during the year.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Career Courses** | **Other Courses** | **Totals** |
| Number of Courses completed in Defence Forces training installations | 23 | 1431 | 1454 |
| Number of Students | 557 | 17581 | 18139 |

Career progression in the Defence Forces is facilitated by successful completion of the relevant primary career progression courses. During 2023, a total of 558 personnel completed 23 primary career progression courses across a range of areas, as illustrated hereunder.

**Primary Career Courses Conducted:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Course Title** | **No. of Courses** | **No. of Students** |
| Potential NCO (Naval Service) | 1 | 18 |
| Potential NCO (Army) | 3 | 160 |
| Junior NCO Logistics Course | 3 | 68 |
| Standard NCO Course (Naval Service) | 1 | 15 |
| Standard NCO Course (All Corps) | 7 | 87 |
| All Arms Standard NCO Course | 1 | 60 |
| Young Officers Course (All Corps) | 3 | 18 |
| Land Command and Staff Course | 1 | 29 |
| Joint Command and Staff Course | 1 | 22 |
| Total | 23 | 557 |

During 2023, the Leadership, Management and Defence Studies (LMDS) Programme for enlisted personnel continued to develop and to be a source of significant success for the Defence Forces and its members. On 11 January 2024, 262 personnel will be conferred with awards by SETU for course work completed in 2023. This includes 97 with a Higher Level Certificate in LMDS (Level 6), 119 with a Minor Award in LMDS (Level 7), 27 being conferred with a BA LMDS (Logistics) (Level 7) and 19 BA LMDS (Level 7). Additionally, 14 personnel will graduate with a Certificate in Introduction to Fire Service Operations.

Over 2,000 personnel have been conferred with awards by IT Carlow/SETU under the LMDS Programme its inception in 2012. The Defence Forces’ Training and Education Branch continues to promote the benefits of the Programme among soldiers, sailors, and aircrew of 3 Star Private rank and to attract them to join the LMDS Programme.

Defence Forces Officers continued participating in the collaborative LMDS programme with Maynooth University throughout 2023. In total, 129 Awards were conferred by Maynooth University in November 2023. This included 39 Special Purpose Awards at Level 7 (LMDS) associated with Cadet Training. 56 personnel graduated with Level 8 Higher Diplomas in Leadership and Contemporary Security associated with the Land Command and Staff Course, and 24 personnel completed a Master of Arts (Level 9 - LMDS) related to the Joint Command and Staff Course.

**Third Level Officer Scheme**

Under the Third Level Officer Scheme, Defence Forces Commissioned Officers who, on induction to the Cadet School, had not completed a bachelor’s degree programme at Level 8 shall be afforded the opportunity to earn an appropriate degree. There are currently 112 Officers attending Higher Education Institutions. In 2023, 34 officers completed their third-level studies.

**Leadership, Management and Naval Studies Programme**

In 2023, The National Maritime College of Ireland (NMCI) conferred Leadership, Management and Naval Studies (LMNS) awards at Level 6 to 36 personnel. 2 officers were conferred with a Level 7 in Nautical Science and 4 were conferred with a Level 8 in Nautical Science.

**Trainee Technician Scheme**

The Defence Forces operates a Trainee Technician Scheme to meet the technical education needs of the organisation. Options within the scheme range from traditional trades such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical, in the Engineer Corps, to heavy vehicle mechanic in Transport Corps to more military technical specialist roles such as armourer in the Ordnance Corps, or Communication Information Services (CIS) technicians in the CIS Corps. Both the Naval Service and Air Corps also conduct technical training to qualify personnel in the technical skills appropriate to their roles.

During 2023, a total of 64 personnel qualified under the army’s Trainee Technician Scheme (TTS). Successful trainees comprised of 11 CIS Corps students (Level 7), 18 Ordnance Corps Students (Level 7), 20 Engineer Corps students (Level 6) and 4 from the Printing Press (Level 6).

Within the Naval Service (NS) during 2023, 11 personnel were conferred under the Naval Service Trainee Technician Scheme with 5 personnel being awarded a National Trade Certificate (Level 6) and 4 personnel being awarded a Level 7 Bachelor of Engineering from Munster Technological University, and 2 personnel being awarded a Level 7 Bachelor of Information Science.

Within the Air Corps during 2023, 8 Air Corps apprentices were awarded a Bachelor of Engineering (Level 7) from TUD upon completion of their apprenticeship as Aircraft Technicians.

**External Education**

The numbers of personnel that availed of external courses either at home or courses/training abroad are as follows:

Attended training activities abroad to date - 639

Availed of External Courses at home – 1,488

**Training for Overseas**

Throughout 2023, the conduct of essential Pre-Deployment Training, for both units and individuals being deployed to overseas missions, (e.g. UNIFIL, UNDOF, EUTM Mali and EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM-UA), was coordinated by Defence Forces’ Training and Education Branch in collaboration with the Military College in the Defence Forces Training Centre (DFTC) and assisted by the lead formations. Pre-Deployment Training EUMAM-UA was a new venture for the Defence Forces in 2023 with the aim of raising the preparedness of personnel to the requisite level for deployment as members of Mobile Training Teams in support of the mission.

Four Mission Readiness Exercises were conducted for larger troop deployments to UNIFIL and UNDOF involving 935 troops in order to certify capability and competence prior to deployment. The Domestic Exercise Evaluation Model (DEEM) was used to evaluate the four Field Training Exercises which are conducted as part of the Mission Readiness Exercises for UNIFIL and UNDOF. The DEEM allows for evaluation in line with international best practice and provides both an initial and final feedback report for the commander. In addition, three Overseas Qualification Courses were conducted, two for the Small Missions List and one for EUTM Mali.

The Defence Forces also engaged in external and foreign training and education activities during 2023 to facilitate organisational learning and to ensure that training, education and capability development gaps are identified and addressed. In total, the Defence Forces participated in 263 foreign activities involving 639 personnel. This engagement helps to ensure that the Defence Forces remain up-to-date with regard to best international practice in terms of military thinking and expertise and ensures that the Defence Forces remain interoperable both at home and overseas.

**Ceremonial 2023**

The Defence Forces participated in over 30 significant military and State ceremonial events in 2023.

State ceremonial honours were afforded on the occasion of the Official Visit to Ireland of The President of The United States in April. Ceremonies were conducted in Áras an Uachtaráin, Farmleigh and Dublin Castle for the visit. Ceremonial honours were also afforded on the occasion of the State visit to Ireland of the President of Malta in March.

A Ceremony of Reconciliation and Remembrance of All Those Who Lost Their Lives in the Irish Civil War took place in The Garden of Remembrance, Dublin in May at which the Taoiseach and Tánaiste attended.

The Defence Forces participated in the National Famine Commemoration, held this year in Milford, Co Donegal in May at which the President attended.

Military honours were also afforded to the Military Advisor to UNHQ, Gen Diop, when he visited UNTSI, DFTC in October.

A ceremony to rededicate the National Army Monument in honour of soldiers of the National Army who died during the Civil War took place in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin in July at which the Taoiseach and Tánaiste attended.

The Defence Forces celebrated Veterans’ Day in McKee Barracks in October where members of ONE, IUNVA and ARCO paraded along with Unit Veteran Associations.

The Defence Forces Remembrance Ceremony was held at The National Memorial, Merrion Square in November to remember the 9 members of the Defence Forces who lost their lives in the past 12 months. As part of this ceremony the Tánaiste and Minister for Defence and families of the deceased laid wreaths at The National Memorial.

The Defence Forces participated in the annual State commemoration ceremonies, including the commemoration of the 107th anniversary of the Easter Rising at the GPO, O’Connell Street; the 1916 Leaders Commemoration at Arbour Hill and at the National Day of Commemoration in Collins Barracks, Cork.

Four (4) Ministerial reviews for overseas contingents took place throughout the country to mark their departure for peacekeeping duties with UNDOF and UNIFIL.

The Defence Forces participated in 9 ceremonies at Áras an Uachtaráin where a total of 27 Ambassadors presented their Credentials of Office to Uachtaráin na hḖireann.

A quintet for the Army No 1 Band, Defence Forces School of Music accompanied by a Combined National and Regimental Colour Party travelled to Messines, Belgium to take part in a ceremony to mark the 25th anniversary of the opening of The Island of Ireland Peace Park in November.

Throughout 2023, a variety of other ceremonial and support duties were performed across the country by members of the Defence Forces in support of State and other ceremonial events.

**Joint Task Force Operations 2023**

**Operation Fortitude 2023**

As part of the Government response to COVID 19, the DF stood up Operation FORTITUDE from 23 MAR 20 - 31 MAY 23, a total of 1,165 days.

The JTF continued to co-ordinate DF capability to Operation FORTITUDE during 2023. This effort required 699 DF work days and 14 vehicle movements from 01 JAN 23 – 31 MAY 23.

DF personnel were deployed on logistical tasks including deployment of DF ambulances in support of the National Ambulance Service. The final DF logistical tasking was 31 MAY 23.

**Operations Fáilte 2023**

The DF conducted ATCA operations WEF 21 Mar 22 in support of the DCEDIY, in order to contribute to the national effort for the reception, accommodation and sustainment of Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTP), together with International Protection Applicants (IP). The JTF continued to co-ordinate DF capability throughout 2023 through delivery of support under three (3) main operational headings: BOTP Accommodation, IP Accommodation and Logistics.

Op FÁILTE Outputs;

As of 07 DEC 23, Op FÁILTE has contributed 3,123 DF deployed work days (4,779 committed work days), 482 vehicle movements and the deployment of 75 DF tents.

BOTP Accommodation;

In 2023, 148 DF deployed work days (283 committed work days) and 30 vehicle movements have been dedicated to BOTP Accommodation operations.

The DF provides facilities in BALLYMULLEN Barracks, TRALEE for use as an Accommodation Centre with capacity for up to 62 BOTP. The provision of this facility commenced on 12 AUG 22.

The DF provided accommodation for up to 75 BOTP daily at KILBRIDE Camp, from 09 NOV 22 to 27 JAN 23.

DF deployment of 13 MPTSS tents capable of accommodating up to 104 IP applicants at KNOCKALISHEEN Accommodation Centre continues throughout 2023.

During 2023, the DF facilitated the provision of 23,167 BOTP bed days.

Logistics

In 2023, 738 DF deployed work days and 16 vehicle movements have been dedicated to Logistics operations including the provision of support to the site of the former Central Mental Hospital DUNDRUM and COLUMB BKS MULLINGAR.

IP Accommodation

In 2023, 2,237 DF deployed work days (3,758 committed work days), and 436 vehicle movements have been dedicated to IP accommodation operations.

From 28 JAN 23, KILBRIDE Camp has been utilised for the accommodation of IP applicants. The capacity of the accommodation centre is 124.

Construction of an accommodation centre (capacity 120) for IP applicants in COLUMB BKS MULLINGAR commenced on 03 FEB 23 and was completed and handed over to DCEDIY on 06 MAR 23. A total of 16 DF MPTSS were transferred to DCEDIY for usage in COLUMB BKS, and struck off charge by DF.

Currently a capacity for 104 IP is provided in 13 DF MPTSS tents at KNOCKALISHEEN Accommodation Centre.

DF provided Engineer Corps personnel and 44 MPTSS tents to Central Mental Hospital DUNDRUM in JUN 2023 on request from DCEDIY. These tents were transferred to DCEDIY and struck off charge by DF.

During 2023, the DF facilitated the provision of 78,984 IP bed days.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Operational Heading** | **DF Personnel Deployed** | **DF Reserve Personnel** | **DF Personnel committed** | **DF Vehicles Deployed** |
| BOTP Accommodation  Operations | 148 | 0 | 283 | 30 |
| Logistics Operations | 738 | 313 | 738 | 16 |
| IP Applicant Accommodation Operations | 2,237 | 0 | 3,758 | 436 |
| **TOTAL OPERATION FÁILTE** | **3,123** | **313** | **4,779** | **482** |

**Best of Albums 2023**

**Best of Army 2023**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfmagazine/albums/72177720313526985>

**Best of Air Corps 2023**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfmagazine/albums/72177720313525552>

**Best of Naval Service 2023**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfmagazine/albums/72177720313540623>

**Best of Overseas 2023**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfmagazine/albums/72177720313525737>

**ENDS**