



ROGER CASEMENT BRANCH OGLAIGH NAISIUNTA na hEIREANN



The Link

Issue 03/09
June. 2009

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Secretary's Notes

The passing of Jim Conway and Johnny Mahon was an enormous loss to the Branch. Both were energetic, committed and long standing members.

In recognition of the service given by both Jim and Johnny, who contributed to the strengthening of the bond which exists between the Branch and the Air Corps, the GOC Brig.Gen Ralph James invited the bereaved families to hold a joint Months Mind Mass in Baldonnel. A large number of members were in attendance and the Branch Chairman laid a wreath at the Air Corps Memorial on behalf of the Branch. The respective families also laid wreaths.

We extend our deepest sympathies to both families. The introduction of the new head-dress was a significant development for the Branch. Our Chairman was the prime mover in getting through the protocol for securing the necessary approvals for the change. Jim Nolan completes his tenure as National President of ONET in June. During his three years in office he maintained a very busy schedule attending numerous events and functions at which he regularly wore the new Branch head-dress. The status of the Roger Casement Branch was enhanced within ONET by Jim's outstanding performance as National President.

The passing of Johnny Mahon was a sad event not only for his family and Branch colleagues but also for the Air Corps Museum. Johnny was the leader of the group who attended the Museum on a weekly basis. He constantly encouraged members to attend and to contribute the benefits of their extensive aviation skills.

This is evident by the improvement in the layout and presentation of exhibits and has been favourably commented on by the various visitors and by the GOC who choose the museum as the venue for a recent Book Launch by the Minister of Defence Mr Willy O'Dea. At the same event the Minister also handed over a retired Alouette Helicopter to the Ulster Museum

The Roger Casement Branch with 118 members continues to develop and continues as the largest Branch in ONET. We always welcome new members and would especially like to hear from Air Corps members living overseas. The attendances at the monthly Branch meetings have also increased and we encourage all our members to attend the meetings which are held at 2000hrs on the third Thursday of each month in the NCO's Mess, Baldonnel.



Branch members with Brig-Gen. Ralph James following the Months Mind Mass for the late Jim Conway and John Mahon

Front Row L-R : E.Tierney;B.Downey;J.Collins;P.McGlynn;P.O'Meara;

BG.R.James;J.Nolan;F.Lyons;P.McLoughlin;M.Prince;T.Roe

Rear L-R; F.Donnolly;W.Walsh;J.Clarke;T.Malone;J.Patterson;J.Berns;R.Murphy.

From the Chairman...

The sad news of the passing of two of our former committee members was a great shock to all. I took over as Branch Chairman from Jim Conway in 2007

And the help and advice which he offered to me was second to none. I got to know Jim well during the past few years and greatly enjoyed the discussions we had on aviation and music topics.. He will be sadly missed.

John Mahon was a classmate of mine joining the Air Corps on the same day in 1956. John always kept in touch with the other class members and kept everybody well briefed on the news and gossip relating to the 'lads'.

He was a keen aviator and our paths crossed on many occasions during our aviation careers. My deepest condolences to his wife Mary and family.

The new head-dress for the Roger Casement Branch has really taken off.

The initial order for 25 hats was sold out rapidly and members proudly wore the new

forage caps at various functions including the Easter Sunday ceremonies at Arbor Hill and at the march past of troops heading for Chad which was held in Galway. A huge representation of members attended the funerals of Jim and John and participated in the respective Guards of Honour. The new distinctive hat with its strong Air Corps identity had an instant appeal to the members and has encouraged them to participate in more ONE parades and functions.

I wish to thank everybody for their support during the negotiations including, Board of ONET, CEO ONET, Dept of Defence, GOC Air Corps, FQMS Stores Casement and last but not least the members of the Branch.



**Edition
sponsored by
John Berns**

Jim Conway

as remembered by Brendan Downey



The untimely death in April of our colleague Jim Conway was a big shock to all that knew him. Jim was born on a farm in Newtown, Co. Tipperrary in 1927. He was educated in the local primary and vocational schools.

In 1944 at the age of sixteen he was selected as an apprentice in the Air Corps and spent nine years at Baldonnel.

When he graduated from the Apprentice Training School as an avionics specialist he was assigned to the Flight Simulator Section as the engineer responsible for the maintenance of the Link Trainer. The Link, as it was known then, was the forerunner of the present day Flight Simulators. Jim left the Air Corps with the rank of Flight Sergeant.

At the completion of his service, Jim joined the Avionics Section in Aer Lingus and was assigned to the Flight Simulator Section as the engineer responsible for the technical operation of the flight simulators. He was dedicated to Link and Flight Simulator training and kept up to date with developments in that field.

Aeroplanes were not the only interest that occupied Jim's time.

His keen interest in motorcycles which started as a hobby but soon developed as a keen activity which involved weekend trips to Newtown and an adventurous overland trip with James Murtagh to Rome during the Holy Year in 1952.

Jim had an inveterate love of both Irish and classical music. He was very involved in developing an interest in Irish music within his colleagues during his period in the Air Corps. He organised the very popular Ceilis in the Gym.

His knowledge of classical music

especially of famous vocalists was demonstrated within the Dublin Airport Retired Staff Association where he regularly presented very entertaining and enlightening music programmes. He encouraged other members to participate in making musical presentations and this was greatly appreciated.

Jim was an energetic member of the Roger Casement Branch ONET. As a committee member for many years he made a significant contribution to the success of the Branch. He played a key role in organising the erection of the monument to deceased former members of the Air Corps. As Branch Chairman (1992/1994) he had the honour of hosting President Mary Robinson when she unveiled the Monument in the presence of a large attendance which included senior members of the Oireachtas, the Diplomatic Corps, Defence Forces and the Gardai.

Jim was again elected Chairman of the Branch for a further period of three years in 2004. He was dedicated to the advancement of the Branch and represented the Branch at the ONET annual conventions and at numerous other functions throughout the country. The Branch grew in stature during his tenure as Chairman.

Jim was a perfectionist at what ever task he undertook, whether he was tuning a motorcycle, preparing a musical presentation or erecting a gatepost on the farm. The completed job had to be perfect. Phrase like "it will do" or "it's ok" didn't exist with Jim.

Jim also had a great sense of humour! At the time of the death of his dear wife Kitty and of his youngest son, Michael, and during his own final illness, Jim showed an extraordinary strength of character and courage.

He has left a lasting impression on all who knew him. With the passing of Jim we have lost a very popular and highly respected friend and colleague.

Jim was laid to rest close to his great friend Padraic Culloty in Esker Cemetery, Lucan, Co. Dublin.

William Gubbins
remembers the late

John Mahon



I was very saddened to hear of John's untimely death.

We first became acquainted in 1956 when John arrived to start his Air Corps apprenticeship. I was in my second year then – having joined the previous year - 1995.

We both joined Aer Lingus after completing nine years in Baldonnel. By good fortune we both ended up on the same crew. John had a great sense of fun and it was such a joy to work with him and to have him as a friend and colleague all those years.

He would ring me occasionally and say – "will you be there in twenty minutes"? I'd reply "sure John" and then he would say – "tell your wife to have the apple tart or scones ready".

He loved every aspect of aviation and had a special place in his heart for all matters relating to the Air Corps and the O.N.E. Mary and I shared wonderful times with John and his wife Mary over the years and we miss him deeply.

We extend our sympathy to Mary and family in their great loss.

William Gubbins

CASEMENT'S HANDS

*(Dedicated to the Roger Casement Branch
O.N.E. members, ex Air Corps,
who volunteer in the Air Corps Museum)*

Raising up the Volunteer mantle
In Casement's name they came
Supporting old comrades and veterans
Of aviation's glory days.
They are the bones of our story
Indeed, stories they do tell
Some are very tall mind you
But each one full of gen.
Honorable and freely gifted
Ol' Rogers' hands work hard
Exhibits and heritage now lifted
It is a museum apart.
Wisdom in experience
Skills brought forth from youthful ways
Work again with older and wiser hands
Restoring Air Corps rays.
Iconic planes of Ireland's past
Old birds that once lay sad
Once more have flesh and blood
To dance upon imagined horizons
Our story made ever good.

*Michael Whelan MA 03 March 2009
Curator: Irish Air Corps Museum
In memory of Johnny Mahon RIP*

Captain Oakes's Local Knowledge by Matt Kennedy

I was operating as Flight Engineer on a flight from Goma to the Kenyan port city of Mombasa with a cargo of coffee. As the aircraft levelled off over Tanzania I tuned the HF radio to the BBC World Service. The Belgian captain and French co-pilot were chatting away as I was sitting at the flight engineer's station of the Bristol Britannia (nicknamed the whispering giant). To my surprise, the broadcast was coming from Dublin, the date was October 1st 1979, and the day Pope John Paul II was due to visit Maynooth.

As we flew towards Mombasa, with the sun beaming into the flight deck, little did I know of the drama being played out at the convent on Dublin's Navan Road.

Almost thirty years later at an Air Corps class reunion dinner I was chatting to Sean Oakes about flying helicopters, it was then that I discovered that he and Fergus O'Connor flew the Pope during the Papal visit. When I told him that I had listened to the BBC broadcast, he started to tell me about that particular morning.

Dublin and the surrounding countryside was covered in thick fog, the KLM crew on contract to Irish Helicopters which shared the helicopter flying was reluctant to take off. The organising committee was trying to make alternative arrangements, the train system was unusable the roads were in a state of gridlock around Maynooth.

Unknown to Sean, there was an understanding with the KLM crews that if they did not fly, that the other helicopters would stay grounded.

Unaware of this agreement and with His Holiness on board, Sean lifted his Bell 212 helicopter off the convent helipad into the fog and edged out over the Navan road.

The helicopter then followed the Navan road down to the railway bridge at Blanchardstown and with the railway as his guide flew to Maynooth landing in the grounds of the seminary.

It was only when I started writing this article I discovered how many ex-Air Corps personnel were involved in the Pope's visit, Tommy McKeown, captain of the Aer Lingus 747 papal flight from Rome to Dublin. Sean Oakes captain of the helicopter flying his Holiness to Maynooth, Galway, Clonmacnoise, Knock and Drogheda. John Kearney was the engineer on flight crew duty. The backup engineering team for the helicopters was led by my friend from my football days in Baldonnel, Mick Fitzgerald who was then the Chief engineer of Irish Helicopters.

After the Papal visit, the KLM crew returned to Holland still resentful that Sean had flown on that particular foggy morning.

Sean was presented with a medal by Pope John Paul II as a memento of the Papal visit.

In 1982 Sean was also awarded a bronze medal and a certificate for his part in the rescue of a fisherman off the Clare coast. Mr. Cochslost, the fisherman, was fishing the blue pool near the cliffs of Moher when a rogue wave swept him out to sea. ATC contacted Sean who was in charge of the IHL S61 off-shore helicopter at Shannon. The helicopter was equipped with off-shore survival equipment but not rescue equipment. On arrival at the spot they realised the fisherman was very tired and was finding it difficult to keep his head above water. Sean decided to descend on a rope from the helicopter into the water. He swam to the drowning fisherman and succeeded in getting him into the life raft. Sean decided to leave the raft to indicate to the helicopter that they were safe. At this stage Sean signalled to the helicopter crew that he was getting cold. The helicopter crew dropped a rope with a seat belt tied to the end of it. Sean tied the seat belt around his own body which enabled him to be winched him up and into the helicopter. Shortly afterwards an Air Corps helicopter arrived and rescued the fisherman from the life raft.

Mr Cochslost was in the water for approximately three and a half hours and recovered later in hospital.

Sean lives in Currageen Co. Cork with his wife Celine, they have five children. His son Cathal followed in his father's footsteps and flies out of Shannon with the Air Sea Rescue Service.

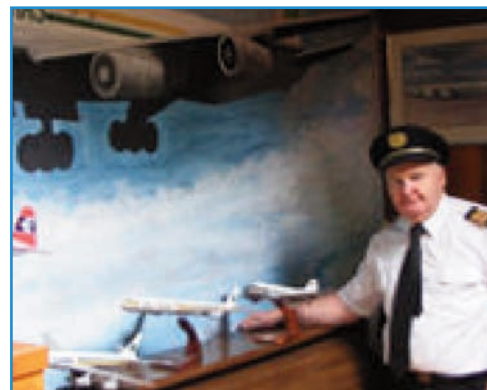
Sean restored friendly relations with the KLM crew a couple of years later.

At a function in Amsterdam the Papal fly / no fly topic came up. Sean put it to rest when he told them that the flight was only possible due to his local knowledge of the area, the KLM crew was delighted with this explanation.

Sean Oakes was a member of the 1957 Apprentice class. After a period in Fighter Squadron, he joined the Heli Flight on its formation and remained in the squadron until his retirement from the Air Corps in 1966. Sean joined Trans World Helicopters in Shannon where he received his CPL training on Hughes 269 helicopters. His first commercial employment was with Island Helicopters in Jamaica as a pilot/engineer on the Hughes 269 where he also held an A&C licence.



Capt. Sean Oakes



Matt Kennedy

He later moved to Schreiner Helicopters in Indonesia. After two and a half years flying in the jungles of Borneo and Sumatra he returned home to take up a command position with Irish Helicopters

Matt Kennedy was a member of the 1957 Apprentice class.

On leaving the Apprentice School in 1959, Matt was assigned to AFTS and after two years moved to the Engine Shop. On leaving the Air Corps in 1963, Matt joined an aviation company in Libya flying equipment and personnel in and out of the Libyan oil fields flying DC3, DC6 AND Beech-Craft aircraft.

He later joined British Eagle as Flight Engineer on Bristol Britannia's. In 1974 he joined Aer Turas and from 1979 to 1981 worked in the Republic of Congo.

He later rejoined Aer Turas as Chief Flight Engineer on CL44 and DC8 aircraft.

Anniversaries & Reunions

The 1949 Apprentice Class holds their 60th Annual Reunion in Baldonnel on Friday June 14th. A former member of the class Fr. Lynch will celebrate Mass.

The 1955 Apprentice Class held a reunion in the Aisling Hotel, Dublin on April 16th. Eleven former members attended. A number of phone calls were received from class members living abroad. A very enjoyable evening was had by all.

Dates for Your Diary

June 12/14: ONET Annual convention in Clonmel.

October 11: Annual Mass in Baldonnel.

December 9: Annual Christmas Dinner. West County Hotel Dublin

Not the Retiring Type by Clive Geraghty

Three years ago, much to my surprise, I reached retirement age. Suddenly I went from a job where I had spent over forty years learning a new play every five or six weeks, to the prospect of spending the morning reading the Irish Times and doing the crossword, then watching Carol Vorderman and Countdown in the afternoon, with a few games of golf thrown in to keep the rust at bay. I knew that there had to be a bit more than that to the last quarter of my life, and my life long lucky streak held out. I had enrolled in an adult education course in modern Irish in NUI Maynooth, but had to abandon the second half of the course when I was asked to play "Da" in Derry. But later on I signed up to do a Diploma course in Irish, spread over two years in NUIM. The university experience was great, even though it was only once a week. I had never been to a university before, truth to tell, I had never been in secondary school even, I started work as an apprentice in the Air Corps when I was seventeen.

During the first year of the course I was asked to do a five month stint in Fair City, which I agreed to do, but I had a clause inserted in the contract which allowed me to finish at 3pm on Tuesdays, which gave me time to get to Maynooth from Donnybrook in time for my class. The classes in Irish were arduous enough, we would do a two hour grammar session followed by an hour of literature, and every few weeks we spent a whole Saturday on campus, with a variety of lecturers speaking on their pet subjects. At the end of each year we sat a three hour exam. I heard about the Mature Student opportunities in Maynooth, I made some enquiries, read all the literature, found the prospect of going to university both challenging and somewhat daunting, and applied to NUIM for a place. I also had to apply to the CAO. I was accepted by both. My exam results came out and I had passed.

In early September, along with hundreds of graduates I had a great day when my Dioplóma sa Ghaeilge was given to me. There were people being conferred with Bachelor degrees, Masters, and Doctorates, my Diploma was a humble affair but I was as proud as punch.

Two weeks later I had my first lecture as a full time undergraduate. I am taking a Double Honours Bachelor of Arts degree, my three subjects are demanding but fascinating, I am studying Modern Irish, Greek and Roman Civilization, and Medieval Irish and Celtic History. If I make it as far as second year I will continue with the two Irish subjects. I have completed one semester, I had my first exams a few weeks ago, the results were okay, we are now in the second semester, so the nose is to the grindstone at the moment. But I am enjoying every minute of it, the knowledge available to us, the studying, the variety of my life. The lecturers are brilliant, and as far as my much, much younger classmates are concerned, well, they have restored my faith in the innate intelligence, courtesy and decency of our young citizens. They are great. H.G.Wells said that human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe. My money is on the former winning the contest.

Clive Geraghty. January 2009.



CUIMHNIMIS

Let us remember those who have died recently;

Jim Conway

John Mahon

Liam Sheridan

Charles McSteen

Brendan Hannigan

Tony O'Doherty

Joseph Yates



The Minister of Defence Mr. Willy O'Dea and Brig-Gen. Ralph James with Joe Maxwell and Patrick J. Cummins, joint authors of the recently published book "The Irish Air Corps" an illustrated guide. The book was launched by the Minister at a ceremony in Baldonnel on 27, May 2009.



Air Corps News

542 lives saved. 1,717 Search & Rescue Missions.

2,882 Air Ambulance Missions. 77,000 flying hours.

44 years service

Widely considered to be one of the best helicopters ever produced in its class. Purchased in 1963 as an "Air and Sea Rescue" helicopter the French made machine had an immediate impact. 542 people owe their lives to the skill of the rescue crews and helicopter's versatility, in over 1,700 missions. 14 members of the Air Corps' were decorated for outstanding bravery during some of these rescues. In addition, over 2,882 Air Ambulance missions were completed. The helicopter fleet was also deployed with the army on operations, particularly in border areas.

The Air Corps now operates a completely new fleet of Eurocopter EC135 and Agusta/Westland AW139 helicopters following the standown in 2007 of the Alouettes and the 2006 retirement of the Dauphin helicopter.



Alouette 111 Helicopter, 202, which was handed over to the Ulster Aviation Society by Minister of Defence Mr. Willy O'Dea at a ceremony in the Air Corps Museum, Baldonnel on 27 May, 2009.

Included: Raymond Burrows, Vice-Chairman and Treasurer U.A.S. Mr. O'Dea; BG R.James and Guy Warner Committee Member U.A.S.