



# Roger Casement Branch of Óglaigh Náisiúnta na hÉireann Teoranta (ONET)



## The Link

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Honorary Branch President: James Nolan

### Roger Casement Branch Celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

The following is an account of the historic first meeting of the Roger Casement as recorded by founder member and current Branch President, Jim Nolan.

"As I was present in the NCO'S Mess in Baldonnell on a Thursday night in April 1979 with some other Mess honorary members a conversation occurred in relation to an FQMS being very ill. I was already a member of ONE, it was suggested that I seek assistance for the FQMS from the ONE at their next meeting. I was advised that "as you people are living in the Baldonnell area perhaps you are in a better position to seek assistance" It was decided that the family of the FQMS would be contacted to offer any help required. This was greatly appreciated and some nursing care was arranged. This exercise displayed a need to organise a Branch of ONE in Baldonnell to cater for former members of the Air Corps. I was urged to contact the Air Corps for permission to set up an Air Corps Branch of ONE. A small advert was inserted in the Evening Press newspaper announcing that the branch was being formed and inviting interested people to attend a meeting in Baldonnell on Thursday June 19<sup>th</sup> at 9pm.

There was a large attendance present and I was nominated to act as Chairman for the meeting.

The following committee was elected.

Chairman, James Nolan; Secretary, Tom Knott; Treasurer, Dave Lawless.

Members: Felix Connolly, Kevin Cooney, Paddy(Hank)Lennon, Gerry Tully, John StJohn. Jim Dwyer, Billy Mahon.

To quote Billy Mahon at the meeting, "**We can face it together the way old friends do**" and so the Roger Casement Branch of the O.N.E. was born. After a few weeks Wally Walsh was co-opted to the committee and Jim Nolan took up the job of organiser and P.R"

In its 40 years of existence the Branch has grown in size and is now the largest Branch within the O.N.E network and actively participates in the fulfilment of its role in supporting the hostels for disadvantaged former members of the Defence Forces and in maintaining contact with the many former members of the Air Corps throughout the world by way of its social media links and its Newsletter.



Branch President  
Jim Nolan with the  
Best Branch Award  
2017.

### Message from GOC Air Corps Brig-General Sean Clancy to the Members of the Roger Casement Branch on its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

'As we approach 100 years of the Irish Air Corps, it is incumbent on us all to take a look back and remember where we have come from. For almost 40 years now, the ONE Casement Branch has provided us with an opportunity to retain our connection with the past and remember our heritage.

The Air Corps is a great organisation for a number of reasons, but it has, and always will be, the people that make it so special. The on-going hard work, dedication and camaraderie of the Casement Branch ONE members provides that proof. It is with great pride that I recognise Casement Branch as the largest of the ONE branches and I look forward to hearing of more 'Best Branch' victories, following your successes over recent years.

I wish you all the very best of luck in 2019 and as GOC AC I am proud to congratulate you on your very important anniversary'



Brig-Gen Sean Clancy  
GOC Air Corps.

Edition sponsored by  
a member of the 1959  
Apprentice Class





## ANNUAL CHRISTMAS LUNCH 2018

The annual Christmas Lunch was held in the West County Hotel Chapelizod on December 6th, 2018. Guest of Honour was Col. Rory O'Connor who represented Brig-Gen Sean Clancy GOC Air Corps. Approximately 100 members and guests some travelling from the USA and the UK were in attendance. Branch piper P.J. Brennan rendered the honours to the Christmas pudding.



*Old comrades chatting after dinner*



*Col. Rory O'Connor, Michael Delaney  
Branch Chairman*



*Sean Staunton, Tom Colgan, Mick O'Brien*



*Michael Delaney Chairman, Col. Rory O'Connor,  
Paddy O'Meara Deputy Chairman, Paddy Kennedy.*



*Paddy Goodman, Addie Patterson*



*Pat Spillane, Paddy Kennedy  
(New York)*

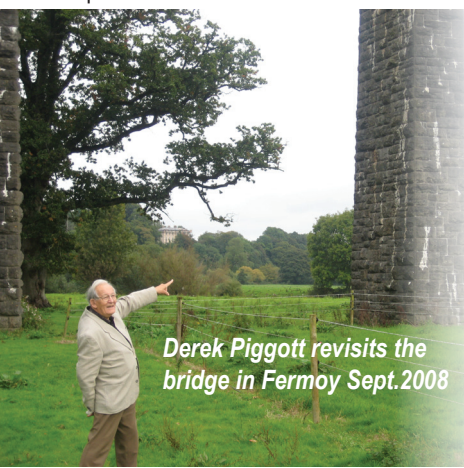
### Derek Piggott: Chief Pilot Flying Films in Baldonnel

The many Air Corps personnel, Pilots, Aircraft Technicians and ground support crews will be sad to hear of the passing of Derek Piggott who was the chief pilot during the Flying Films from 1965 to 1969. Derek died on January 6th 2019 after a short illness at the age of 96. He was one of the UK's best known glider pilots and wrote many of the 'Books' on glider flying. He took part in a number of films prior to coming to Baldonnel including 'Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and others.

When based in Ireland, during the Blue Max he flew a Fokker Triplane under the now legendary railway bridge in Fermoy through the wide span of the bridge 15 times and through the narrower span 17 times.



*Blue Max, Baldonnel 1965*



*Derek Piggott revisits the  
bridge in Fermoy Sept.2008*

In Darling Lili he was responsible for the majority of the designs of six of the replica aircraft. Some of the Dog Fight scenes which included a number of Air Corps pilots were considered to be among the best made.

A reunion of the Flying Films Period was held in Baldonnel in September 2008 and Derek attended as Guest of Honour. Many of the Air Corps pilots and technicians and film personnel who took part in the Flying films were in attendance. Derek expressed a desire to visit the bridge in Fermoy with his partner Maria and this visit was facilitated by Ciaran O'Connor of Weston Aerodrome and the helicopter was provided by the Mansfield Group. A group comprised of Derek and his partner Maria Boyd, Lt-Col Peter McMahon who was a pilot in the films and Paddy O'Meara Chairman of the Reunion Organising committee flew to Fermoy and the Helicopter was flown by P.J. Mansfield. It was a very moving and nostalgic visit to Fermoy for Derek.

Derek will be remembered as one of the true flying legends. May he Rest in Peace.

*Continued . . .*



## Dancing in the Gym at Baldonnell.

Richard Cummins

For several generations of personnel who served in Baldonnell, dances in the Gym were part of the social life of their time in the Air Corps. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's dances were organised by the various sports clubs that were operating in Baldonnell. These dances were used by the clubs as fund raisers to finance the activities of the clubs. They were run under the auspices of the Air Corps Welfare Board who distributed profits from the dances to the organising clubs. Among the clubs seeking permission to hold dances were Gaelic Football, Hurling, Soccer, Rugby, Basketball and Hockey.

The first evidence available shows that the annual sports day in the 1940's, certainly from 1945 on, always included a dance in the gym. For example in 1947 the Sam Williams Dance Band were engaged to play at a cost of £10-10-0 and in 1948 the J Murtagh Orchestra played at a cost of £15-15-0. The dances were free to Air Corps personnel and their families. These dances ended in time for the people attending to get the last bus from the main gate back towards the city.

The first evidence of sports clubs organising dances comes from 1951 when the Air Corps Hockey Club ran a dance on Sunday 6th May. The reason given for the dance was to raise funds to repay monies received from Welfare. The Gaelic Football Club and the Basketball Club ran dances later in the same year. In 1952 such was the demand to hold dances that a schedule was drawn up allocating dates to the six previously mentioned clubs for the year ahead. However, no dances dates were allocated during Lent. The normal hours allocated for these dances was 9pm to 2am. The Gaelic Football Club ran a dance in July 1952 that had door receipts of £60-6-0. Expenses incurred were £37-3-4 including the cost of the band at £23. The dances continued throughout the 1950's and among the bands that played in Baldonnell were Maurice Lynch Orchestra, Jimmy Dunne Band, Maurice Mulcahy Orchestra, Paddy Kearns Orchestra and the Leo Singleton Orchestra. The first showband to play Baldonnell were the Royal who played there on the 13th November 1959. They were engaged to by the Air Corps Soccer Club whose secretary was Paddy O'Meara. Paddy knew most of the members of the band personally as he had gone to school with them in Waterford and had heard them play there on a visit home. He approached them on another occasion in early 1959 when they were playing the Crystal Ballroom in Dublin. Their manager agreed to the gig for a fee of £65. At this stage the Royal were only making a name for themselves so the fee was modest enough. However, by the time they played Baldonnell some months later they had become the new sensation of the dance scene in Ireland and were in big demand by promoters. . The advertisement for the dance in the Evening Herald newspaper stated that the admission fee was 6/- and that a special bus would run from Aston's Quay in Dublin. The special bus from Aston's Quay continued to be the norm for all dances in Baldonnell down the years following a route through Inchicore and Clondalkin allowing young people from all areas along the route the opportunity to dance somewhere different. The Gym was packed and the Soccer Club reaped the reward.



*The Air Corps had its own Showband , The Airchords during the Showband Era comprised of Air Corps members between 1959 and 1963. After 1963 the band continued as a professional unit with the addition of external musicians.*

It was customary in those days for bands to play a second dance at the venue if the first went well. A second date was agreed for the 27th May 1960 but this time the split on the door takings was 60/40 in favour of the band and the admission charge was 7/6. The Airchords, in their original line-up all members of the Air Corps, made their Baldonnell Gym debut at this dance as the interval act.

The Airchords next played the Gym in a dance organised by the Air Corps Hockey Club in October 1960. They were supported on the night by The Shadows Skiffle group and the admission charge was a modest 4/-. The next dance in the gym does not seem to have been run until April 1962 when the Airchords, this time on their own, provided the music. The admission was now 5/-. They played the Gym twice more that year, three times in 1963 and at least once a year after that. The busiest year for dances in the Gym was 1964 when a total of ten dances were held. In 1965 eight dances were held and in 1966 there were six. Apart from the Royal and the Airchords, other showbands to play the Gym were the Cadets, Dixielanders, Casino, Victor, Declan Ryan and the Arrivals, Witnesses, Drifters, Donie Collins, Kings, Regal, Hilton, Derek Dean and the Freshmen, Gene and the Gents and the Clipper Carlton. These dances were normally held on Friday nights. Prices for the dances varied from 4/- to 7/6 depending on how well known the band was. For a New Year's Eve dance on the 31st December 1966 punters were charged 10/- to hear the Clipper Carlton. The fee for the band on the night was £380. This dance was run by the hurling club and was to be the final dance held in the Gym. A total of 1,200 people were in attendance which, in the health and safety conscious world we now live in is hard to imagine. Unfortunately for the organisers among the crowd were about fifty people intent on causing trouble who became involved in a fracas that took some time to bring under control. A subsequent investigation recommended that dances in the Gym be discontinued due to the rowdy element that had started to attend ruining the good reputation that had been enjoyed heretofore. So ended a part of Air Corps social history that provided great enjoyment to all those who were part of it and provided essential finance to the various sports clubs who organised and ran the dances.

*(Richard Cummins was a member of the 31st Air Corps Apprentice Class and retired as a Lt-Col. in 2008.*

*Continued from page 2*

**Derek Piggott: Chief Pilot Flying Films in Baldonnell**

*Tony Kearns Air corps Historian,  
Derek Piggott Chief Pilot Flying  
Films, Paddy O'Meara, Chair-  
man, Reunion committee.*





# CUIMHNIMIS ~ Let us remember those who have died. ~

William McDonnell  
Diarmuid Dinneen

James Gilsenan  
Bill Ward

John McLoughlin  
James Mortell

Joe McCormack  
Niall Byrne

Charlie Nolan  
Tony McCormack

## Air Corps News

### 15th February 2019

On This Day in 1994 the first helicopter of the H135 family performed its first flight. Number 3 Operations Wing operates four H135 helicopters. 302 Squadron use their two H135 helicopters to carry out a variety of tasks including pilot training, air ambulance, sniper security operations, aerial fire fighting support and much more. 304 Squadron use their H135s alongside An Garda Síochána in air support role. The crew consists of one Air Corps pilot and two members of An Garda Síochána.



### 14th February 2019

A huge milestone was reached today. Members of the 35th Cadet Class carried out their first solo navigation exercise passing through all of the Air Corps' training areas at a speed of almost 400km/hr covering a distance of 300km. With around 25hrs of flying completed, this a massive achievement for the Cadets on the road to earning their Military Pilots Wings. If you would like to join our Team keep an eye on our social media accounts as we will launch this year's Cadetship in the coming weeks!



### 14th February 2019

This weekend our #EAS crews have been busy. On Saturday while out on a training mission we received a call to an incident near the Cliffs of Moher. Our helicopter landed on scene and transported the patient to Galway University Hospital. After landing in Galway we were tasked to yet another emergency near Thurles. The helicopter arrived on scene without delay and the patient was transported safely to hospital. A quick stop in Shannon airport was needed on the way home to refuel the helicopter - and its crew!



### 14th February 2019

Today 302 Squadron took a trip to the Wicklow Mountains to conduct some winter training. Landing on snow can be difficult and requires a special technique.



### 20th February 2019

This photograph was taken earlier this week during some formation acrobatic training in military airspace. The PC9M can pull -3.5G/7G and is an ideal platform as a display aircraft in addition to its air policing and pilot training role.