



Cumann na nIar
Oifigeach Coimisiunta

ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED
COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO. 12
SPRING 2007

*Continuing the fellowship established during service
in the Permanent Defence Forces*

12th Annual General Meeting

The 12th AGM was held on Saturday 7 October 2006 in the Auditorium of the 2nd Eastern Brigade HQ in Cathal Brugha Bks. Thirty members attended and 25 sent their apologies. Lunch afterwards in the Officers Mess was, as usual, excellent and provided an opportunity for members to catch up on news.

The meeting progressed as per the Agenda notified in the Autumn 2006 Newsletter. The Acting President welcomed members and then led a minutes silence as a mark of respect for our deceased colleagues. In his address the Acting President made reference to Colonel John Ryan who resigned as President in May. He thanked John for his long and dedicated service to ARCO and the hard work

the 28 Feb as heretofore. Amendments to the Rules of Association were agreed to by the members.

The Hon Secretary and Hon Membership Secretary presented their respective reports. The Hon Treasurer presented the audited accounts for the year ending 28 Feb 06 which showed a deficit of income over expenditure for the year of €671.61 and net assets of €34,500.64. The deficit was mainly due to once off payments involving presentations. The President thanked the Hon Auditor, Comdt Pat Casey, for his work in auditing the accounts again this year.

The President thanked the outgoing Committee and, in particular, Maj Gen Fergus O' Connell and Commodore Liam Brett who were not going forward for re-election. The incoming Executive Committee, duly elected, are as follows:



Annual Mass Wreath Laying Ceremony

Col Michael Lucey, President, representing ARCO at the Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Annual Mass for Deceased Members of DFHQ and McKee Barracks in November 2006.

President
Vice President
Hon Secretary
Hon Treasurer
Hon Membership
Secretary
Eastern Branch

Southern Branch
Western Branch
Curragh Branch

Air Corps
Naval Service

Co-option

Col Michael Lucey
Vacant
Lt Col Ken Kelly
Comdt Mick O'Byrne

Comdt Brian Mc Donnell
Col Jim Mortell
Lt Col Joe Ahern
Vacant

Col Senan Downes
Col Donal O' Carroll
Col Dick Heaslip
Lt Col Mick Hipwell
Capt (NS) Charlie O' Donnell
Lt Cdr Peter Dunne
Col Dorcha Lee

Note: At the EXCOM Meeting held on the 18 Nov 06 the vacancy of Vice President was filled by Col Heaslip, and that in the Southern Branch by Lt Col Sean Scanlon and in the Air Corps by Col Kevin Hogan.

he did on behalf of the Association including his work as Editor of the Newsletter. He went on to say that Colonel Ryan had again, in the early part of 2006, sought the legal position of the Ombudsman's decision on the MSA Pensionability issue. That legal opinion upheld the Ombudsman's original position. The EXCOM will continue to monitor the matter. In the coming year it is planned to explore the possibility of establishing a formal relationship and annual meetings with DFHQ/DOD/RACO. The COS directed the Director of Administration to have ARCO put on the list of recognised bodies for DF Ceremonial events. He also confirmed that the Department of An Taoiseach will include ARCO on their list for National Ceremonial events. Also it is intended to embark on a series of visits to the Bdes, DFTC, Air Corps and Naval Service. It was agreed that the Audit period would end on 31 July and not



l-r: At the AGM Col. Michael Lucey, newly elected President, made a presentation to Capt. Ray Tumulty, First President of ARCO.

Congo Communique Un Volunteer Programme

The ONUC operation from 1960 to 1964 was a major watershed for the Defence Forces and an extraordinary experience for those who took part. I'll never forget my father heading off to the Congo or the great stories he had when he came back. However, the Congo mission ended before my turn for overseas service came around.

I was therefore delighted, in early March last, to receive an invitation from the UN Volunteer Programme in Bonn, to serve as a UN volunteer with MONUC, the UN Peacekeeping Mission in DR Congo. They were short of Logistics Officers who could work in French, for the Electoral Division, and they wanted me on the ground within ten days. The initial contract was, however, only until 30 June, without pay, but with satisfactory allowances. It was later extended until October. I turned down an offer to stay to year end, due to personal commitments at home.

I was well familiar with the UNV Programme, having conducted OPS briefings for them in 1994 in Mogadishu. The concept behind the Programme was to recruit university graduates, (or military equivalent) to work with the field missions. Two categories were targeted; young graduates leaving college who needed work experience, and retired personnel who were willing to share their training and experience. However the majority of UN volunteers I met fell into a different category. These were graduates from Third World countries who lived relatively frugally, and were supporting their families with their in-mission living allowances. In comparison to the well paid UN international staff, volunteers were regarded, in some UN quarters, as 'yellow-pack' personnel helping out a cash-strapped organization. The UNV administration staff in Congo were a first class team. On the other hand, the mission to which we were attached, MONUC, lacked resources to fully support the electoral support role.

It took nine days to complete inprocessing in Kinshasa (formerly Leopoldville), where I was issued my 4th UN Driving License. During the check-in period, I discovered my father's favorite restaurant back in 1960/61 - a small Italian restaurant, then called "Au Petit Pont", changed to "Chez Nicola" in '67. He and his flatmate, Col Justin McCarthy, went there most evenings. Sadly, as most ARCO members recall, Col. McCarthy was killed in a traffic accident in Kinshasa. Amazingly the same restaurant owner was there and still making pizzas! I recognized him immediately from the many photos taken by my father.

After inprocessing I was posted to Matadi, the Congo River port city 360km west of Kinshasa, in the westernmost province, Bas-Congo. My initial job as a logistic officer, was easy, as logistic resources were planned and organized mostly at national level in Kinshasa.



The author with two locals standing in front of Stanley's Baobab tree near Boma.

My job involved tracking the deployment of electoral kits, ballots and awareness kits all over the province of Bas-Congo, and sorting out problems as they arose. This meant a lot of driving through some really scenic country, bush, savannah and rain forest. Matadi, while the hottest part of DR Congo, was a good posting. It reminded me a bit of Cork, all built on hills sweeping down to a river, with people who raised their speech an octave in mid-sentence, and uptown, a Metropole Hotel!

Throughout the whole period the atmosphere was calm in Matadi, except for one serious incident on 30 June, the Congolese National Day, and the first official day of the electoral campaign. Kingdom of Kongo (Bundu Dia Kongo (BDK)) separatists staged a demonstration march. They killed a passing soldier with arrows and machetes, and, in a subsequent exchange of fire with military police, ten BDK were killed.

In May I was earmarked and given training as the MONUC Electoral Officer for the Region of the Lukaya. This meant a lot of commuting from my office in Matadi to the Lukaya regional capital of Kisantu, 230km away. The Lukaya is about the size of Belgium, but has only a small electorate of about a quarter of a million people, spread out in three territories. Before the elections, my initial duties involved supervising the selection and organization of 455 Polling Stations in 92 Centers and the selection and training of 2,500 electoral agents. Closer to Election Day I moved up to Kisantu fulltime, liaising directly with local Congolese administration and electoral officials.

Election Day, on 30 July, was a long day beginning at 0530hours and ending for us at 0100hours. The turnout was fantastic, 80%, many people having walked 20km to get to the polling stations. The recovery of ballots and the compilation of results took about three weeks.

Overall it turned out to be a really great experience. If any of our members are interested in UNV work I would be happy to advise them.

*Col Dorcha Lee (retd),
Email: dorchalee@hotmail.com.*

Three Navies - One Centre of Gravity

In every navy there are at least three navies, yesterday's navy, today's navy and tomorrow's navy and, some say, the Navy after that!

Since the early 1990's the Naval Service (NS) has been subject to a number of reviews, most of which, together with the Defence White Paper, have driven the NS Value for Money Implementation Plan. Since 2000, this plan has seen an almost 50% increase in patrol days and a greater fleet capacity for service provision today. Studies have highlighted the importance of joined up maritime thinking at a European and a National level. Countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand have advanced with an Ocean's Policy to guide and define their maritime strategic national interests. The publication of a European Green Paper on Maritime Policy has signalled the start of a similar process from an EU perspective. It will be important to ensure that Ireland's marine national interests are also clearly defined. As one of the instruments available to Government for furthering policy objectives in the international as well as the national maritime domain this will have implications for the Navy of tomorrow.



The LE Eithne in action. The two boats slung out are her 7 metre Rigid Inflatable Boats which sometimes operate up to 20kms away from the ship.

The NS is the primary seagoing agency of the State and therefore must develop in a balanced manner, ready to deliver the maximum range of defence, policing and public services to the greatest number of stakeholders. This requires taking a 30-40 year long-term view of the State requirements. The importance of having a full understanding of the policy objectives and strategic options for the design of the Navy of the future is clear. Such an understanding will not just help advise on optimal hull requirements but also on the manner in which the Defence



Naval service personnel involved in the sinking of a large navigation hazard in the South Atlantic.

Forces may contribute to better Ocean Governance at a National and European level.

Moving into 2007 the NS is poised to benefit from potentially the biggest investment project ever undertaken within the Defence Forces. With a decision on the replacement of three naval vessels imminent a number of factors will help shape how the Navy prepares for the future. Firstly, Ireland has commenced its claim for sovereign rights over the continental margin, potentially doubling its area of jurisdiction. This new expanded area could eventually be up to thirteen times the size of the State with parts up to 1,300km off the coast. Secondly, statistically the roughest seas in the world encompass much of Ireland's current and future area of jurisdiction. The largest wave, at 29 metres, ever recorded by scientific instrument was off the north west coast of Ireland in this area. This will have significant implications for the safe and efficient delivery of services. Thirdly, Government policy is to expand the contribution to the economy from its maritime resources. This will see a major increase in activity off the coast including exploitation, renewable energy development, bio-prospecting, research and tourism.

As it ponders on the optimal mix of ships for the future the Navy must look at the State's requirements from the perspective of a post modern navy. A Navy where its contribution to the Defence Forces is aimed at delivering defence services which have the greatest effect. Of course improving the level of jointness within the Defence Forces will help. From a policing perspective the global maritime security environment is dynamic and unpredictable necessitating greater inter agency and inter state co-operation. On the softer side the Navy must attain a level of flexibility enabling the broadest range of public services possible with a capacity to assist in everything from humanitarian disasters to monitoring marine environmental health.

Finally while, policy, strategy and resources are important for the Navy, as ever, one resource forms its centre of gravity. This centre of gravity is the same as always, for yesterday's Navy, for today's Navy and for the Navy of tomorrow - it is its people!

Cdr. Mark Mellett.

Lebanon 1958 - 2006: Remembering the Pathfinders



Photo taken at UNOGIL Sector HQ in Baalbeck and includes Col. Justin McCarthy, Comdt. Hogan, Lt. O'Brien, Capt. O'Connor, Lt. McCorley, Capt. Moran, Lt. Ryan, Lt. O'Connell, Capt. Keogh, Capt. Furlong and Lt. Sheedy.

In July 2006 Lebanon once again captured the international media headlines when Israel invaded as a consequence of the Hezbollah cross border raid and kidnap of Israeli soldiers. The presence of both UNTSO observers and the much reduced UNIFIL force was totally ignored by Israel and the conflict in Lebanon raged for almost a month. Defence Force personnel serving with UNTSO and UNIFIL missions were very actively involved in this conflict and provided impartial reports on events and incidents. In time, due to the threat posed to international peace and stability, a cease fire was eventually negotiated with the UN once again being required to provide the military resources to police it.

Ireland with its long connection to the UN operations in this part of the world was requested to provide troops for this new mission, UNIFIL II, a follow-on for the original UNIFIL but now operating under a new more robust mandate. So by Nov 2006 when 34th Inf Gp deployed to its operational sector in Lebanon in support of the Finnish contingent, the Defence Forces was once again renewing its engagement in international initiatives in Lebanon albeit under another new UN mandate. In the reflection which followed this deployment the Irish media focus was on the Defence Forces long contribution to UNIFIL from 1978 to 2000, little if any mention was made of the fact that the Defence Forces involvement with Lebanon had preceded that particular venture by 20 years when Ireland first provided personnel for UNOGIL in 1958.

Lebanon in 1958 was where fifty Defence Force officers under Lt Col Justin McCarthy took the first tentative steps in what in time has become Ireland's proud record in peace-keeping. In the Cold War era this mission was a novel and very important

international conflict management tool of its time. Then as now the Middle East was strategically located astride a contentious superpower fault line with huge potential for escalation to a major conflagration. In this cauldron UNOGIL defused the threat posed in this “flash point” and successfully restored the delicate balance of the region by December 1958. Forty eight Irish UNOGIL veterans then returned home keeping their own counsel on their international experiences with little or no enthusiasm shown by national authorities in their experiences or, indeed, of the lessons learned on this mission.

Col McCarthy (promoted following strong recommendation by his UNOGIL superior the Norwegian Maj Gen Odd Bull) and Capt Jordan both transferred to UNTSO for a further period of UN service thereby becoming the first Irish officers to serve in that mission. In time Col McCarthy was again to redeploy to UNOC in July 1960 at the request of UNOC first commander the Swede, Maj Gen von Horn. In Oct 1962 Col McCarthy died in a car accident near Leopoldville, thus becoming the first Defence Forces officer casualty on UN operations. He was posthumously awarded the DSM on the recommendation of

von Horn in recognition of his commitment to duty and his service to UNOC. In his memory the McCarthy Trophy was presented to the Cadet School in 1964 and is now awarded annually as a public speaking award for Senior Cadets.

Apart from this small simple memento there has been no real recognition of the role played by Col Justin McCarthy DSM as the first to lead a deployment of Irish personnel on overseas duty. Neither is there anywhere throughout the Defence Forces any formal plaque or other recognition commemorating the historic pathfinder nature of the UNOGIL mission. With the fiftieth anniversary of this mission fast approaching (in 2008) is it not now time to commence the campaign to formally redress this oversight? It is my belief that ARCO should take a leading role in this matter.

And, as an epilogue for the benefit of the collective corporate Defence Force memory, only 11 of the original fifty UNOGIL veterans now survive: Tom Furlong, Rory Henderson, Noel Sloan, James Moran, James Fagan, Colm Cox, William Flynn, Des Duff, Fergus O’Connell, John Ryan and Pat Dixon.

Col. R.E.M. Heaslip.

Welcome to ARCO’s New Members:

Brig. Gen. Frank Mc Kevitt
Brig. Gen. Maurice Downing
Brig. Gen. Gerard Mc Namara
Capt. (NS), Charlie O’Donnell
Lt Col. Coleman Goggin

Lt. Col. J.H. Murphy
Lt Col John Moriarty
Lt. Col. Peter Mc Mahon
Lt. Col Tom Mc Nally
Lt. Col Noel Byrne

Lt Cdr Peter Dunne NS
Comdt. Neville Furlong
Comdt. John Byrne
Capt. Noel Conway
Capt. Cormac McCarthy

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-Anamacha

Deceased Officers:

Our condolences to the families and friends of those who passed away since our last newsletter went to print:

Retired Officers:

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|------|
| Col Jim Croke | 01 June | 2006 |
| Lt Col Peter Ward | 24 July | 2006 |
| Col Tadhg Ryan | 17 August | 2006 |
| Capt Sean Minihane | 20 August | 2006 |
| Lt Col Sean Clancy | 17 September | 2006 |
| Comdt Donal Sweeney | 29 September | 2006 |
| Lt Col Con Costello | 06 October | 2006 |
| Col Ted Sheehy | 15 October | 2006 |
| Capt Harry Agnew | 24 October | 2006 |
| Lt Col Donal Madden | 28 November | 2006 |
| Brig Gen Vincent Crawford | 24 December | 2006 |

Serving Officers:

| | | |
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| Comdt Francis Hession Pharmacist S.B.H. | 28 October | 2006 |
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Ships Clock - Presentation



l-r: Col. Michael Lucey, President, presenting a Ships Clock and Barometer on behalf of ARCO to Comdt. M. O’Carroll, Mess President, Officers Mess, Cathal Brugha Barracks after the AGM

An Ród seo Romham

Doing the Camino de Santiago de Compostella first surfaced as a topic for our hill-walking group loosely based on the 37th Cadet Class.

Prompted by the benefits of superficial research and veteran pilgrims tales we opted for the “Camino Francais” version. This begins in the Basque Region of France at St Jean Pied de Port on the east side of the Pyrenees and extends 800 Km across the North of Spain to Santiago.



Journeys End ‘Cape Finisterre’ (l to r): D. Heaslip, M. Hanley, M. Lucey, J. Ahern (picture by F. McKeivitt).

We opted to complete the pilgrimage in four stages. In April 2005 Col (Retd) Dick Heaslip and I arrived at our start point in the foot hills of the Pyrenees to commence the pilgrimage. Of course we were complete with our individual self sustaining 9 Kgs back-packs containing the “creature comforts” required for the challenges ahead. We booked into a hostel or ‘refugio’ run by volunteers. It was an old building divided into small dormitories furnished with two tier bunk beds, spotlessly clean, boasting excellent showers, and costing all of €6 per night. Generally speaking this was the basic standard available across the route. Access to this hostel support network is gained with a “pilgrim passport” which we collected in St Jean Pied de Port. When stamped each day in the hostel it acts as verification to the authorities in Santiago that you have followed the pilgrim path.

Our journey took us across the Pyrenees via the Napoleon route to the monastery at Ronceval in Spain. This trek, climbing to 1440m, was one of the steepest and highest sections of the pilgrimage. Apart from a strong wind blowing against us at the higher altitudes we had fine weather and a clear view of mountain scenery on a grand scale. The Ronceval hostel was a 200 bed refurbished granary run by Dutch volunteers, one of whom offered us coffee laced with whiskey. He was a little

surprised to discover that 50% of the Irish contingent didn’t drink alcohol but Celtic stereotyping was re-established by the arrival of a Scotsman, who was a connoisseur, having spent much of his life selling the stuff all over the world. In fact he became the third member of the group and apart from an immense tolerance of old soldiers stories he spoke some Spanish, a language of which I and Dick Heaslip were remarkably ignorant. Thus reinforced we continued our journey through the Navarre Rioja and Burgos regions finally ending in Fromista in the Palencia region on April 20 having covered 350km. We had a great deal of rain which made the going heavy and on one notable day as we climbed out of Pamplona going South West over a mountain pass (800m) we encountered a small blizzard which threatened to obliterate the track in places and this was the main “war story” from our first camino outing. However we were very pleased with the absence of any foot problems.

We resumed our trek in late October 2005 from Fromista. Our objective on this occasion was Villafranca del Bierzo, 240 km distant. Though not as daunting as the Burgos to Fromista stretch, the countryside retained its flat and featureless characteristics until we reached the city of Leon. After Leon we walked through pleasant mountain scenery to our destination in Villafranca del Bierzo.

When we returned to complete the final stretch to Santiago in April 2006

our numbers had swelled to five in that we were joined by Col (Retd) Michael Lucey and Brig Gen (Retd) Frank McKeivitt. This portion of the journey was through the scenic mountainous countryside of Galicia including a transit of the 1400m high pass at Alto do Poio. It was an ideal time of year for walking weather wise as it was generally fine and dry without being too hot. We were fortunate when on reaching Santiago. This is a giant incense burner which is suspended by large ropes from the roof of the Cathedral and is swung in a huge arc over the heads of the congregation by a team of strong fit adult altar servers. In former times the object of this exercise was to kill the stench emanating from sweaty pilgrim bodies but its function is now strictly ceremonial and occurs on certain feast days connected with St James.

We returned yet again in the September 2006 to walk the final 100 km from Santiago to the sea at Finisterre. Our team now numbered six as we were joined by Lt (ret) Malachy Hanly. This was probably the most challenging part of the undertaking as Galicia more than lived up to its reputation as one of the wettest parts of Europe.

All participants found the experience a most enjoyable project in many aspects including the exercise, the scenery, the people we met, the sociability of the ‘refugios’, the sense of history and even a little religion.

Lt Col J. Ahern.

Old Soldiers Never Die

Lt Col Sean Clancy, who died on the 17 September 2006 at the age of 105, was the last surviving War of Independence veteran. He was born to a farming family in Clonlara, County Clare in 1901 and joined the Volunteer movement in the wake of the 1916 Rising.



In 1919 he moved to Dublin to work as a clerk and joined 'B' Company, 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade. He took the Pro-Treaty side when the IRA split in 1922 and enlisted as a private in the National Army in Portobello Barracks, Rathmines. He was present at many historic events during this time, including the hand over of Dublin Castle. In August 1922 he marched in Arthur Griffith's funeral procession and less than two weeks later in that of Michael Collins.

He was commissioned as a Lieutenant in April 1923 and was one of those who were retained in service when the Army was greatly reduced in strength in the wake of the Civil War and the Army Crisis of 1924. In 1932, by now a Captain, he was a member of the Officer Guard of Honour for the Mass held in the Phoenix Park during the Eucharistic Congress. At the outbreak of the Emergency, in the rank of Commandant, he was appointed second-in-command of the newly formed 18th Infantry Battalion. He achieved a Distinction on his Command and Staff Course and in 1954 was promoted to Lt Col.

Towards the end of his career he commanded the 5th Infantry Battalion, a unit for which he retained a special affection for the remainder of his life. He retired in 1959. On his 100th birthday he visited his old unit and inspected a guard of honour to mark the occasion. In April 2006 he was an honoured guest at the 90th Anniversary Commemoration of the Rising. Three months before his death he was a guest of the Chief of Staff in McKee Barracks to mark his 105th birthday.

This remarkable man, whose life spanned the history of the modern Irish state, was led from Donnybrook Church by a piper from the 5th Infantry Battalion and at Deansgrange Cemetery a firing party drawn from that unit rendered honours at his graveside. He is survived by a daughter and four sons.

Ar Dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

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Hail and Farewell

Members and the Executive Committee of ARCO who enjoy the use of the facilities in Cathal Brugha Barracks would like to wish Brig. Gen. Gerry Mc Namara all the very best in his retirement and to congratulate Brig. Gen. Denis Murphy on his promotion and appointment as the new GOC 2nd Eastern Brigade. Prior to his promotion Brig. Gen. Murphy was Director of Intelligence. We wish him every success in his new appointment.

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Social Welfare/Benefits/ Pensions

Capt. Dave Meade, who has expertise in the above areas, has offered his services to our members should they need information or advice. You can contact him at Tel no: 01-4947260 or e.mail: davidmeade81@eircom.net

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Deduction of Subscription from Army Pension

Currently the annual ARCO subscription is paid by members mainly by means of a Bank Standing Order. However, Pensions Section, DOD, have now agreed to facilitate ARCO by deducting the annual subscription from the pension of those members who give their permission. Accordingly, you will receive an explanatory letter and authorisation form with this Newsletter. This new system for collecting subscriptions will be of great benefit and will help in the effective administration of the Association. I would therefore strongly urge all members to agree to have their subscription deducted from their pension.

M. Lucey, President, ARCO.

Editor's Note

This newsletter is issued in Spring and Autumn. Articles or items of interest from members are always welcome.

If you have something to contribute please send it to Michael Lucey, Editor at melucey@hotmail.com or by post to:

Col. Michael Lucey (Retd.),

228 Grange Road, Rathfarnham, Dublin. 16.

Your Health . . .

Cataracts

One of the hazards of growing old is the risk of impairment or loss of vision due to cataracts. A cataract is a clouding or loss of transparency in the lens in the eye. The lens is a small structure inside the globe of the eye, behind the blue or brown of the iris and it gives the ability to focus vision at a range of distances from very near to far away.

There are several kinds of cataract with different causes, but a common one is a change with increasing age. In the early stages of development there may be a

hazy vision in bright light with only minor disability. If the changes progress to cloudiness or opacity of the lens, then effectively vision becomes impaired and is finally lost in that eye. Only one eye may be severely damaged at first with minor changes in the other eye.

If there is no problem with the retina at the back of the eye, then best treatment is surgery i.e. removal of the damaged lens. Ophthalmic surgeons now commonly put in a plastic lens to replace the damaged lens. The procedure can often be completed in hospital in two days. On admission measurements are made to estimate the size of the replacement lens. The next morning, under anaesthesia, the surgeon makes a

small cut in the eye through which he removes the damaged lens and inserts the replacement lens. The eye is then left covered until the next day, when, if all is well, the patient may go home. The artificial lens is unable to change the focus like that in a normal eye, so spectacles may be needed for near vision i.e. reading, while distant objects can be viewed directly. After a successful operation vision in the treated eye may be markedly different from that in the other eye in which the lens is still brown. Blue objects will now be seen brightly blue again and white objects appear much brighter without the brownish tinge as perceived by the other eye.

Col. Joe Laffan, M.D., (Retd.).

Towards 2016 (T2016):

Ten Year Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015

In the last issue Government policy on priority actions and long term support for the elderly was referred to and we now summarise the issues concerned and progress to date. Section 32, Part I of the Agreement is the relevant section for members who wish to read the full text.

The outline vision of Government policy with respect to older people details a number of points which will be pursued viz:

- Every older person would be encouraged and supported to the greatest extent possible in social and civic life;
- Every older person would have access to an income which is sufficient to sustain an acceptable standard of living;
- Every older person would have adequate support to enable them to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible. This will involve access to good quality services in the community, including health education, transport, housing and security;
- Every older person would, in conformance with the needs and conscious of the high level of disability and disabling conditions amongst this group, have access to a spectrum of care services stretching from support

for self care through support for family and informal carers to formal care in the home, the community or in residential settings. Such care services should ensure that the person has opportunities for civic and social engagement at community level.

The Partnership document contains many measures supposed to give effect to the above vision but ARCO members should remember that it was produced in advance of an election. However, it is a long term social strategy and is unlikely to be reversed by whatever Government succeeds the present one.

Of immediate concern to members should be the maintenance of income and that we do not have a repeat of the fiasco of MSA (Military Service Allowance) where many older members were arbitrarily excluded from a de facto pensionable allowance. Furthermore, the issues of accessible public transport, means testing for home and residential care services and the availability of affordable medical services for older people remain crucial. Significantly, the **Older and Bolder Campaign** which involves five national organisations has initiated a public information and education campaign to call on politicians to adopt a **National Strategy for Older People**. This includes some of the proposed Government vision

above but also asks for an end to discrimination against older people, equal access to health services and facilitation of true choice around work and retirement.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge recent improvement in services for older people, including the removal of time constraints on the Free Travel Scheme. But the 2007 Budget Speech lacked specific measures on care of the elderly and, in particular, the apparent intention to force older people to sell family homes or arrange equity release schemes to fund nursing home care. **Official denials of this intention have issued but the persistence of the idea of a “notional income” generated by the family home does not inspire confidence in such denials. This idea creates fictitious Euros but real ones must fund the care required!**

To paraphrase a previous election promises, “A lot done, more to do” by whatever Government emerges from the next election!

