

OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN, GAILLIMH

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY

Text of the Introductory Address delivered by **PROFESSOR CHRIS CURTIN**, National University of Ireland, Galway on 27 June, 2014 on the occasion of the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on **LIEUTENANT GENERAL SEÁN MCCANN**.

A Uachtaráin, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle.....

In 1969 the first army cadets enrolled into what was then UCG and is now the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG). Since then, over 1,000 officers have followed in these pioneers' footsteps, creating a special and mutually rewarding bond between this University and the Defence Forces.

This innovative development on the part of the Defence Forces whereby their officers would acquire a university education as an integral part of their overall formation was based on a realization that a higher level education was needed if the defense forces were to be enabled to carry out its duties at home and abroad and to respond effectively to the rapidly changing environment in which they operated.

It was a decision that has proved to be hugely beneficial to the Defence Forces whose members have been internationally recognized and have been much sought after as leaders in the difficult and challenging processes of peace keeping and enforcement in the

many and varied theatres of operation in which they have served throughout the world, including Europe, Africa, Asia and Central America.

In the words of the late Lieutenant General Dermot Earley “had we not proceeded with this initiative at that time, I have no doubt that we would have been left behind by many other armies who were doing so before and since its introduction”.

The arrival of the cadets on campus was to say the least ‘dramatic’. To quote our esteemed Academic Secretary, Michael Kavanagh, then a student at UCG “initially the cadets were viewed as almost exotic figures. UCG was a much smaller campus back then, with only some 3,000 students and the arrival of these fine young men with cars added an extraordinary dimension to student life”.

Nonetheless the cadets integrated easily into college life, mixed well with their fellow students and played an important role in all aspects of life on the campus. Many excelled at sport and hundreds of officers have played on UCG/NUIG teams. Among the better known of course, is Kieran Fitzgerald who went on to lead Ireland to Triple Crown victory in the mid 1980s.

Many of our graduates have achieved high ranking in the Defence Forces and many have developed successful careers outside of the Defence Forces. All recognize the importance of a university education in developing competencies and leadership from the tactical to the strategic.

The combination of academic and military qualifications and personal development and growth has ensured that officers are highly regarded in both public and private sector activities. Having a third level education also proved a significant asset to the officers who were asked to serve abroad.

As a neutral country Ireland has, over the last 50 years, played a most significant role in many hazardous UN and EU peacekeeping missions. These international commitments underscore the capacity of the Irish Defence Forces to participate in multi-national peacekeeping operations with countries with which we share a peacekeeping tradition and ensure that Ireland continues to be in a position to contribute to the very important fields of peace support operations and humanitarian assistance.

Sean McCann, following his secondary school education in Thurles Christian Brothers School (CBS) and the Cistercian College Roscrea, joined the army as a cadet in October 1970 and was commissioned in September 1972.

He graduated from UCG with a Bachelor of Commerce degree in 1974. Sean is also a graduate of the Institute of Public Administration (1976), and is among a select group of senior Irish army officers who attended the United States Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, acknowledged as one of the leading centers of military training in the world.

During his career he has held a number of high-level positions which included Deputy Chief of Staff Operations, General Officer Commanding Defence Forces Training Center,

Director of Operations, Director of the Calvary Corp and Commandant of the Combat Support College.

In the course of his military career Sean has seen extensive service overseas, including the Lebanon, Israel, Iraq and Kuwait as part of United Nations operations and has served with the European Union Monitoring Mission in Sarajevo following the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. More recently he led the Irish Defence Forces during their deployment into new and very challenging locations in Mali and the Golan Heights in Syria.

In these new operations and indeed throughout his military career Sean is universally acclaimed as having displayed outstanding qualities of organizational, tactical and strategic leadership, qualities which were evident and recognized by the army even as a young cadet.

These qualities were also displayed in other dimensions of Sean's life particularly in the sporting domain. A formidable sportsman he was recognized as an accomplished rugby player and by all accounts was no mean hurler as befits his Cork and Tipperary background.

In June 2010 he was appointed Chief of Staff, following the untimely death of Lieutenant General Dermot Earley, a position he held until his retirement in August 2013. In October 2011 he was honoured as the first Irish graduate inducted into the International Hall of Fame of the United States Army Command and General Staff College. The Hall of Fame

honours previous international graduates who have reached the highest positions in their respective armed forces or similar positions in multinational military organisations.

In recognition of the special relationship between the Defence Forces and this University, the remarkable women and men from the Defence Forces that have graduated from UCG and NUIG, together with the distinguished military career and personal achievements of Lieutenant General Sean McCann, the first NUIG graduate to have achieved the prestigious position of Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces it is a my great privilege to introduce him as the recipient of the degree of Doctor Laws.

PRAEHONORABILIS PRAESES, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.