



The Cavalry Corps

An Cór Marcra

Memorial Garden, Plunkett Barracks , Curragh Camp

The erection of what was first referred to as a Congo Memorial Close at Plunkett Barracks, Curragh Camp to honour Cavalry personnel who lost their lives under the flag of the United Nations started in late 1962. The work was carried out after normal duty hours under the direction of Commandant Joe Foley and Captain Tommy Roche and was undertaken by volunteers from the units in barracks.

The memorial is based on the megalithic monuments at Moytura Conga, just east of Cong in County Mayo. According to mythology, a great battle took place at Moytura between the Fir Bolgs and the Tuatha De Danann three thousand years ago. The Cavalry memorial was built in the form of a cromlech with three upright stones on each side on the stones supporting the capstone. The top stone is shaped like a cavalryman's Glengarry. The inscription on the gate reads " In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum" a motto given to the Irish troops in the Spanish army by Phillip V of Spain in the sixteenth century. It means: "their fame has gone throughout the world".





As work progressed Mr George Spiers, a landscape designer of Spiers Nurseries, Burtstown Athy, was engaged. The garden, then known as the Congo and Cyprus Memorial was unveiled by the Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Seán McKeown on Sunday 6th Oct 1963. The photograph above shows the Chief of Staff with Commandant Joe Foley and Squadron Quartermaster Sergeant Matt Kelly at the ceremony. Lieutenant Martin O'Neill, Depot Cavalry, commanded the Guard of Honour for the ceremony and Second Lieutenant Ken Kelly was the Flag Officer. In attendance at the ceremony were: Major General Seán Collins-Powell (Adjutant General), Colonel P Curran (Quarter Master General), Colonel James Cogan Officer Commanding Curragh Training Camp, Colonel John Stapleton (Director of Cavalry), Lieutenant Colonel Richard Bunworth (former Commanding Officer of 33 Battalion ONUC), Lieutenant Colonel Hugh MacNamee (former Commanding Officer of 35 Battalion ONUC), the officers commanding all Cavalry units and the President of the Cavalry Club. The Band of the Curragh Training Camp under Captain Denis G Mellerick B Mus rendered musical honours. Father G Brophy CF assisted by Father C Swan CF and Father L Fleming CF blessed the memorial.





In his address, Lieutenant General McKeown said:

“They gave their lives gloriously and magnificently, a sacrifice in the best traditions of the country, the Army and the Cavalry Corps. I am certain that their names will not be forgotten and I am convinced that their sacrifices will not have been in vain. I am proud to perform the ceremony of unveiling the memorial on which are inscribed the names of the six dead soldiers. Three of them, Sergeant Gaynor, Trooper Browne and Trooper Fennell fell at Niemba in November 1960. There in the fateful ambush, in which almost an entire patrol was wiped out, these men acquitted themselves in the highest traditions of Irish arms. Against odds estimated at 20 to 1, they fought bravely and unflinchingly. One of them, Trooper Anthony Browne, for his particular heroism and gallantry on the occasion, was posthumously awarded An Bonn Míleata Calmachta.



A little under a year after this tragic engagement, the names of Corporal Nolan, Trooper Gaffney and Trooper Mullins had been added to the roll of the dead. They died in Elizabethville, and in the hurly burly and confusion peculiar to street fighting, these young soldiers deported themselves with resolution and courage until they fell in action. In honouring the memory of these men, we pay tribute also to the officer, three NCOs and two Troopers who were wounded and to all members of the Cavalry Corps who served in the Congo. The Cavalry Corps has a proud record in the United Nations operation since it began in July 1960 and the corps was represented in the ranks of every Irish unit in the Congo. In all, Cavalry provided 655 personnel, 67 officers, 201 NCOs and 387 Troopers. This is a magnificent contribution, indicative of the high state of morale in Cavalry units.

The cause in which you soldiered has been a just one. Indeed, I might say that never have arms been taken up in a nobler cause – the cause of peace, the cause of humanity. I am sure that they have never been borne more gallantly or more chivalrously.



The memory of your dead comrades, perpetuated here in this memorial, will be a source of inspiration for future generations of Irish soldiers and future generations of Irishmen in all walks of life. I hope too that it may provide some small consolation for the families and loved ones.”



The memorial was funded by voluntary subscriptions from personnel in Cavalry regular and reserve units, Cavalry Workshops and Technical Stores and individuals as well as grants from Plunkett Officers Mess, the Cavalry Club and the 11th Cavalry Association. The initial cost for materials, lighting, shrubs and plaques amounted to £1851.86 (pounds).

On Saturday 5th Nov 1966 the inaugural Remembrance Day for Cavalry personnel killed while serving with the United Nations in the Congo and Cyprus was held. The Reverent Father Gregory Brophy CF celebrated Mass for those who died overseas and for all deceased Cavalry personnel in Saint Brigid's Garrison Church. Relatives of the deceased and representatives from all Cavalry units attended. After Mass the parade moved to Plunkett Barracks where the Last Post was sounded as the Tricolour was lowered, and Reveille was blown as it was raised to full mast. Since 1966, the Cavalry Corps Memorial Day to honour members of the Corps who died on overseas service and those who died during the year is held on the first Saturday in September.



In recent years the Cavalry Club provides funds for the maintenance of the memorial.

The maintenance of the Memorial Garden is one of the objects of the Cavalry Club. “Rule 2.4 To provide for, and when deemed necessary to expend funds on, the maintenance of the Cavalry Corps Memorial Garden in Plunkett Barracks, Curragh Camp, Co Kildare.”

