

Irish Independent

Tuesday, April 10th, 1990

Irish Army's "good guy" role in Namibia

TOM O'DEA outlines the Irish contingent's tour of duty with UNTAG in Africa

WHEN members of the Irish Army arrived in Namibia on March 16 last year, they were viewed with a degree of suspicion by the locals. On the following day, St. Patrick's Day, the commanding officer, Lt.-Col. David Stapleton, produced a bottle of Irish whiskey.

Soon the ice was broken, and a great party was underway. The Namibians not only found a billet for the Irish party, but they invited Stapleton to inspect their troops.

As well as that, when the Irish were preparing to move on, the Namibians sent word ahead saying, in effect, "The Irish are coming. They're good guys. Look after them." If there is a moral in this story, it must be that Irish whiskey travels well, not to mention Irish blarney.

The Irish contingent was there for a year-long tour of duty with the **United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG)**. Among the tasks to be undertaken by UNTAG were the monitoring of the cessation of hostilities and the maintenance of law and order leading up to Namibian independence, which occurred on the 21st of last month.

While Lt.-Col. Stapleton was looking after things in the south, the overall contingent commander, Col. Michael Moriarty, was based in the Angolan capital, Luanda. His function was to observe and report on the activities of the PLAN fighters of SWAPO, and to ensure that the Angolan government and army were keeping their side of the agreement to confine PLAN fighters to camps north of the 16th parallel.

Namibia has a good infrastructure, and its people are well educated, says Lt.-Col. Stapleton, whose Irish troops were the first UN forces to arrive there. The result was that the Irish took up the key appointments before the arrival of forces from Togo, Czechoslovakia, Panama and Bangladesh.

Stapleton is proud of the fact that his group had a budget and a plan for 12 months, and that they abided by both. "This is quite unusual for a UN mission," he adds.

The Irish were the only members of the UNTAG group who had previous UN experience. Stapleton served in the Congo (now Zaire) and in the Middle East, as had Col. Moriarty, who also served In Cyprus.

At 187,000 sq. km., Southern Namibia is three times the size of Ireland, but it has only 60,000 people. The prime industry is livestock farming — cattle and sheep. Huge tracts of land are necessary to feed those animals because the grass is so poor. Farms are thousands of acres in size and are mostly owned by descendants of Europeans whose grandfathers came up from South Africa in the last century.

Other areas of the south are reserved for ethnic groups, whose homelands are farmed on a communal basis. The land has been overgrazed and appears almost as desert. Apart from farming, the only other industries in the south are mining and fishing.

The knowledge and understanding the Irish had of how the UN operates was a key factor in ensuring an effective operation in Namibia, Stapleton believes. Irish officers were distributed through the different nationalities to guarantee an efficient operation, particularly with regard to communication.



Col. Michael Moriarty and Lt Col. Dave Stapleton



**UNTAG – Peacekeeping Medal
United Nations transitional
Assistance Group**

UNTAG was established to ensure the early independence of Namibia through free and fair elections under the supervision and control of the United Nations. The mission was established April 1989 with a mandate for one year and closed in March 1990.

Irish Commitment: 20 Observers



Lieutenant-General Dave Stapleton

Was a member of the **30th Cadet Class 1955 / 57** was born on 25 September 1937 in Clonmel, County Tipperary. He entered the Cadet School, the Military College on 1st December 1955 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant into the Supply and Transport Corps on 25 November 1957.

Between his date of commissioning and January 1967, he occupied appointments in the 1st Field Supply and Transport Company and the Supply and Transport Depot, as Platoon Commander and as Military Analyst and Instructor. He was promoted to Captain on 13 January 1967 and appointed as a Staff Officer in the Directorate of Supply and Transport. He returned to the Supply and Transport Depot in the same month and continued to serve there as an Instructor and Administration Officer until he was promoted to Commandant in March 1976. He was then appointed as Adjutant of the 6th Brigade. Lieutenant General Stapleton completed a Staff Course in Camberley, UK, in 1977. Following the Staff Course, he was appointed as an Instructor in the Military College in March 1978.

He returned to the Supply and Transport Depot in November 1983 and was appointed as Officer Commanding Vehicle Workshops in January 1986. Lieutenant General Stapleton was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in September 1988 and was appointed as Officer in Charge of Operations Planning Sub-section in Operations Section, Chief of Staff's Branch. He was promoted to Colonel on 2 September 1991 and appointed Officer Commanding 6th Brigade. He was promoted to Brigadier General on 26 January 1995 and to Major General on 8 February 1995, when he was appointed as Quartermaster General. He was promoted to Lieutenant General and appointed Chief of Staff on 22 August 1998.

Lieutenant General Stapleton first overseas service was as a Transport Platoon Officer with the 37th Infantry Battalion (ONUC) in the Congo from May to November 1962. He was a Military Observer with UNTSO in the Middle East from October 1972 until April 1974. He served twice with UNIFIL in Lebanon, as Second Command of the 53rd Infantry Battalion, from March to November 1983, and as Transport Group Commander of the 57th Infantry Battalion. He served with the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia from March 1989 until March 1990. On 1 June 1997, he was appointed Force Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Syrian Golan Heights, where he served until he was appointed Chief of Staff.

Lieutenant General Stapleton retired from the Defence Forces with effect from 25 September 2000.



Lieutenant General David Stapleton DSM
Defence Forces Chief of Staff
August 1998 – September 2000

Irish Times
Friday 22nd September 2000
Chief of Staff awarded DSM

The Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces, Lieut Gen David Stapleton, was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) by the Minister for Defence, Mr. Michael Smith.

The Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces, Lieut Gen David Stapleton, was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) by the Minister for Defence, Mr Smith, yesterday.

The award of the DSM was in recognition of Lieut Gen Stapleton's long career of distinguished service in the Defence Forces at home and overseas. He retires on Sunday.

Death Notice – Monday 13th June 2016

The death has occurred of Davis Francis Stapleton

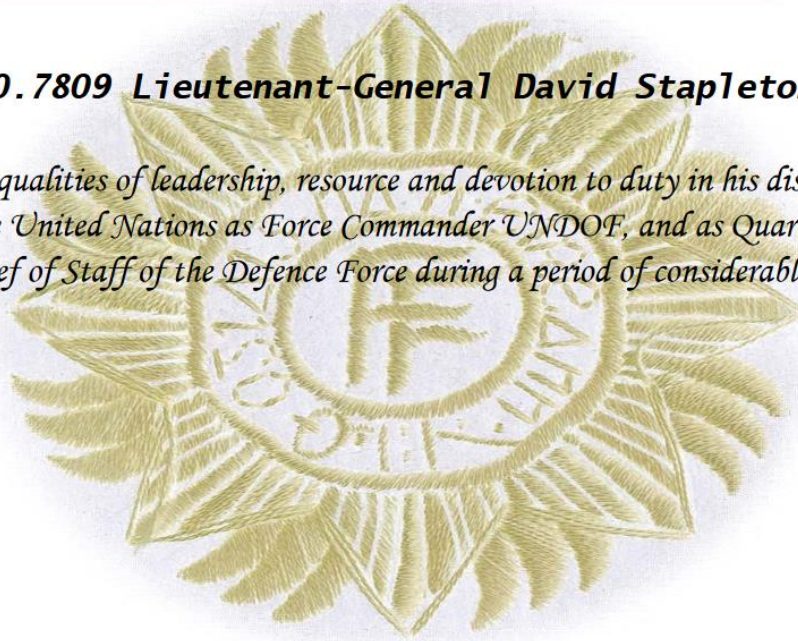
Lieutenant General, former Chief of Staff of The Defence Forces. Peacefully at his home with all his loving family by his side. His funeral mass was held in St. Conleth's Parish Church Newbridge. Followed by burial in St. Conleth's Cemetery Newbridge.

Rest In Peace

The Distinguished Service Medal With Honour

0.7809 Lieutenant-General David Stapleton

For outstanding qualities of leadership, resource and devotion to duty in his distinguished service with the United Nations as Force Commander UNDOF, and as Quartermaster-General and Chief of Staff of the Defence Force during a period of considerable challenge



Lieutenant-General David Stapleton Citation

21st September 2000



Curragh Camp Transport 1950's