

PILOT IN THE IRISH AIR CORPS

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To become a pilot in the Irish IAC is a serious matter !

In Ireland they think of defense forces in a proper way. The country is surrounded by sea which is also a source of income for the fishery. Except for the dragging but local Northern Ireland conflict there is not any international tension and thus no direct threat for Irish sovereignty. The Airforce more or less limit itself to support tasks for the Army and Navy and support in civil sphere. The Irish Air Corps (IAC) in it's modest size a real helicopter airforce with transportplanes and light aircraft. The planes, about 30 are all based on the Baldonnel/Casement Aerodrome situated near Dublin. Two locations can serve as extra base of operation, these are Monaghan Camp and Finner Camp both situated near the Ulster border.

It's all about skills

Who drops in at headquarters in the NCO mess will see a plate which reminds on an occurrence that left a deep impression in Ireland. It concerns a memory about the Dauphin crash (1 of only 3 of these types in service). On July 2nd 1999 a Dauphin left and never returned while the mission was completed, it crashed on the way back in the fog in the dunes of Tramore. Capt. Dave O'Flaherty, Sgt. Paddy Mooney, Capt. Mick Baker and Capt. Niall Byrne left their lives. Touching it is written: 'They died, so that others may live'. It must have been an enormous loss for the Irish, to lose four of their best men. And that they were good is for sure, because there is a very professional opinion about their jobs. Outside the base on the fence there is a plate which says in Irish: 'Tosnaíonn sa bhailieacht eitleite anseo' which means 'Flight safety starts here!' In the mess we spoke to an army soldier who occasionally has to join helicopter flights. He spoke highly of the mentality of the airforce personnel. 'They do their job very well, efficient and they work so much more relaxed compared to the army which only seems to exist of following commands and drilling, drilling...'

Learning to fly on the PC-9M, a sort of 'can do it all'

At the 'Scoil Oiliuna Eitleoiteachta' (Flying Training School) we meet Captain Derek Furniss, the Chief flying instructor. He explains that the PC-9M appeared to be a very welcome replacement in 2004 of the Siai Marchetti SF-260. Not that the plane was inferior, but the PC-9M can do so much more. To start with, the PC-9M is a plane with very fine flying characteristics, which also permits much of the student.

Let's say it's quite 'stupid-proof' for the beginning pilot, with all respects of course.

It lands like a jet, it's very hard to get the plane in a spin, and when it might happen it's easy to correct again. Within the IAC it will be the first plane to learn a pilot to fly, there is no other lead-in or something like it. The flight characteristics are of a kind that getting control of the airplane is very easy to pick up. Most important matter is that the cadet has to focus his (or her) attention will have to focus on the system management.

For that matter the limited capacity for pilots and the direct step on an advanced plane requires an extended selection with long lasting interviews and psychological investigations. After nine months training at the Military College in Kildare for Air Cadets A, next there is a survival training on the menu of one week. Who succeeds, can start right away with the Computer Based Training (CBT) on the Air Corps College next to the FTS. Here technical explanation of the plane is taught and also there is an advanced static simulator where a 180 degrees moving scene is projected. 'Seven hours before they strap in' Derek explains us, and with that he means stepping into the real cockpit of the PC-9M. The cadet will need 18-20 hours in total preceding the first solo flight. After 170 flight-hours and about 147 sorties and 40 hours in the simulator you are qualified, and you get your wings and the rank of 2nd

Helicopters in the multi role

Seen from above the traffic-control tower there is a very good view on the flight movements. On the foot of the tower the birdman has a real falcon-run, not another bird who dares to come in the neighbourhood ! Then from the ramp the helicopters pass by over the taxiway on a height of about six meters, about 30 meters from the tower, they are practicing busy. Two modern EC-135T-2 helicopters are being used to train pilots in helicopterflying. Finally they will fly the Alouette-III of which seven still in service though the days of this type have been numbered at the IAC. Another possibility is that they will fly on the brandnew Agusta Westland AW-139. This plane is very interesting because the experience learned with modern cockpit-systems on the PC-9M can be proceeded via the EC-135T-2 . From the AW-139 four examples have been ordered with an option on another two. This helicopter has a multirole function, because next to the transport of soldiers with 'crashworthy' chairs the helicopter is also optimised for SAR tasks. The cabin can be transformed very fast even in an air-ambulance in case of big disasters. The AW-139 has Honeywell LCD mission display's, full digital control on the engines, a four-axial digital automatic pilot, and modern search equipment like forward looking infra red (FLIR). In the door-opening if desired, a hoist or board-cannon can be mounted. Though as we stated, modest in size, the equipment is modern and almost any task can be fulfilled. The FTS with their Irsh motto 'Oinear Dilseacht Agus Buanseasmhacht' which means 'Honour, Diligence And Steadfastness' has an important tasks for the realisation of this.

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