

# Right To Represent?

Commandant Michael Geraghty of RACO recently travelled to the UK House of Commons to address a Parliamentary reception, organised by the British Armed Forces Federation (BAFF), which is engaged in an ongoing campaign to gain legal recognition.

In the UK over the past two years there has been extensive debate regarding the fundamental right of association and the right of representation for members of the UK Armed Forces (UKAF); this debate has received quite an amount of press coverage and has been the subject of debate in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords in recent months.

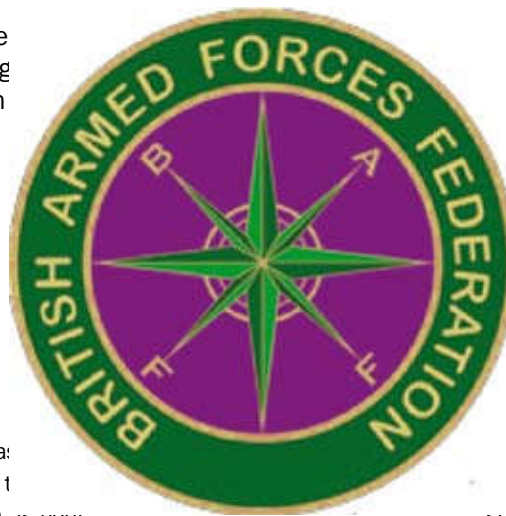
Approximately three years ago the British Armed Forces Federation [BAFF] was formed by current and former members of UKAF arising from a variety of issues such as poor accommodation, the matter of compensation to those injured and killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, operational overstretch and pay and conditions of service. Although its campaign for official legal recognition by the British Ministry of Defence has yet to bear fruit, BAFF continues to lobby in Britain and in Europe for the right to negotiate on behalf of its members; BAFF represents the interests of all ranks in the three services, members of the Territorial Army as well as all veterans.

In autumn 2008 the official ArmyNet website ran an informal poll on whether members of the Armed Forces support the creation of an independent armed forces federation to represent their interests. Voting was restricted to the registered members of the website, who are mostly serving personnel; almost three quarters of respondents were in favour or thought this concept had merit.

On May 20th Lt Col Douglas Young, who is the Chairman of the Federation, held a parliamentary reception in the Houses of Parliament in conjunction with Linda Gilroy, MP for Plymouth Sutton, who was the event sponsor and is also a current member of the Defence Select Committee. Members of both Houses, including the Defence Select Committee, were invited to attend the reception.

BAFF invited Commandant Michael Geraghty from RACO, Fleming Vinther who is the Chairman of the Danish trade union of Enlisted Privates and Corporals [HKKF], and Colonel Kim Kristensen from Denmark to address the reception on the conduct of representation in both countries. Michael Geraghty briefed the meeting on:

- (i) the establishment of representation in Ireland, including the



- (ii) the industrial relations structures and mechanisms, including appeals procedures, in the Irish Defence Forces;
- (iii) the scope of representation, including examples of agreements on policy issues such as recruitment and induction, promotion, pay and pensions, accommodation, selection for overseas service and conditions of service; and,

Defence Forces' modernisation and social and workplace partnership.

Fleming Vinther briefed the meeting on the operation of a trade union within the armed forces in Denmark and the ongoing positive relationship between their union and senior military and civil management, including their Minister for Defence.

Col Kristensen spoke about his recent command of a battlegroup in Helmand province in Afghanistan where he shared his area of operations with the British Army; he explained how he works in a positive manner on a daily basis in partnership with the HKKF union representatives in his unit even during operations in Helmand.

The briefing was followed by a detailed question and answer session where much of the focus of the MPs and peers was on the detailed workings of representation within the Defence Forces and in particular its effect on the military chain of command.