

LINDA GILROY MP

reporting back on

Defence Matters



January 2008

Naval Base Review: The Work Goes On

Linda Gilroy continues to fight for the future of Devonport in the MoD's ongoing Naval Base Review.

Defence Secretary Des Browne announced last year that all three of the Royal Navy's main bases – Devonport, Portsmouth and Clyde – are to be retained.

However, key questions remain over the base-porting of ships and submarines and the allocation of refit and maintenance work.

This month will see Linda Gilroy lead a delegation of trade union and city council representatives in a meeting with Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth. This will be followed by a meeting with Chief Secretary to the Treasury Andy Burnham, in which Linda will outline the economic importance of the Navy to the city.

'Honour the Brave'

Linda has committed her support to the Daily Mirror's 'Honour the Brave Campaign', which aims to ensure that the sacrifice of every UK sailor, soldier or airmen killed or wounded in action is recognised through the presentation of a special medal.

In the distant past servicemen who made the ultimate sacrifice were awarded a 'death plaque' or "wound stripe", but no such recognition exists currently. Such medals are common in other countries, notably the American Purple Heart.

Linda said "A British serviceman or woman has been killed on operational duty in every year since 1945 bar one. Today, our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan are encountering some of the most intense fighting seen since the Korean War. So now more than ever it is important that we acknowledge the sacrifices made in our name".

Submariners' Wives

Linda Gilroy has called upon the Ministry of Defence to pay closer attention to the needs of submariners and their families.

Linda asked the Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth to "consider the welfare of submariners' families and, especially, ensure that they can get together before deployment so that they can draw support from each other during the very long time for which submariners may be deployed and out of touch with their families"

In his reply, the Minister recognised "We ought to look at whether we can do more for submariners".

Devonport is currently home to seven Trafalgar class submarines and is also involved in refitting other submarines.



Linda Joins the Navy!

Linda Gilroy has been accepted onto the respected Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme.

Over the course of a year Linda will spend the equivalent of a month with the Senior Service, on placements aboard warships, visiting training establishments and meeting with service personnel.

The scheme was established in 1989 to give MPs and Peers a greater understanding in the armed forces.

Linda Gilroy said "Through my work on the Defence Select Committee and as a Plymouth MP I deal with defence issues on a daily basis. But the chance to actually see what our sailors do on a day-to-day basis and the challenges they face will be invaluable".



Labour & Co-operative Member of Parliament:

Plymouth Sutton

Compton

Drake

Efford & Lipson

Peverell

Keyham

St Peter & the Waterfront

Stoke

Sutton & Mount Gould

Whitehall Roundup

- **Sixth C-17 Globemaster for RAF**

Baroness Taylor, Minister for Defence Equipment & Support, has confirmed the order for a sixth C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft in an £130 million contract with Boeing.

The C-17 has the capacity to transport either 3 Warrior armoured vehicles, 13 land rovers, 1 Chinook or 3 apache gunships. It has a formidable range of 2,400 miles and can land on unpaved runways.

The four C-17 currently in service with the RAF have already proved their worth, transporting equipment to British forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and humanitarian aid to Southeast Asia following the 2004 Tsunami. (4/12/07).

- **Free Post for Troops Extended**

Troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are to continue to benefit from free post. The free service has proved extremely popular with families of those serving overseas since its launch in September. The current arrangement was due to expire in December, however, under a new deal agreed on 12 November 2007 between the Ministry of Defence and Royal Mail, it will now continue after Christmas and is expected to last as long as British forces are serving in these areas (12/11/07).

- **Improvements to veterans healthcare**

Health Secretary Alan Johnson MP Veterans Minister Derek Twigg MP have announced that those veterans whose injuries or ill-health are attributable to their military service will now receive priority treatment on the NHS. A new mental health scheme will also be trialled in six pilot projects across the country (23/11/07).

- **New welfare strategy for troops**

The MoD has announced a new Command Paper, to be published in the Spring, which will set out the Government's vision for enhancing the level of support offered to the forces, their families and veterans. The paper will look at policy across all Government departments (8/11/07).

- **Service complaints commissioner.**

Dr Susan Atkins has been appointed as the first ever Service Complaints Commissioner. Dr Atkins will effectively act as an independent watchdog, ensuring that accusations of bullying, harassment and improper behaviour are dealt with correctly. This move is part of the Government's response to the Deepcut Review (07/11/07).

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In Committee

Linda has been kept busy in recent months through her membership of the Parliamentary Select Committee for Defence.

As part of the on-going investigation into **Medical Care for the Armed Forces**, Linda represented the Committee on a visit to the Ministry of Defence Hospital Unit (MDHU) at Derriford—the tri service facility that replaced Plymouth Naval Hospital when it was closed in 1995. The Report is expected later this month.

December saw the publication of four reports. The first—**UK Land Operations in Iraq**—called upon the Government to set out clearly the future of remaining UK forces in the country. Whilst it praised progress made so far, it also raised concerns over the slow progress of training Iraqi troops and the continuing levels of attacks against Basra's civilian population.

The second concerned the **costs of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan**, predicting they would rise and urging changes to the way in which Parliament approves the necessary increases in expenditure.

The report into the **UK/US Defence Cooperation Treaty** broadly welcomed the Treaty as a framework to strengthening interoperability between UK and US forces.

The final report, relating to the **Iranian hostage incident**, concluded that the event had been deeply damaging to the reputation of the Royal Navy but accepted that lessons had been learnt and necessary changes were being made.

Further investigations continue on the subjects of **NATO & European Defence** and **Defence Equipment**.

Study Into Public Recognition of the Armed Forces

The Prime Minister has asked Quentin Davies MP to lead a study to consider how the public's understanding and appreciation of the armed forces might be enhanced.

The investigation will involve interviews with military personnel, civic and religious leaders, service charities, journalists and representatives from other public bodies. It will also draw on the experience of other democratic countries that regularly deploy their troops into combat zones.

Linda will be meeting with Mr Davies in the New Year and would welcome any comments or opinions that constituents would like to see raised. Contributions can be added to a forum on Linda's website – this can be found by visiting www.lindagilroy.org.uk and selecting 'Your Say'.

Spread the word

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