



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

SPEECH BY THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, LORD PHILLIPS OF WORTH MATRAVERS

AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE COLCHESTER MILITARY COURT CENTRE

THURSDAY, 12TH OCTOBER 2006

High Sheriff, Judges, General, Ladies and Gentlemen -

From the age of 18, when as an ordinary seaman I found myself on shore patrol at closing time in the Main Street of Gibraltar, I have taken a keen interest in military justice. That interest continued during the period when I instructed the Royal Navy Supply Charge Course on criminal law.

I saw, of course, military justice from the Naval viewpoint, where all aspects of it were carried on 'in house'. It seemed to me that Naval justice worked very well and very fairly, but we live in a new world and I am delighted to have been invited to open this new Court Centre building, which marks a significant milestone in the development of the new Military Criminal Justice System.

The unique nature of the demands placed upon Servicemen and women will always need to be reflected in the special character of service courts. Military justice is an integral part of the fabric of Service life, and supports that Service discipline upon which operational effectiveness so crucially depends. At the same time all members of the Armed Forces are citizens, and we must ensure they no less than civilians are treated according to the highest standards of justice and fairness.

The Services are committed to providing exemplary environments for the conduct of court business. The opening of the magnificent new Military Court Centres that have been constructed at Aldergrove, Bulford and that are being constructed at Catterick and Sennelager, and the opening of this Centre here at Colchester, demonstrate that this commitment is well on the way to being turned into reality.

The Centre is for the use of all three Services and I am delighted that the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force are represented here today as well as the Army. This is in a way symbolic of the welcome unification of the systems of law of the three Services that is being brought about by the Armed Forces Bill currently before Parliament.

The burden on prosecutors, in all three Prosecuting Authorities, must surely be eased by having spacious modern accommodation to work from, and the same goes for those who represent defendants.

The presence of the Judge Advocate General and some of his team of Judge Advocates marks the significance of this occasion. The fact that every court martial trial is conducted by an independent member of the judiciary is and is seen to be a guarantee of fair process and the rule of law. And critical to the success of the judges is the support they receive from the staff, in this case those of the Military Court Service, whose Director has welcomed me here today. They too should find their tasks made easier in this wonderful new environment.

I had the benefit of visiting the site earlier in the year, and what I saw then demonstrated a thoughtfulness of design and a standard of construction and finish that are quite outstanding. I wish to offer my heartfelt congratulations to all who have been involved in the design and building of this magnificent facility, represented by those who are here. You can be justifiably proud of providing such a landmark building within the new Colchester Garrison project.

I shall delay no longer the pleasure of inspecting it in its finished form. I am delighted to declare the Colchester Military Court Centre open.

Ends

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