



# Senior military officer and keen sportsman

## Vincent Savino

Born: July 27th, 1927  
Died: August 28th, 2022

Vincent Savino, who has died aged 95, was a senior officer in the Defence Forces (Óglaigh na hÉireann) in which he served with distinction for 44 years, both in Ireland and overseas, attaining the rank of major general.

He served with the United Nations on multiple occasions and, shortly after his retirement in 1989, helped found the Irish United Nations Veterans Association (IUNVA) of which he was national president.

A keen sportsman and fitness enthusiast, whether on the playing field or carrying out his professional commitments, he gave it his all. He was widely respected and liked, and served as a coach and mentor to many.

Vincent (Vinnie) Francis Savino was born in July 1927 and grew up in Dublin. His father Frank was a civil servant in the Department of Defence, a professional exemplar that was reflected in the lives of his children, of which there were two – Vinnie and Marie. She married Pat Monaghan, a member of the Defence Forces who rose to the rank of brigadier general.

### Origins

The Savinos originated in Italy, just outside Rome. In 1898, a young man named Giuseppe Savino left Italy for the United States, like many of his contemporaries. But when Giuseppe's ship stopped in Cork, he disembarked and subsequently met a woman, also of Italian extraction, named Maria Gassparro. As Vinnie Savino explained

in 2020 to Deryck Vincent, writing on the website Cricket-Europe.com, Giuseppe stayed in Ireland and moved to Dublin, where he and Maria settled in the Aungier Street area.

Their son Frank raised his own family in Glasnevin. Vinnie was educated in the O'Connell's School on North Richmond Street.

Sport was a consuming interest from an early age. He played Gaelic football, soccer, rugby, athletics, boxing and he also swam. He played on the O'Connell's GAA team and, as goalkeeper for the Dublin minor team in 1945, won an All-Ireland medal, his side beating Leitrim 4-7 to 0-4.

Not long after that triumph, in November 1945, Savino entered the Defence Forces'

19th Cadet Class from which he graduated two years later and was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant, and posted to A Company in the 4th Infantry Battalion.

Regular promotions followed that saw him rise through the ranks, to captain (1957), commandant (1971), lieutenant colonel (1978), colonel (1982) and brigadier general (1984) as general officer commanding (GOC) of the Eastern Command. He retired in 1989, having been further promoted, in 1987, to major general and quartermaster general of the Defence Forces.

Along the way, there were tours of duty with the United Nations, the first in May 1962 as a staff officer in the Military Personnel Section at the

headquarters of the United Nations Operation in the Congo, Ireland's first UN peacekeeping mission.

Reflecting many years later, Savino recalled the comparative lack of preparedness of the Irish troops.

### 'Badly prepared'

"It was grim," he told this newspaper's Michael O'Regan. "We were badly prepared. In fact, we were not prepared at all. We had none of the comforts of home, none of the clothing, proper living accommodation and so on. It is much better today."

From October 1965 to March 1966 he served as the welfare officer with the 5th Infantry Group, United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

(UNFICYP). He was an unarmed military observer with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) from 1970 to 1972 and he was stationed on the Suez Canal during the War of Attrition between Egypt and Israel (March 1969 to August 1970).

He was the Commanding Officer of 44th Infantry Battalion United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from November 1978 to May 1979. He returned to UNIFIL as a Colonel as the Deputy Chief of Staff Operations in September 1980 for a one-year tour of duty.

The recently retired former chief of staff of the Defence Forces, Vice Admiral Mark Mellett DCM, said Maj Gen Savino had a legendary status within the Defence Forces and

■ Brig Gen Vincent Savino, who served in the Defence Forces for 44 years, at Cathal Brugha Barracks in 1986; and (below) at an annual UN veterans wreath laying ceremony in Arbour Hill in 2008. PHOTOGRAPH: INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERS IRELAND/NLI COLLECTION; BRYAN O'BRIEN

had been a true leader.

"He empowered others with the capacity to lead," said Mr Mellett. "He was razor sharp and had the ability to accommodate different perspectives. He was self-effacing and humble, and was highly respected."

Savino qualified as a physical training instructor in 1949 and throughout his adult life both played and coached rugby and cricket.

He served as president of Wanderers in 1984/85, a year in which the club's 1st XV won the Leinster Senior League defeating Lansdowne in the final.

### Honorary president

For many years he was involved in fundraising for Epilepsy Ireland and he was honorary president from 2011.

Vinnie Savino was married for 65 years to Catherine, known to all as Kate. She was a yoga teacher for some 30 years, many of them at Marino College, where her husband began a keep-fit class in 1963, which ran for 53 years. In 2015, City of Dublin Education and Training Board made a special presentation, acknowledging their contribution to the college.

Vinnie Savino was predeceased by his sister Marie. He is survived by his children, Gina, Anna, Rosa, Caterina, Elena and Franz, his grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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