



THE CLINTON VISIT

Limerick welcomes the US President



Members of the American Legion form a guard-of-honour in Newcastle West, Bill Hughes, Mike O'Connor, Mike O'Sullivan, Patrick Barry, Joe Willis, Michael Devine, Glen Fry, commander.

US first couple greeted with red carpet and a warm welcome

By **RON KIRWAN**

WELCOME! Welcome! Welcome! Mr and Mrs Clinton, said six-year-old William Twomey, his three-year-old sister Alice, and five-year-old Michelle Cleary to President and Mrs Clinton as they stepped onto the ramp at Shannon Airport at 9.35 on Friday night.

The three children of staff members at Shannon Airport presented Mrs Clinton with a bouquet of flowers and their brief spoken welcomes, as the US couple made their first visit to the region.

Airforce One carrying the Presidential couple had approached the airport from the Shannon Estuary and touched down 10 minutes earlier before taxiing to a stop in a lighted area near the terminal building.

The first couple alighted hand-in-hand onto a red

carpet and a warm reception as they began their short visit to the region.

"We are glad to be here and are looking forward to our visit," said President Clinton, as they were welcomed by Minister of State for Education, Willie O'Dea.

Deputy Tony Killeen, Antoin Mac Unfraidh, chief-of-protocol at the Department of Foreign Affairs, and Barry O'Shea, general manager, Aer Rianta Shannon were also in the welcoming party.

Members of Aer Rianta staff and the large security and media presence applauded the Clintons as they disembarked from the aircraft; the applause continued as the President side-stepped his limousine for an unscheduled walkabout.

President Clinton then joined the First Lady in their bullet-proof limousine and the 50 vehicle motorcade set off for Adare Manor through Shannon Town and Limerick city where flag-waving crowds lined the streets.

Security at Shannon Airport was so tight that the media bus escorted by Gar-

da outriders and with three gardai on board was refused entry at the service entry to the airport.

The bus had to be diverted to the arrivals area of the airport; the media were then escorted to a holding area in the duty free hall before taking their places on the airport ramp.

The President and Mrs Clinton left from Shannon on Saturday after the President's helicopter flight from Ballybunion and Mrs Clinton had returned from a day sightseeing in Clare.

After their departure, the Taoiseach, Mr Ahern, said that the presidential couple were unlikely to pay a return visit to the region before 2002.

"I think they'll come back sometime in 2002 or 2003 as private citizens—but I look forward to meeting them on St Patrick's Day," said the Taoiseach.

Mr Ahern and his partner, Celia Larkin, were at the steps leading to Airforce One as Bill and Hillary Clinton arrived at the airport.

Also present on the tarmac were Arts Minister,

Sile de Valera; Education Minister, Micheál Martin; US Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith; Cllr PJ Kelly, Chairman of Clare County Council, and county manager, Willie Moloney.

"They thanked us all for a wonderful three days in the island of Ireland, particularly they were thanking me for the last few days here. They appreciated the hospitality," said Mr Ahern.

According to the Taoiseach, President Clinton was very pleased that the peace process had moved on considerably while they were in Ireland; Mr Ahern thanked him for his contribution.

"They look forward to keeping closely in touch with us over the next few months," he said.

Mr Ahern said that he appreciated the key part already played by President Clinton in strengthening the agreement reached between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland in May.

Mr Ahern said he was pleased with David Trimble's decision to meet Gerry Adams later this week.



Faillte go Sionna: President Clinton is welcomed to Shannon Airport at the start of his visit. (LL)



Pat Wall, Bank of Ireland, with President Clinton. (LL)



Chief Inspector Liam Guinn, Ennis, and formerly of Roxboro, meets the US President. (LL)