

Military History Society of Ireland

NEWSLETTER – 1/2006

1. Foreign Tour 2005 – Central Europe

In September 2005, some 60 members of the Society visited Vienna, Prague and Budapest. Highlights of the tour included a memorable visit to the field of Austerlitz - arguably Napoleon's greatest victory – and the military museums of these great capital cities. Special thanks are due to the tour organiser, Brigadier General Saunderson, the Irish diplomatic service for receptions in each of the three embassies and to the President, Colonel Donal O'Carroll who so ably dealt with the military aspects of the various sites.

2. Foreign Tour 2007 – The Peninsular War

The Peninsular War, 1807-1814, has a special place in the history of the Irish Regiments in the British Army. It is there that proud units such as the 27th (Inniskillings), 87th (Prince of Wales's Irish Regiment) and the 88th (Connaught Rangers) won fame while simultaneously proclaiming their Irish identity. Other Irish units that served there included the 4th Royal Irish Dragoons and the 18th Regiment of Light Dragoons – sometimes called "The Irish Hussars". If the latter units failed to garner as many battle honours as their infantry counterparts, it was not for lack of trying. They all won the grudging respect of Wellington and many of the sayings attributed to him about his Irish troops originated there. For Napoleon, of course, it was a different story. The Peninsular War

was his 'Spanish Ulcer' that drained his strength and diverted resources from his struggle against the forces of Russia, Prussia and Austria.

The Society intends to revisit some of the battlefields of this campaign in its next foreign tour – Autumn 2007. Full details will follow. In the meantime, for background reading one can commend David Gates's history of the campaign, appropriately entitled 'The Spanish Ulcer' and recently reprinted. Also, the Osprey 'Men-at-Arms' series No. 382, Wellington's Peninsula Regiments – 1 – The Irish gives a useful potted history of the Irish contribution.

3. Lucius Emerson, M.A., 1911 – 2005

It was with great regret that we learned of the death of Lucius Emerson. Lucius had long been a stalwart member of this Society. His work on many aspects of the history of Donegal was recognised last summer by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. On 15 June, 2005, Lucius was conferred with the degree of Master of Arts (First Class Honours) in recognition of a lifetime of learning achievement. He was president of the Donegal Historical Society, had served for many years in the FCA and had taught for 40 years in Ballyshannon and in Stranorlar. May he rest in peace in his beloved Donegal.

4. The Irish Military History Exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland at Collins Barracks.

This new exhibition will open this summer at the National Museum of Ireland. The exhibition aims to tell the story of the Military History of Ireland from 1550 to modern day Ireland. In the past, Irishmen have worn uniforms, fighting for a variety of reasons in foreign armies in distant countries. Today, Irish men and women serve all over the world in Irish uniform as an important part of the United Nations peacekeeping forces.

The planned galleries will be a major advance in the development throughout Ireland of an inclusive attitude to all our traditions. They will also promote, at home and abroad, a greater awareness of the contribution of the Irish Soldier, not only to his homeland but also to the adopted homelands of so many. The exhibition will trace the military history of Ireland through three themes: **Soldiering in Ireland; Soldiering Abroad; Soldiering in the 20th Century.**

These themes will highlight and explain some of the more famous incidents of Ireland's Military History including the Flight of the Earls, the Wild Geese, the Battle of Fontenoy and the role of the Irish in the American Civil War. In addition, the exhibition will tell the story of Collins Barracks (formerly the Royal Barracks), the role of the British Army in Ireland from 1500 to 1922, and the history of the Irish Regiments in the British Army. Where possible, Collins Barracks will be used as a specific example of the way in which military occupation influenced the lives of local men and women. The exhibition will highlight links with other countries and their armies and the social and

economic reasons which, in many cases, forced Irish men and women to serve in foreign armies. Finally, the exhibition will explain the history of the Irish Defence Forces from its creation through the Emergency and finally its current peacekeeping role with the United Nations.

The exhibition will be based on the Ground Floor and 1st Floor of the North Block of Clarke Square in Collins Barracks covering 1,700 sq. m. An 822 sq. m. extension has been built at the back of the building to provide a large gallery space; this will improve circulation and provide a space to display larger objects.

The Irish Defence Forces are lending a number of items for the exhibition including: Miles Magister aircraft, a De Havilland DH 115 Vampire jet, a 12 Pdr. Cannon which belonged to the Royal Irish Artillery, a OQF 18 Pdr artillery gun, a 40 mm Bofors 1.60 Anti-aircraft gun, a Ford Armoured car and a Panhard APC AML VTT M3. In addition, there are large numbers of loans from military museums in England and United States.

It is hoped to prepare a private tour for the Society before the exhibition opens and these details will be announced in May.

5. Book News – 1

In March 2003, an Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D. formally announced that the Bureau of Military History Papers were available to the public and to researchers. In the course of his remarks he said "Today, 82 years after the end of the War of Independence in 1921, a new light is being shone on an era about which much has been written".

Already we are seeing the results of researchers using these most valuable sources. Professor Charles Townshend, author of a seminal study of the War of Independence, makes full use of the Bureau of Military History Witness Statements to give the most complete analysis yet of 1916 in his new book Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion, Penguin/Allen Lane. His use of the BMH sources is particularly impressive in his analysis of the plans for the provinces and the confusion and inactivity that resulted from the commands and countermands.

The Witness Statements are most valuable for local analysis. Two recent county histories make full use of them. The Quiet County by Michael Rafter gives a history of the Lewis Brigade I.R.A. while Kathleen Hegarty Thorne covers the exploits of the Roscommon Volunteers in her magnificently illustrated book 'They put the Flag a-Flyin'- The Roscommon Volunteers, 1916 - 1923. Laois was not to the forefront in the fighting in the War of Independence and, as such, is probably more typical of the experience of most counties. Hence such a local study is all the more welcome. Both books also cover the Civil War period. T. Ryle Dwyer's latest book 'The Squad and the Intelligence Operations of Michael Collins uses the Witness Statements of survivors of the legendary squad and other members of the Dublin Brigade to trace the brutal war that was waged on the streets of Dublin.

There is no doubt that there will be many more such books using the BMH papers and we look forward to all of them.

6. Book News 2

Participation in the UN force in the Congo was a defining experience for the modern Irish Army. At last this experience is getting the historical coverage it deserves. In October last the Irish Academic Press published a collection of reminiscences of veterans of ONUC – the UN Force in the Congo – which brings vividly to life the hopes, the fears and the day-to-day life of Irish soldiers serving there. The veterans who contribute include not only soldiers but journalists, diplomats, interpreters and Congolese. Entitled 'The Irish Army In The Congo 1960 – 1964 –The Far Battalions' and edited by David O'Donoghue it is a worthy addition to the bibliography of the Irish Defence Forces. Declan Power's book – The Siege At Jadotville – covers one of the most controversial events in the Irish participation in Onuc. Significantly it is sub-titled 'The Irish Army's Forgotten Battle'. Perhaps the best account of Irish participation in ONUC is contained in a lengthy essay by Edward Burke in a volume called 'Obligations And Responsibilities – Ireland And The United Nations, 1955 – 2005' edited by Michael Kennedy and Deirdre McMahon and published by the IPA. It is detailed, thought provoking and a tribute to those who soldiered there in almost impossible conditions. The same book also contains essays on UNOGIL and UNTSO by Richard Heaslip aptly called 'The pre-Congo origins of Ireland's involvement in peacekeeping.

7. Book News 3

The Naval and Military Press continue with their reprint of scarce military titles at affordable prices. Their recent catalogue includes such gems as: 1st Battalion, The Faugh-a-Ballaghs in the Great War by Brig. Gen. A.R. Burrows; History of the Royal Irish

Regiment of Artillery by Maj. J.J. Crooks; History of the Royal Irish Rifles by Lt. Col. G.B. Lauries; History of the VIII King's Royal Irish Hussars by Rev. Robert. H. Murray and many, many more. Their website at www.naval-military-press.com is worthy of a browse.

8. The Yellow Ford

The Battle of the Yellow Ford, 1598, Hugh O'Neill's greatest victory, has featured in memorable field days of the Society, most recently in 1998. Remarkably, the exact scene of the battle remained obscure until recently, scholars not being able to other than narrow it down to a three-and-a-half square mile area between Armagh and Blackwater town. Now new research by battlefield archaeologists Paul Logue and Jim O'Neill has identified the precise locations of most of the main events of the battle. Working for the Northern Ireland's Environment and Heritage Service they have found two of the three major areas of fighting – strung out over a mile long killing ground. Field surveys have yielded sword fragments, buttons, lead shot and other military equipment. Their success illustrates the potential for battlefield archaeology on many other sites such as Kinsale or Aughrim.

9. Summer Field-Trip 2006

Keeping in Touch

Would you like to receive email reminders of our lectures and other relevant events organised by the Society or which come to its attention? If so, send the message 'MHSI Events List' to mullpaul@Indigo.ie. Also check the Society's website www.mhsi.ie from time to time where additional information may be posted.

Limerick is justly famous for its sieges in 1690 and in 1691 and its epic resistance on both occasions. But the longest and most costly siege of Limerick was in fact the Cromwellian siege of 1651 which lasted from June until the final surrender by Hugh Dubh O'Neill on October 27. It is estimated that over 2,000 English soldiers died and at least twice that number of Irish soldiers and civilians. That event, the earlier siege of King John's castle in 1642 and other sieges in the Limerick area will be the theme of this year's summer field-trip on June 3 – 5. Full details will follow.

10. XXXII CIHM Congress.

The XXXII Congress of the International Commission for Military History will take place in Potsdam, Germany during the week of August 20 – 25th. The Congress theme is "Nation State, Nationalism and the Military". The Society's speaker will be Lt. General (ret.) Colm Mangan, Vice-President of the Society, former Chief-of-Staff, who will present a paper on "Multi-national commitments to Peace Support Operations". Full details of the Congress can be found on the website: www.cihm2006.ie