



A drawing depicting the original scale of Collins Barracks which will house the new Military History Exhibition. Courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland.

# ‘The Irish At War’

## A Major Irish Military History Exhibition Due To Open in 2005

**H**oused in what was reputedly the oldest continuously occupied Military Barracks in the world, the 5th Infantry Battalion walked out of the gates of Collins Barracks, Dublin, for the last time in 2000. Since then the former Barracks has formed a cornerstone of the National Museum’s policy of expansion and development. At present, the National Museum is preparing the largest ‘single-subject’ exhibition ever compiled in this country, focusing exclusively on Irish military history. ‘The Irish At War’ exhibition is massive in scale and ambitious in scope and is due to be opened to the public late in 2005.

The exhibition will tell the stories of Irish soldiers throughout the many campaigns and battles which they were involved in between the Elizabethan wars of the 16th century and the final departure of Ireland’s UNIFIL commitment from the

Lebanon in 2001. The massive historical time frame which the exhibition hopes to encompass has led to the discovery and

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exposure of a vast range of highly interesting military artifacts. The Military History exhibition will, when completed, occupy a prominent place in the Museum

and according to Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism John O’Donoghue it will also mean a continuation of the historical military connections with Collins Barracks. “The Exhibition will be the largest ever undertaken to date by the National Museum and will extend to 2,000 square metres. The estimated cost of the exhibition, including construction, is in the region of €9 million,” added the Minister. The display will be separated into a series of Military History Galleries covering different themes and will also boast audio-visual features and computerised displays. Some of the different galleries include ‘The British Garrison in Ireland’, ‘Battles in Ireland’, ‘The Irish Soldier Abroad’ and ‘Soldiers of the Irish State.’ In addition to the more conventional trappings of military exhibitions, such as flags, uniforms and weapons, the exhibition has also sought to tell many personal stories, often traumatic,



Irish troops in the Lebanon. The exhibition will cover almost the entire spectrum of Irish military history.

tragic or blackly humorous in nature. Siobhan Pierce is one of the exhibition's curators: "We hope that the level of detail which we are seeking to achieve with the Military History exhibition will resonate with the Irish public and past and present members of the Irish military who may have stories to tell. We are doing our best to blend items of genuine and unique historical significance with items of a personal nature which reflected the conditions of combat and military service for Irish soldiers at the time." For instance

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the exhibition has some unique and striking pieces such the hat worn by Padraic Pearse in the GPO during the 1916 rising, the helmet of a slain Russian soldier from the Crimean War, with the tell-tale cleft of a

sabre across it. The helmet might have survived, but you can be pretty certain the Russian wearing it didn't. There are also a host of personal journals and diaries from Irish troops and many unique and amazingly decorative pieces of 'trench-art' made by hand by soldiers in the trenches of battlefields in the earlier part of the 20th Century. One of the most unique pieces is a cigarette lighter ingeniously fashioned from a spent ammunition shell.

The staff at the exhibition have received much assistance and advice from both past and present members of the Irish Defence Forces, which they much appreciate: "The guidance of officer's within the Defence Forces has been invaluable, and continues to be invaluable, throughout the collation of this major exhibition. Their insight's into the many varied chapters which make up Ireland's rich military heritage will greatly benefit the exhibition."

While the exhibition has amassed a vast quantity of material there is still a lot more to do, that is why the Museum has recently launched a National Appeal for Military History Material. "We are appealing to anyone within the Defence Forces, and indeed to general public, who might have articles or artifacts of military significance to make them available to this ambitious exhibition," adds Siobhan Pierce. "We are interested in anything that tells a story or refers in a unique way to Irish military history. What we

want to do is create an outstanding repository of Ireland's martial heritage and we really need further items to add additional depth and character to our collections."

### **The Military History Exhibition Needs You!**

In particular, the exhibition is seeking military, economic and social material relating to British Garrisons in Ireland and also relating to both military and civilians experiences from the 'Emergency' period during the Second World War. However, the museum would like to talk to anyone with material that they believe would make a valuable addition to the exhibition. For further details regarding the exhibition and making donations to it please call the exhibition office on Tel: 01 648 6467.

*Note: Donations to the National Museum of Ireland involve a full transfer of ownership, including copyright. We cannot guarantee that donated objects will be placed on exhibition, however they will become part of the national collection of Irish military material, available for research and preserved for future generations.*