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www.military.ie
Fire Fighter Remembered

On February 8th a memorial service for the late fire fighter Sgt Denis ‘Jack’ Whelan took place in DFTC, Curragh Camp. Jack was a member of the Camp’s Fire Service and former president of PDFORRA who died tragically while on a fire call in 1996. Pictured at his memorial are (l-r): Lt Col Patrick O’Leary (OC DFLB), Cpl Terry O’Leary, Ptes Mick Winders, Noel Ging, Col Joe Dowling (OC CSC), Ptes Bernard Lynch, Vinny Burke and Sgt Dan Whelan (all Fire Service DFTC).

First Timer

At a medal parade in Camp Ville, Kosovo, Brig Gen Gerry Hegarty (Comd MNTF (C)) presented Mr Colm O’Conaill (Political Advisor to the General) with his KFOR medal. Mr O’Conaill is a Department of Foreign Affairs diplomat and it’s the first time an Irishman held such an appointment, attached to a Defence Forces unit overseas.

Photo by: Comdt P White.

Well Done Kevin

At a ceremony at IT Carlow in November, Sgt Kevin Gibbons (1 Ops Wing) was conferred with a First Class Honours Degree in Mechanical Engineering. Sgt Gibbons, an Aircraft Inspector in 103 Sqn, also won the Irish Business Systems Award for achieving the highest results in his year. Sgt Gibbons is pictured receiving the award from Dr Ruaidhrí Neavyn (Dir IT Carlow).

In Memory

On February 13th, EUFOR laid a memorial stone in honour of the eleven members of the Macedonian Contingent who died in January 2008 when their helicopter crashed near Skopje on their return home. Irish troops serving with No7 Irish Contingent took part in the Ceremony. Pictured (l-r): Sgt Maj Paddy Doyle, CQMSs John Nolan, Dan Ahern, Sgt Joe Naughton, Cpl Francis Flood, Cey Sgt Peller O’Rourke, Lt Col Des Doyle, Cpl Vanessa Wrenne, Sgts Cathal Quirke, Paul Devine and PO Andy Devine.

Aye Aye Captain

Miss Orla Thompson is seen here trying out the Captain’s chair during a recent visit to LÉ Orla. Photo by: Mr Kevin Thompson.
Far from the madding crowd

Capt Ian Harrington send in this recent photo of himself with a couple of the locals in the Western Sahara. Capt Harrington is serving with MINURSO, one of the remotest UN missions in the World.

A Warm Welcome

Brig Gen Seán McCann (GOC DFTC) is seen here with Cllr Mary Glennon (Mayor of Kildare County Council) in the DFTC on January 28th. It was the first time the council held its monthly meeting in the Curragh Camp and the visiting councillors and officials got a tour of the camp, including a warm welcome from the Chief of Staff, Lt Gen Dermot Earley.

Good Luck Sean

BOMS Sean Hensey (D Ord), one of the longest serving BOMS, retired in January after 40 year’s service. Sean joined in 1969 and trained in the CTD Curragh, before been posted to Clancy Bks in 1969. BOMS Hensey served 11 times overseas (10 in Lebanon and one in Cyprus).

A Family Affair

President Mary McAleese is seen here with members of 2 Cav Sqn and their families on February 19th in Áras an Uachtaráin. The troopers of 2 Cav Sqn provide the Presidential escort of honour and the president invited the families to her home on a courtesy call. Photo by: Armn Billy Galligan.

Eyes Front

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Mr Eamon Ryan TD inspects a Naval Guard of Honour accompanied by LIL Tadhg Clarke at a ceremony in the new National Maritime Campus at Ringaskiddy, Cork Harbour. Photo by: Lt Cdr Ward.

On Guard

Pictured in Camp Ville, Kosovo are members of 1 Irish Guard Platoon who served as a security detail for the camp. The platoon has recently returned to Ireland and all come from units in the DFTC. Standing in the front are (l-r): Sgt J Chapman and Lt G Fagan. Photo by: Comdt P White.
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Up to 450 Defence Forces men and women will eventually deploy to the mission area, and during the 12-month period of the Government’s agreed participation, a total of 1,200 Irish soldiers will serve on this mission.
allowing the deployment of French, Swedish and Austrian troops last week. The latest delays have shifted our initial departure dates but not our main deployment in the coming months.

Fourteen EU nations have agreed to commit troops operating under the unanimously approved UN Security Council Resolution 1778 in a multidimensional peacekeeping operation. The military force, authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter will work with UN agencies and the NGO community and will compliment the neighbouring UN/African Union peacekeeping mission recently launched in Darfur.

Limerick man, Lieutenant General Pat Nash commands this 3,700 strong military force, which is a great honour for him, his family and the Defence Forces. As Operational Commander since October 2007, he has had the task of translating political decisions into military plans and objectives.

The Operational HQ is based in Paris and General Nash will command the mission through his Force Commander on the ground, French Brigadier General Jean-Philippe Ganasica who in turn is assisted by Deputy Force Commander, Galway man Colonel Derry Fitzgerald.

The Ranger Wing will operate with other Special Forces units from Austria, Belgium, France and Sweden. The will be based in Camp Croci in Abeche, in Eastern Chad, where they will demonstrate a robust presence in the area of operations to deter any rebel groups from interfering with the refugees and IDPs. Initial activity will include reconnaissance operations and long-range patrols to familiarise themselves with the area of operations and to gain detailed knowledge on the armed groups who are active in the region. The deployment of these highly skilled soldiers will allow EUFOR Chad/CAR to set about enforcing UN Resolution 1778. Over time and in tandem with the many other elements of this operation, this will bring about much needed stability to the region.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Defence Forces participation in UN operations. Overseas service has been a major motivation factor for recruitment, retention and advancement and has provided great impetus for ongoing modernisation of the Defence Forces.

All of the 73 previous overseas missions and over 58,000 individual tours of duty have had some risk and many Defence Forces personnel have lost their lives or been wounded in the cause of peace. As always, force protection is a priority and Defence Forces personnel on this mission will not be put at unnecessary risk.

As the Ranger Wing commences operations in Chad, the balance of 372 personnel continues to train at home for their impending deployment. This mission-specific training combined with state of the art equipment and the experience of their leaders, at all levels, will contribute significantly to risk minimisation. The threat assessment for the mission is defined as ‘Medium Risk’. The risk assessment for Lebanon in 2006 and Liberia in late 2003 was similar. The intention in Chad is that our soldiers will patrol in strength, as we did in Liberia. We will not initiate hostile action, but will always be prepared to react, should the situation demand. This international mission has a clear UN mandate. Our intention is to work specifically to the military tasks defined by this.

The Rangers will be followed by an advance party of military logisticians and engineers who will commence building a camp for the Irish battalion to occupy as its main operating base adjacent to the town of Goz Beida in South Eastern Chad. Initially, living conditions will be basic. Many of the personnel being deployed will have had previous experience in Somalia, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire, Western Sahara and Eritrea and this will boost confidence in their ability to overcome such difficulties in pursuit of their mission. However, as the extensive array of transport, tentage, communications, medical, catering, electrical, engineering and welfare equipment are deployed conditions will improve. The bulk of this equipment will arrive by sea into the port of Douolal in Cameroon and will be transported approximately 2,500 kilometres overland.

The main group of soldiers will deploy in May and commence operations. Like all Defence Forces missions abroad they will also engage in limited humanitarian work on selected projects, in addition to their
military tasks. This will bring soldiers into direct contact with the people that this mission is mandated to protect and will continue mutual respect, cultural awareness and understanding between the two groups. Such a relationship is key to the success of any mission, especially one so strongly underscored by humanitarian objectives.

As Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces, I know the task ahead for our troops will be challenging, often complex, sometimes lonely, but ultimately professionally very satisfying. I am very aware of the families and loved ones left behind when the men and women of the Defence Forces deploy overseas and I am grateful to them for their continued support and understanding. This is a very important contribution to the Defence Forces and one that I wholehearted acknowledge.

Our Minister for Defence, Mr Willie O’Dea TD has said participation in overseas service “is a concrete expression of Ireland’s foreign policy objectives” and it is a stated role of the Defence Forces. Chad and the Central African Republic are undoubtedly in need of our assistance and the deployment of this EU force is critical in helping to return stability to this troubled African region. It is a mission that will test our organisation, planning, logistical capability and most of all our professional soldiers. I am very confident that the soldiers deploying to Chad will continue our proud tradition of professional, impartial and dedicated service. This service has become the recognised international hallmark of Irish soldiers who have deployed all over the world. Along with the 427 other soldiers who are currently operating in 19 different missions in 18 different countries, I am certain they will do Óglaigh Na hÉireann and the nation proud.
In recent years, both military and sport parachuting in the Defence Forces has undergone exponential growth. The recent arrival of new Air Corps helicopters and the purchase of military static line parachute systems capable of carrying a parachutist and his kit required that current Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) to be re-examined. A review of international best practice was undertaken with drop zone management, training and jumpmaster’s SOPs updated. As part of this process, four members of An Para-Chumann Míleata (PCM - the Defence Forces Parachute Training Team) travelled to Fort Bragg, North Carolina in December 2007 to take part in ‘Operation Toy Drop 2007’. In 2005, members of the Army Ranger Wing took part in a similar concentration.

This effectively was a training concentration for the US and international airborne community, which had both a professional and a charitable function. All the participating paratroopers and jumpmasters brought toys for orphaned children, which are distributed through local charities. Now in its tenth year ‘Operation Toy Drop’ continues to positively affect the lives of children through the generosity of the paratroopers.

With Pope Air Force Base located directly adjacent to both Fort Bragg and the drop zones, the exercise was very well coordinated. Many well-known US Army units participated, such as the 82nd Airborne Division and elements of US Army Special Forces.

The visit provided the perfect opportunity for PCM jumpmasters to join other airborne units in training and to observe international best practices. Over an eighteen-day period, a full schedule of airborne activities was conducted.

This included jumpmaster standardisation training, aircraft drills, dispatching of large numbers of parachutists and the opportunity to conduct freefall
Certainly, it was gratifying to hear that the performance of our senior jumpmasters, particularly Flt Sgt Jay Curley (MTS Air Corps) and Coy Sgt Graham Nuttall (6 Inf Bn) was the subject of very favourable comment from both the US authorities and other jumpmasters.

Over the course of the operation, over 1,000 troops were dispatched from four different types of aircraft. On any particular day, a jumpmaster could find himself dispatching and jumping from a C130 Hercules, a CH47 Chinook helicopter or the CASA 212 (similar to but smaller than our own Air Corps CASA aircraft). Depending on the aircraft in use, the jumpmaster had to adapt and amend his orders and checks to accommodate such details as the routing of the static line and the seating plan. Of particular interest to the Irish delegation was the use of the UH60 Blackhawk helicopter. For parachuting purposes, the Blackhawk is very similar to the Air Corps AW139 and the SOPs employed by the US jumpmasters were found to be very similar to our own.

The Irish delegation got the opportunity to cross train and jump under the command of Canadian, German and Chilean jumpmasters, thereby obtaining the various wing qualifications. In total, over 500 sets of replica wings were issued to paratroopers from around the world who were dispatched ‘as Gaeilge’ by Irish Jumpmasters, using the Irish SOPs. The use of the Irish words of command was a particular talking point especially among the many Irish-Americans, some of who made special requests to jump under the command of Irish jumpmasters.

Overall the concentration was a great learning experience and it taught us that, though small, the DF Parachute Training Team is on a par with the best of its international counterparts. Looking forward to 2008, PCM will continue to run monthly training sessions in the Curragh for current and potential members of the ‘Black Knights’, the Defence Forces Parachute Display Team. Having carried out sixteen high profile displays in 2007 as part of the DF’s public relations effort, the development and maintenance of display skills remain a priority of the training cadre. The culmination of this training will be a Freefall and Display Skills Course, which will take place from June 9th to 27th, during which PCM will qualify new members of the team in time for the busy summer season. To further develop our military jumpmaster cadre, PCM will also conduct a military static line jumpmaster course from August 11th to 29th. On the sports side, PCM hopes to send a team to the CISM regional championships in late 2008, at a location to be announced in the coming weeks. For aspiring members of the ‘Black Knights’, further details of the June Course will be published in the next edition of Connect.

HALO (High Altitude, Low Opening) and static-line jumps. Luckily, the small size of the DF’s training cadre demands that PCM instructors have to be cross skilled in all aspects of parachute jumping, training and management. The US hosts impressed to find that the Irish jumpmaster team included two AFF (Accelerated Freefall) instructors, two HALO instructors, a tandem master and a member of the Irish National Skydiving Team who has represented Ireland at the recent World Cup in Russia.

The fact that all our jumpmasters are highly experienced freefall and display jumpers was also noted, particularly during accuracy landings.
The Inter Services Cross Country Competition was held in the Phoenix Park on January 30th and was hosted by An Garda Síochána. The competition encourages participation in cross-country within the Prison Service, An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. This year was dominated by the Defence Forces, whose runners took all three team events, the first Senior and Masters individual competitions.

The results were:

**Senior Men**
- Winner: Cpl E O’Neill (B Coy 3 Inf Bn)
- Runner-up: Pte P Buckley (6 Inf Bn)
- 3rd Place: Pte N Kelly (4 Fd Engr Coy)

**Senior Team Winners (Defence Forces)**
- Cpl E O’Neill (B Coy 3 Inf Bn), D Nugent, Ptes P Buckley (both 6 Inf Bn), N Kelly (4 Fd Engr Coy), C Merritt (HQ 1 S Bde) and G Sweeney (4 Inf Bn).

**Senior Ladies**
- Winner: Gda L Manning
- Runner-up: Pte L Nolan (12 Inf Bn)
- 3rd Place: U Hayden (Prison Service)

**Ladies Team Winners (Defence Forces)**
- Ptes L Nolan (12 Inf Bn), G O’Connor (4 Inf Bn), Cpl C Reynolds (1 Cn Cois) and Lt D Murphy (4 Fd Arty Regt).

**Masters 0/40**
- Winner: CPO M Buckley (Naval Service)
- Runner-up: Pte E Lynch (6 Inf Bn)
- 3rd Place: Pte T McSweeney (DFPP)

**Masters 0/40 Team Winners (Defence Forces)**
- CPO M Buckley (Naval Service), Sgt J Devlin (USAC), Ptes E Lynch (6 Inf Bn) and T McSweeney (DFPP).

**Masters 0/50**
- Winner: Sgt J Doyle (2 Fd CIS Coy)
- Runner-up: Gda Sgt K Grogan
- 3rd Place: Coy Sgt W O’Riordan (HQ 1 S Bde)

Participation in sport is an important part of a soldier’s life. This year we hope to feature more sports and adventure sports in An Cosantóir and in this month issue we report on basketball, indoor athletics, cross country and boxing.
Defence Forces Basketball 2008

This year’s one-day basketball ‘blitz’ took place in the Mary Immaculate College, Limerick on January 28th and was hosted by the 12 Inf Bn. The tournament saw teams from all Army Brigades, Naval Service and Air Corps. Pool A consisted of the 2 E Bde, Naval Service and the DFTC with the Air Corps, 1 S Bde, and 4 W Bde making up Pool B. After some closely contested games and unexpected results saw the 2 E Bde and 1 S Bde qualify as pool winners with the Naval Service and Air Corps qualifying as runners up. A closely fought semi-final between the Naval Service and the 1 S Bde saw the favourites lose out by a score of 29–23. The Naval Service faced the 2 E Bde, which proved too much for the Navy who lost 58–27 in the final, with Pte Conor Gallagher (27 Inf Bn) taking the Most Valuable Player award.

**Pool A**
- 2 E Bde–28vNS–20
- 2 E Bde–39vDFTC–10
- DFTC–17vNS–24

**Pool B**
- Air Corps–30v1 S Bde–28
- Air Corps–16v4 W Bde–19
- 1 S Bde–33v4 W Bde–20

**Semi Final**
- 2 E Bde–32vAir Corps–26
- 1 S Bde–23vNS–29

**Final**
- 2 E Bde–58vNS–27

Below (top): Naval Service Basketball team and (below): 2 E Bde Basketball team.

Frank Aiken Memorial Boxing Tournament

On December 5th the soldiers of the 27 Inf Bn tested their courage, physical fitness and skill against members of An Garda Síochána in the first Frank Aiken Memorial Boxing Tournament, in Dealgan Boxing Club, Dundalk.

The event consisted of thirteen bouts of a varying standard from novice to senior boxers and were watched by a large contingent from Aiken Bks along with many local spectators who crowded into Dealgan Boxing Club. Few could say they were disappointed as boxers from both teams put on a magnificent display. It was obvious from the early stages that the excellent coaching instruction of Pte Anto Donnelly and Sgt Brendan ‘Pokey’ Murray gave the 27 Inf Bn a slight advantage over their counterparts from the Gardai. However the Gardaí fought with valour, passion and courage as they faced an extremely tough well-disciplined battalion team.

Notable amongst those were Cols Darragh ‘Dumper’ Merrick, Ken ‘Charlie’ O’Hagan, Tiernan Kelly, Ian Woods, Ptes Keith Taffee and John Devny who all won memorable victories over their Garda opponents. Also representing the battalion was Lt Dan ‘The Spartan’ Ayiotis, reigning British and Irish light heavy weight Intervarsity Champion, who also won his bout against tough opposition. Best Boxer of the night went to Capt Graham Smaul, who won his bout 20 points to 6. But perhaps the most memorable fight of the night was the last bout, with a ring entrance more akin to Las Vegas than Dundalk, when Pte Ronan Donaghy entered the ring to tackle a monstrous opponent from the Gardaí in the heavy weight division. Although in true Ronan ‘The Rock’ style the bout didn’t last the first round, when his opponent came crashing to the canvas just 60 seconds after receiving a trade mark big right hand from Ronan.

The battalion boxers were the outright victors on the night by 11 bouts to two. Mr Frank Aiken Jr presented the trophy to a delighted Lt Col Michael Murphy (OC 27 Inf Bn). A word of thanks to Pte Donnelly and Sgt Murray for their time and effort in preparing the team. To Dealgan Boxing Club for use of the venue and training facilities. OC 27 Inf Bn for facilitating training time and encouraging the development of boxing within the battalion. A special thanks to the Garda Boxing Team and to coaches, Larry Morrison and Steven Dalton. The Gardaí, already keen for a rematch have invited the battalion down to Templemore to see if they can win back some pride from their defeat in Dundalk.
Defence Forces Indoor Track and Field Championships

This event now in its second year since it was re-introduced was held in the Nenagh Olympic Indoor Athletic Track, Co Tipperary on January 23rd. Organisers Lt Ruaidhri Kedney, Pte Stephen McDonnell and staff from HQ 2 E Bde with logistics support from 4 W Bde picked the Nenagh facility because of its covered 200m track with a banked synthetic surface for all events over 200m, a 60m sprint track and separate throwing and jumping areas. It is the only indoor track in the Republic, although the Odyssey Arena in Belfast was used this year for the National Indoor Championships.

It may come as a surprise to many to learn that the Defence Forces had its own indoor track from the early 1960s to 1973. An Irish Independent article in 1962 noted that the Curragh Indoor Track was located in the old Gymnasium. It measured 246 yards or just over seven laps to the mile, with straights of 80 yards. It was, at the time the largest indoor track in Europe and was longer than most indoor tracks in the USA. It could cater for all indoor track and field events, including shot, high jump and pole vault. Unfortunately the facility was burnt down in 1973 and was never rebuilt. All events at this year’s championships were keenly contested and some good times achieved.

The results are:

**Men’s 60m**
- Winner: Lt R Kedney (27 Inf Bn)
- Runner-up: Lt K Byrne (1 Air Def Regt)
- 3rd Place: Pte M Bennett (1 Cn Cois)

**Men’s 200m**
- Winner: Lt R Kedney (27 Inf Bn)
- Runner-up: Tpr M Bannon (1 Cav Sqn)

**Men’s 800m**
- Winner: Cpl E O’Neill (3 Inf Bn)
- Runner-up: Lt A Watson (2 Inf Bn)
- 3rd Place: Pte P Buckley (6 Inf Bn)

**Men’s 1500m**
- Winner: Cpl E O’Neill (3 Inf Bn)
- Runner-up: Pte P Buckley (6 Inf Bn)
- 3rd Place: Pte G Sweeney (4 Inf Bn)

**Masters 3000m**
- Winner: Pte T McSweeney (DFPP)
- Runner-up: Coy Sgt W O’Riordan (HQ 1 S Bde)
- 3rd Place: Pte M Walsh (1 Fd Engr Coy)

**Men’s Shot**
- Winner: Pte T McSweeney (DFPP)
- Runner-up: Lt N O’Grady (1 Cav Sqn)
- 3rd Place: Lt K Byrne (1 Air Def Regt)

**Men’s Long Jump**
- Winner: Tpr M Bannon (1 Cav Sqn)
- Runner-up: Lt Brennock (CSSC)
- 3rd Place: Lt K Byrne (1 Air Def Regt)

**Men’s High Jump**
- Winner: Lt K Byrne (1 Air Def Regt)
- Runner-up: Cpl E O’Neill (3 Inf Bn)
- 3rd Place: Pte D Heaney (27 Inf Bn)

**Multi-Event Competition**
- Winner: Lt K Byrne (1 Air Def Regt)
- Runner-up: Lt Brennock (CSSC)
- 3rd Place: Pte D Heaney (27 Inf Bn)

**4x100m Relay**
- Winner: USAC

**Ladies 60m**
- Winner: Pte G O’Connor (4 Inf Bn)
- Runner-up: Pte L Halpin (32 Res Inf Bn)
- 3rd Place: Pte L Nolan (12 Inf Bn)

**Ladies 3000m**
- Winner: Pte G O’Connor (4 Inf Bn)
- Runner-up: Pte L Nolan (12 Inf Bn)
Our soldiers today are among the best equipped in the world, and it's hard to imagine what it was like for those who went to the Congo in the early 60s. They travelled for over 24 hours in noisy propeller transport aircraft to a country they knew little about and arrived into tropical heat wearing, in most cases, bull's-wool uniforms carrying WWII-vintage .303 rifles.

For over four years, our troops in ONUC flew the flag for Ireland and did us proud, with 28 paying the ultimate sacrifice for peace, many in contact with the enemy, and nearly 70 medals for bravery and actions above and beyond the call of duty were awarded.

Due to the length of the original article it has been abridged for inclusion in this issue.

(At the outset of the article the author gives some background on the Congo conflict before turning to the establishment of the ONUC mission and Ireland’s contribution.)

This article from August 1961, written by a British officer, gives an interesting account, from an outside viewpoint, of the operations of the 9th Brigade in the Congo and its organisational problems. As we prepare for another deployment to Central Africa it can be seen that some of these challenges are still relevant today, especially regarding strategic logistical support. Chad, like the Congo, has minimal road infrastructure and the need for in-theatre airlift, simply to get around, is vitally important, as is radio communications to enable contact between troops dispersed over a wide area.

A part from the Irish, the only other white ground troops acceptable to the “Afro-Asian” bloc were Swedes; by November 1960, the United Nations Force in the Congo (ONUC) totalled some 20,000 under Lieut General Von Horn of Sweden.

The sending of troops overseas was a new experience for the Republic of Ireland and this, plus the part that Ireland as a nation is beginning to play in United Nations Councils, made the raising, despatch and activities of the Irish contingent to the Congo of unusual interest.

(The author then outlines the Defence Forces’ structure and organisation before returning to the establishment of the mission.)

The UN Request

The United Nations initial request for troops was met by a special unit of 700 officers and men. It was designated the 32nd Infantry Battalion, the next number to be taken up in the Irish Army order of battle. The unit, however, was a composite one consisting, (with the exception of the Naval Service and Air Corps) of men drawn from all arms and services of the Defence Forces, with a high proportion of specialists such as drivers, engineers, signalmen and cooks. Practically every eligible officer and man in the Army volunteered for service: planning organising and formation took place speedily and contemporaneously. Whilst meeting the UN requirement, this specially composed battalion had all the inherent drawbacks of a unit in which there was no initial cohesion. The UN request specified only personnel acceptable to the “Afro-Asian” bloc were Swedes; by November 1960, the United Nations

Departure

Before the airlift the 32nd Battalion made a ceremonial march through the streets of Dublin, the Salute being taken at the GPO by Prime Minister, Mr. Sean Lemass, and at Baldonnel Air Station before embarking, the whole battalion knelt bareheaded on the tarmac to receive a blessing from the Archbishop of Dublin in its mission of peace.

The 32nd Battalion was airlifted to the Congo between 27 and 29th July in Hercules transport planes of the 322nd USAF Division, on charter to the United Nations, each plane with a capacity of 60 men and 8,000lb of freight. Among the very first to leave was the Army Head Chaplain, the Very Rev. C.P. Crean, who was Senior RC Chaplain in British 2nd Army in 1944.

The flights staged at Evereaux, Wheelus (Tripoli), Kano and Leopoldville. At Wheelus they were given a welcome by a party of 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers. On the night of 27th Army HQ in Dublin picked up a message that the first plane arrived in the Congo had been attacked by tribesmen, but this turned out to be incorrect. (In fact, the first supply planes, Canadian, to reach Goma had been met by
hostile Force Publique, but negotiations on the spot changed the situation almost immediately.)

From the outset the Irishmen had a friendly reception; the battalion pipe band was the centre of attraction and soon had tribesmen dancing to their tunes. Much interest was taken in the heavy wool serge uniforms in which the battalion arrived, and a certain amount of souvenir hunting for Irish badges and buttons also ensued.

Whilst the 32nd Battalion was being flown out the Security Council asked the Irish Government for a second battalion and this, designated the 33rd, was raised on similar lines and sent out in August. A small brigade HQ, the 9th Irish Brigade, command by a Colonel (Colonel H.W. Byrne) was sent out and was integrated in the UNO HQ at Elisabethville in Katanga (the “breakaway” province of Mr.Tshombe).

Among the officer in General Von Horn’s initial staff was Colonel Justin MacCarthy who served with the Lebanon observer group, transferred to the UN Palestine Truce Supervision Organisation and then came direct to the Congo as Deputy Chief of Staff of the UN Force. He had attended the Staff College in 1946 and was making a fine reputation as an international staff officer. Most unfortunately, he was killed in a motor accident in Leopoldville in October 1960.

The Contingent’s Duties

The Irish have had to play their unaccustomed role in a continually confused political set up. The UN HQ in Leopoldville has been described as a Staff Officer’s nightmare, with its inadequate improvised international staff, short of junior officials and clerks, and striving to “hold the ring” in the area 1,000 miles square. With subordinate HQ’s up to 700 miles away, air support and radio links were vital to give advice and counsel attitudes to complex political changes that were continually taking place.

The great thing that the UN force has done in the Congo, if it has done nothing else, has been to prevent it becoming a battleground for rival world powers. But to achieve this has meant much patience, restraint, improvisation and unaccustomed work of all ranks.

The Irish Brigade Commander was soon appointed commander of all UN forces in Kivu, and later Katanga (during the period covered by this article). He found himself in control of an area some six times the size of Ireland and with a force of 4,800 troops of five nations under his command.

Initially, co-operation between HQ’s and his various national contingents was handicapped by poor communications, and also by nervousness on the part of some unit commanders as to the possible repercussions any action they took might have in their homeland. This was especially so in the case of the Africans. But the Irish senior officers found generally that all the commanders they came in contact with were internationally minded and motivated by genuine desire to follow the UN policy.

Operational Problems

In the early period there was a lack of organised intelligence service as the Force Commander felt that there was no “enemy” as such, there was no requirement. To British troops with painful memories of imperial policing and aiding civil powers in similar situations overseas, this may seem a surprising decision. It seemed so, as well, to the Irish, and since the beginning of 1961 an adequate intelligence service has been established.

The main Command communications were provided by a Canadian Signal squadron using ANGRC 26 (radio teletype). Each territorial HQ is now served by Canadian Signals detachment who provided excellent service. Within territorial commands the National Contingents provide their own communications. Where distance is great and contingents mixed, some command communications have been provided by Indian and Irish Signals using BC610 sets supplied by the United Nations.

As much use as possible was made of both radio on company/battalion networks and with higher HQ’s. In this, the use of the Irish language was found of great value as a means of passing messages, which it was desired to keep confidential. On the other hand, as all Irishmen spoke English, there was no language barrier with other UNO personnel, but for patrol work UNO interpreter were necessary.

Transport

Dispersion over large areas put a premium on mobility and to achieve this for ground movement, the UN Forces had to impress every suitable motor vehicle. Whilst this solved the immediate problem of getting around, it will cause trouble of a further kind when in the near future these vehicles wear out and the maintenance stocks of spares in the Congo are used up. The absence of a suitable vehicle, such as the Saracen APC, also inhibited patrolling to some extent.

Much more could have been done to control the areas and so prevent incidents if there had been enough aircraft, but the Irish commander in Katanga province was only allotted three small aircraft with which to carry out reconnaissance, and perform all movement, evacuation and supply requirements. At a later stage, when helicopters became available, they were employed in pairs so that in the event of a breakdown the occupants of the “crock” were not left to the mercies of the tribesmen.

The UN Presence

As part of the United Nations “presence” the young men of the Irish battalions had many tasks to perform, calling for a tact and patience which might well have taxed more experienced troops. The early work consisted of inducing the mutinous and trigger-happy ANC to hand over their weapons, and also the collecting of arms, including bows and
Incidents between Belgian officials and Congolese were toned down by the tact of the Irish soldiers, and potential ugly situations at airports and road posts also averted by the friendly and disciplined intervention of the Irish guards. Much useful work in getting the stillborn state to life was done by escorting and reassuring the returning Europeans and protecting food supplies.

Patrolling

Patrols encountered persistent road blocking. In the clearing of one such block a young officer and eight men of the 33rd Battalion were killed in an ambush at Niemba in November.

In practice, the Irish contingent found little need for night patrolling, as the Congolese did not seem to care to move much in the jungle at night themselves. Deployed into company, and sometimes platoon posts, all this activity placed much responsibility on young officers with only formal training up to then.

The most valuable asset to a unit in the Congo was a high degree of self-sufficiency, which aided rapid deployment. This was achieved by developing self-reliance in every man and by adding certain specialists to minor units.

The morale value of the UN blue headdress and armbands was immense, once the local Congolese understood what they were for. They enabled much more to be done in many circumstances that was possible with a show of armed strength, which in most cases was generally lacking.

The fact that UARC is a peace force provides an unfamiliar situation to the highly trained soldier. He is allowed to use force only in the last resort of legitimate self-defence. Under the convention of non-intervention the troops may not resort to military initiative in situations, which normally call for a strong reaction from courageous and responsible troops. This imposes a heavy strain on them and only high morale, discipline and belief in their mission makes such forbearance possible.

This was not always understood by reporters and others who witnessed incidents and wrote excited accounts of "UN troops that stood by and did nothing."

The climate in the Congo called for a very high standard of physical fitness and energy from all ranks. The work of the patrols entailed long periods of isolation of sub units. By comparison, the Irish had a higher proportion of officers that any other contingents, but even so the need for NCO Section Leaders to be able to act on their own was most apparent.

Tribal Warfare

Whilst the Irish patrols found considerable evidence of tribal warfare in North Katanga, they met no trace of ritual human sacrifices as reported in some quarters. Arrows used by Baluba tribesmen were poisoned, but the effects of the poison were not lethal as has also been stated – at least not on Irishmen!

Attacks and resistance to the UN personnel as well as on Europeans generally could not, in the opinion of one officer, be attributed to overt Communism. The situation, in his view, had been going for long enough for Communism to obtain any real influence. The main resistance appeared to come from the cult of "Lumumbaism" which had gripped many of the younger and backward Congolese like a voodoo.

Congolese who had taken part in the outbreaks of violence against whites and who had been questioned as to their motives were unable to give any reason other than the word "Lumumba." The greater majority of these didn’t know Lumumba or who he was or why they were doing such things.

But generally the Irish found the ordinary Congolese likeable and friendly and a basically docile and honest people with a sense of humour. One Irish officer who studied them, was charmed by their natural grace, "particularly," he said, "the way they could walk along balancing an open bottle of beer on their heads. Surely, there can’t be much harm in a people who like to do that."

Administration and Welfare

Initial assistance and advice had been offered by the Military Attaché in Dublin, Brigadier H.R. Thicknesse. Acting on one of his suggestions, the first battalion took out two suits of overalls per man to use as a temporary tropical kit, which was as well as there was some delay in obtaining this through UNO sources. Special tropical medical supplies were also obtained by him and an Irish regiment in Central Africa notified to keep a lookout on the Uganda border to see if they could offer any local help. Local police and missionaries in Uganda and N. Rhodesia also helped the common cause in the early days with loans of radio sets for communication purposes. Naturally, the Irish Army was anxious to make a success of the job on its own resources and must be admired for their spirit in doing so.
Lacking previous experience of such operations, the Irish Ordnance Corps had to figure out (and in a few days) the special requirements of the battalions. Such “obvious” items as extra light underwear was tackled swiftly, a Cork firm producing six sets for each man within a few days of order. Brassards and rank insignia for tropical dress were also made in Ireland. Blankets and stretchers to sleep on, and Landrovers for unit transport were sent with the battalion, as well as 20 days composite field rations. Packing for dispatch by air was done at the Ordnance depot in Dublin, and a larger hanger at the emplanting station taken over by Ordnance as an assembly station for all stores and vehicles going by air. An Ordnance officer was included in the specialist staff of each battalion, to perform duties analogous to those of a British BOWO. No Ordnance Depot had been set up, but a small Ordnance group was provided with Brigade HQ. This was not a store holding group, but was made up of ammunition examiners, store men, armament artificers and tent repairers (Workshop Services have remained a part of the Irish Ordnance Corps). The biggest tasks to be tackled have been organising the local repairs of boots, laundry contracts and obtaining batteries and other spares for the wireless sets.

**Logistical Support**

The amount of logistic support provided by UNO was found to be sketchy at first, especially when it was relying on local sources, which broke down. It is true to say that it was not geared to support a force of this size and the case of Irish and Swedish contingents made re-supply lengthy and erratic. There were some shortages and a good deal of improvisation, but this should not be overstressed as a grave deficiency in an operation of this kind. Anyone with experience of minor operations on the NW Frontier in the inter war days, will see the parallel and agree that much of this was good for troops in teaching them how to soldier.

To improve the logistic and administrative situation, units from India and Pakistan were brought in August and September. As the Irish contingent worked with them and was dependent on them to some extent, a passing reference to their organisation and duties will not be out of place.

The Government of India supplied a service unit of battalion strength. As a result of the need for more ground troops, India has now sent a brigade group of approximately 5,000 to the Congo.

Pakistan had supplied two units: an independent ASC (GT) Company of 12 officers and 248 Ors, and an Ordnance Company of 21 officers and 219 Ors. The ASC Company was located at Leopoldville and Kamina and provided transport for stores and personnel and transport cover to UN Headquarters. The Ordnance Company operated a Base Depot for ORUIC at Leopoldville and a Command Depot at Kamina. The stores were procured through UN civil procurement agency (local purchase) or under arrangement of UN Headquarters in New York.

**Soldierly Reactions**

The Irishmen reacted to the unaccustomed surroundings in typical soldierly fashion. At first they found it strange without a plentiful rainfall and some were disappointed by the absence of lion, elephant and snakes. In one location all stocks of mouth organs were brought up the first time the troops were allowed out, and inevitably there was some cheating by the traders.

Medically, all ranks stood up very well to their sudden transfer from a temperate zone to an equatorial one. Until tropical clothing was issued a number continued to wear their green serge service dress, which caused some discomfort. The men of the first battalion were submitted to a series of vaccinations and injections, and initially quite a number were bothered by the varying degrees of reaction whilst on route and when taking up their first duties. This was avoided in the second battalion, for which it was possible to allow a longer period for these inoculations. Apart from this, the sickness rate was very low, and only five men were invalided back to Ireland up to the end of November.

As a health precaution, swimming was banned until it was certain that it would produce no ill effect; thereafter, it was found a very welcome relaxation. The tropical heat was beneficial, especially among some senior NCO’s, in helping to reduce weight.

The original scale of rations was revised to include extra meat and eggs and increase of fresh vegetables, which were plentiful in towns. In parts of the interior it was otherwise, and where controlling the pack rations was used. In the majority of locations, the Irish troops were well accommodated either in modern school buildings or new Belgian barracks. Some were fortunate to find Dunlopillo beds, but, for the most part, the majority had to use the canvas stretchers and blankets they took with them. Apart from the patrols, not a man was under canvas. At Kamina, the troops were quartered in a barracks of unusual circular design with “built-in” tennis and basketball and swimming pools, which could be floodlit at night.

**Local Beer**

Like his British counterpart, the Irish soldier is addicted to his cup of tea, and, as the cost of this was prohibitive, tea was one of the items most looked for from “Welfare” to supplement the rations. Local beer met with general approval, but “as the boys missed their own drop of stuff” a famous Dublin brewery sent a consignment out by sea to the Congo, so it would be available in the “PX” establishments at all major posts.

Apart from the strictly duty moves of personnel and stores, everything else from Ireland travelled by commercial aircraft which meant that it had to be paid for. Generous free issues of papers by the Irish newspaper firms cost Army funds £66 a week to fly out; the freight on a consignment of paper back books donated by Irish Shell amounted to twice their value. The cost of bringing the bodies of the men killed in the Niamba ambush was over £1,000 each.

Radio Éireann organised special forces programmes on tape recordings, which were flown out to Radio Brazaville, which transmitted two programmes a week.
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Some of these were relayed by Radio Leopoldville as part of the UNO local forces programme and included recorded messages from relatives.

**Allowances**

A special allowance of approximately 6/- a day (later increased to 9/-) was issued by the United Nations to all personnel in ONUC. Some national contingents were also paid special allowances by their Governments. The allowances paid by the Irish Government to its contingent were eventually fixed at daily rates ranging from 15/- for an unmarried Private to 51/3 for a married Commandant (Major) and higher. In general, the personnel chose to let these allowances accumulate in their pay accounts until their return to Ireland where the total amount was paid in a lump sum.

The early success of the first unit led to the call for the second battalion. It is a matter for praise at the way these young Irishmen grew quickly confident in their new duties and developed the right touch in dealing with many incidents, firmly, politely, humorously and without fuss.

“Friendly, efficient, disciplined and uncomplaining,” one observer said of them, “the Irish are more an army than anything else seen so far in the Congo.”

The period, for which the original contingent was requested was for six months, and the recruiting of replacements and stores maintenance, etc., was based on this. The absence of over 1,400 men, which represented one-sixth of the whole army, including so many specialists, caused a great strain on the rest at home. Officers were particularly overworked; especially those connected with the FCA, and were doing two or three jobs in this period. It was, however, realised in Dublin, particularly in view of the withdrawal of certain other national contingents that a replacement contingent would be needed, even if not so large. The appointment of General McKeown, the only General officer in the Irish Army, as the UNO GOC in the Congo, may be interpreted as a sign of the value the Secretary General placed on his Irish Soldiers.

**Legislation**

In January 1961 the Irish Government passed permanent legislation for the dispatch of contingents from the Defence Forces for service outside Ireland with UNO international forces. The 9th Brigade, which was given a great welcome on its return, was replaced by the 34th Infantry Battalion an armoured car detachment. In April 1961 the Secretary General asked Irish Government to augment this by two further infantry companies (which brought the total strength up to 1,155) and that this be replaced by a further unit on expiry of six months in July 1961. At the time of writing, the 35th Battalion (650 men) and an armoured car group are in process of moving to the Congo.

The only criticism of these arrangements that might be made is the comparatively brief duration of the tour for most of the contingents, only a few doing a tour of one year. In view of the distance and numbers involved, it might have been considered more economic and efficient to extend the period in the case of later contingents. A year for all on such duties, and there is no doubt that the value of the contingents to ONUC would be enhanced by the longer period.

**More Equipment Needed**

The experiences of the senior Irish officers led them to believe that more equipment was needed to enable the force to do its work. More transport was needed to be brought in by the contingents, and a need for bridging equipment began to arise. Armoured vehicles for patrolling were desirable, as also, were better radio links and aerial recce at unit level. The most valuable personal weapon was found to be sub machine carbine.

In his first report to the Secretary General, Ambassador Dayal, emphasised that the hasty provision of the force had called for a high degree of improvisation at all levels. During the build-up period such matters as medical, supply and postal services were not all that might be desired, but any hardship were borne with patience and understanding. “The magnitude of the task,” he said, “has resulted in units having to operate at full pressure without the normal reserves necessary for regular reliefs. The excellent spirit of the Force, however, has remained unimpaired by these shortcomings.”

The Irish as peacemakers were no longer a novelty or a cause of humour. The Congo experiences suggests that there and elsewhere Irish soldiers may play an increasing part in similar circumstances. The British Army had long known the value, and will be delighted to see them succeed in the delicate international sphere.

It is worthy of note that no single incident has been reported of the Irishmen putting a foot wrong in their dealings with many factions in the confused Congo situation. Both there and at UNO they made no enemies. Even the Russians have not said an unkind word about them. Apart from the Swedes they were the only white men acceptable to the colour-conscious young African States.

In Ireland the task aroused great public feeling. Contingents were given great public send-offs through the streets with their colours and saluting the President (Mr. de Valéra) and the Prime Minister. The lamentable killing of an officer and eight men by tribesmen at Niemba had a profound emotional effect on Ireland, manifested when half a million people turned out to watch the military funeral in Dublin. Although, naturally, a great deal was said about this ambush it is noteworthy that the tragedy was everywhere treated with forbearance and restraint and has not evoked one single anti-racial or colour prejudiced outbreak.

**Conclusion**

Irish success in UNO is not so surprising when one recalls the consistent record of support for collective security which Ireland gave to the old league of Nations. A further point is that she is not a member of NATO, which has debarred so many other European countries from doing useful work in the Congo. In UN debates Irish delegates with their experiences of the worries and troubles of a people emerging into independence are in good position to acquire the trust and respect of Africans and Asians.

The Irish Army may, therefore, find itself becoming the nucleus of that most desired of all forces – a true United Nations police force – a role in which all wish them well.
During the Cold War the Soviet mapping agency GUGK began a major project of mapping the USSR’s vast territories. They then started to map areas of strategic interest, such as Europe and the Northern Hemisphere. The maps produced were in scales of 1:100,000 and 1:50,000 which were ideal for military operations. In addition GUGK produced maps of over 2,300 towns and cities of Europe of which some 80 were of locations in the British Isles. Ireland had only one city covered by such a map, Dublin. Belfast and ‘Londonderry’ were mapped in Northern Ireland. Col Des Travers (Retd) explains some of the detail captured...

Dublin was covered by four sheets in a scale of 1:10,000 (10cm to 1km). These sheets, in colour, cover the city in considerable detail. Printed in 1980, the map has a key to important installations and their purpose. These installations were also colour coded: black for an industrial site, green for state installations such as barracks, police including prisons or military barracks and pink for national institutions such as: government departments, The Central Bank, Trinity College and so on. Astonishingly, Leinster House was not listed or identified.

It was considered worthwhile to examine the maps especially with regard to the treatment of the Barracks and Department of Defence installations. As these installations combined are together on the Western edge of the city, North of the Liffey, this will form the basis of our enquiry. McKee Barracks is clearly identified on the map shown at top right on p23 (opposite) both by number (24) and by name.

A study of a city map of this period suggests that it may have been. The suburban areas shown in the Ordnance Survey map of 1948 are similar to those shown on the Soviet map but the tram-line is not to be found on this map. Again, the Soviet map shows an airfield in what is present day Leopardstown Racecourse. Again this airfield is not in evidence in the 1948 map. There was however a private airfield located there serving the Guinness family resident in Farmleigh House at an earlier time. This then would have put the sources of the Soviet map at a much earlier period than 1948 sometime between that date and the establishment of the Irish Free State.

And what of the omission of the Garda Depot? The 1948 map shows that the identification of the Garda Depot was often written on maps of that period to the left of its actual location and the script largely overwritten on the grounds South of the Zoological Gardens. Had it been correctly identified it would have been numbered and coloured pink as is Mountjoy Prison. After all the Soviets attached importance to police installations and would have invested effort in identifying them.

An explanation for the road incursion into McKee Barracks is more speculative. If however a Soviet cartographer had available only air photos of poor quality of similar period, there is a possibility that an error of this kind could occur. For example a monochrome photo taken in the early light especially if surfaces are wet could mistake the roofs of those blocks with a streetscape. The sheen from their tiles when wet can give this effect. Though it must be said that it would have had to have been a very poor quality air-photo indeed.

The map (bottom right) shows the Dept of Defence and Army Headquarters buildings, which are listed as 31– and described as “Ministry of Defence”. Collins Barracks has been listed correctly at No. 23. St Brins Hospital has been plotted and correctly colour coded but not identified. East of Infirmary Road the Dept of Defence and Army buildings are identified as No. 41. Remember, this area housed such offices as the Directorates of Intelligence, Planning and Research, the Library, Enlisted Personnel Section, offices of A’ Administration, Press and An Cosantoir Offices, Coiste an Asgard and so on. Well, maybe not! For it is described in the Soviet map’s key as:

**Склад артиллерийского и технического снабжения**
(See also map on opposite page (bottom right.)

Which is: “Store of Artillery and Technical Equipment”. So now you know! ■
The author wishes to thank Mr John Davies (UK) for his earlier work on the Dublin map. His website is also worth a visit for those who may be interested in the phenomena of Soviet mapping at: www.jomidav.com. He also wishes to thank Lt Col Michael O’Malley (Retd), aviation historian, for his information relating to the airfield at Leopardstown. Also, thanks to Comdt Mark and Mrs Olga Hearns for assistance with translations. The author’s map of Dublin described here will be placed in the Military Archives where it will be available to view.

Top right: The GPO, Dublin (no 31 on map.)
Interest in the Niall Mellon Township Trust has been growing steadily over the years since its inception in 2002. I watched a programme in 2005 about the building ‘blitz’ week they run in South Africa each year and it interested me. I felt I would love to do it and checked out their website but then left it at that, until a friend of mine, Hazel Revington, told me she was doing a fundraising night for Focus Ireland and the Township Trust in the Bloomfield Hotel, Mullingar April 2007. I got involved with the fundraiser, which turned out to be a great night. Irish soccer star Damien Duff kindly donated a signed jersey for which we raised €900 in an auction on the night. The rest of the night consisted of a belly-dancing display, which was excellent.

Each volunteer for the building ‘blitz’ week must raise €4,000 to participate in the trip. Half the money is used for travelling expenses and accommodation, with the remainder going towards building materials. The Trust takes on tradesmen first, provided they are healthy and have the money raised. The remainder volunteer for a range of tasks, with labouring being the most common.

For the 2007 trip, which took place in November, over 1,300 people travelled to South Africa. The building ‘blitz’ this time was in a location about 40 minutes drive outside Cape Town in a place called Mitchell’s Plain, which was featured in Ross Kemp’s TV programme on gangs around the world.

The flight to Cape Town took 15 hours and included a stop-off in Ghana for refuelling. We eventually landed in Cape Town in the early hours of Saturday November 3rd and Niall Mellon himself personally greeted us at passport control. He was delighted to see us as we very nearly didn’t make it because a plane had overshot the runway a few hours previously and the airport had been closed. As a result Niall had to go on South African radio to tell listeners that no matter what happened the blitz would still proceed.

We were bussed to our hotels and welcomed by the staff with refreshments. Despite it being the early hours of the morning, ‘kick-off time’ was only delayed by an hour and was timed for 7am. Following breakfast we assembled in a marquee across from our hotel with over 1,450 volunteers and support staff packed in. There we were introduced to the Trust’s team of doctors who gave us a health and safety brief. Children from the township that we would be working in were also bussed in to meet us and this raised everyone’s emotions immensely, as these were the children who would benefit from our work and none of them had ever had a home to call their own.

Even more tragic was the fact that most of them were HIV positive. In his address Niall told us that official government figures stated that HIV infected over 40% of the population but that a random test of 10,000 people only a few weeks before had shown results in...
the region of 70%. Following the briefs we loaded onto a fleet of 20 coaches and departed for the township.

Walking onto the site that morning we soon got an insight to the enormity of the task ahead; basically, it was a flat site. We were also told that a bacterial analysis of the ground showed the sand was heavily contaminated, so any cuts or abrasions had to be attended to immediately.

We assembled at a container and were grouped into our respective trades. Each trade had its own colour, electricians wore black and plumbers light blue. We were broken down into teams of five, with a plumber and electrician allotted to each team, and then distributed into sections, covering different areas of the site. I was allotted to the 'Tan' section, whose job was to erect 15 houses.

Most of the houses in our section already had their foundations poured and a couple had been started using local labour, but that was generally it. To think that 200 houses and a community centre had to be built in a week seemed a complete non-runner!

Each day started off with an early call, breakfast, and transportation to the site, arriving at around 7.45am. Some lads handed over their lunch to the locals through the fence on their way into liveable dwellings. The community centre, a focal point for the new community, was also coming along well. (Celebrity TV gardener Diarmund Gavin was of course dependant on our energy levels!

In the marquee each night but participation in that was in charge of all gardening around the centre.) The first two days on site involved block work. All trades helped in this task to get things moving and when the block work was at wall-plate level, things really got going. The roofers put on timber trusses, felt, laths and tiles in a matter of hours; the electricians wired the houses for power; and the plumbers installed a solar panel on each roof and plumbed a toilet, wash-hand basin, shower, kitchen sink and taps. The plasterers, to their credit, did a great job and plastered the houses in record time. This was all done by day three!

Every house had its own kitchen/dining area, bathroom and bedrooms, with the number of bedrooms determined by the type of house required (single- or two-storey).

The site was a hive of activity, as houses with no roofs in the morning were transformed by 5pm each day into liveable dwellings. The community centre, a focal point for the new community, was also coming along well. (Celebrity TV gardener Diarmund Gavin was in charge of all gardening around the centre.)

A strong sense of camaraderie began to develop early on and the commitment of the volunteers was surreal. We generally finished up at 5.30pm and were bussed back to the hotel. Entertainment was available in the marquee each night but participation in that was of course dependant on our energy levels!

While we were there we got the opportunity to visit some of the shacks that people lived in and were also given a tour of a local school. We were lucky, as Niall himself conducted our tour and during it he explained why he set up the trust. He had bought a house in South Africa a number of years previously and one evening when he was dropping a local labourer home the guy asked him in. When Niall saw the conditions that the labourer, his family, and their neighbours lived in, it spurred him to do something.

During our tour, Niall brought us inside a few of the shacks where the locals lived. Some were no more than 10ft by 8ft, with some housing more than ten people in one room. The conditions were appalling, with little or no running water and poor sanitation.

One of the biggest dangers for the inhabitants is fire, due to poor wiring to the electricity supply, which was grossly overloaded.

However, these people were the lucky ones, as they were going to get the new houses. When they moved in their old shacks would be passed on to families in worse circumstances.

The people spoke openly about their plight and were grateful to the Irish volunteers for giving them the opportunity to start a new life in a new home. At the local school we were given a tour by the principal, who told us the children usually come to school hungry, so they provide them with breakfast. He also told us a story about a time when one of the children was overheard saying to another, “You are being very Irish to me.” When asked to explain this, the child said it meant ‘you are being very generous to me.’ This gives some idea of the impact the Township Trust and its Irish volunteers have had.

As the week wore on the progress was unbelievable. Houses were being painted and glass fitted into frames, before being cleaned out ready for the handover. Energy levels were low among the volunteers but progress remained constant. The local electricity board also came on site and began to connect houses properly to the grid.

As the official handover loomed, the focus centred on the community centre and every hand was on deck, working hard to have everything ready for the noon Friday handover.

At last Friday came and we assembled around the finished centre, where Niall Mellon handed over the keys to a very emotional community leader and the locals moved into their new houses. The children put up posters on the walls of their new rooms, where for the first time in their lives they had somewhere safe to sleep. There were also stories of relatives travelling from as far as Johannesburg with mattresses as a gift for the occupants of the new houses.

The emotion that circled the site was unreal and was a fitting culmination of the months of fund raising and the week of hard graft and effort by everyone involved. We went back to our hotels with a sense of a job well done: it was a night of celebration!

Personally, I would like to thank the people who sponsored me, especially everyone in Baldonnel, who gave very generously, and I would like to extend a very special thanks to Hazel Revington for her behind-the-scenes efforts to get the two of us there. Because of all the support and money we received, 1,500 people are sleeping in their own homes tonight.

Anybody considering going on the blitz in 2008 can contact the Trust directly at 01-4948200 or through www.irishtownships.com
This year sees an important milestone for the Defence Forces as it celebrates 50 years of unbroken peacekeeping service, which its main resource, its personnel, has carried out professionally and honourably since 1958, and which has brought much national respect and success to this country. Almost 100 Irish soldiers have given their lives while performing their duty on various missions abroad and a number of events are scheduled to mark this 50th anniversary year.

No doubt the national media will discuss the merits of Ireland’s UN commitment and highlight the Defence Forces’ role. This is only right but what do they really understand about the history of Irish soldiers on the ground supporting peace in foreign countries? Do the general public and even serving soldiers really understand that dynamic of which they have been a part for 50 years?

As a student of history, and in particular Irish military history, I feel there is quite a large void regarding testimonial material relating to this overseas service. This material simply does not exist and there is no corpus of personal accounts. The Bureau of Military History 1913-1921 in the Military Archives holds over 1,700 witness statements relating to the Irish revolution given by people who were involved or otherwise witnessed events. These statements, collected by the Bureau, sometimes up to thirty years after the events, are considered by historians to be invaluable for the study and understanding of the period. For this reason and the fact that this is an important year for the Defence Forces I would suggest that this is an opportune time to establish a project, in the style of the Bureau or an oral history theme, to collect testimonials from soldiers and their families on their experiences during their peacekeeping duties.

Other countries have long paid attention to this area. For instance, the US military sends historians overseas with its troops to record the mission and also takes statements from its veterans. The Imperial War Museum in London and the National Army Museum have a vast collection of material, which is available as part of that country’s historical narrative, and they continue to collect.

Of course funding and resources will be an issue, but if the Defence Forces, the Department of Defence, the official veterans’ organisations and Military Archives were to successfully collaborate on this issue, we could record a very unique part of Ireland’s historical narrative, as well as commencing a proper military historiography. I believe there is a hunger within Irish academia and the public in general for such a source.

Another illuminating source that the military authorities might consider publishing are the histories of every unit that has served overseas. Also the Irish Historical Manuscripts Commission could be approached for assistance and advice.

From my own experiences on UN missions, and from talking to other veterans during my research, there is a lot of good will towards a project like this. However, we must be aware that time may be running out in regard to collecting material from some veterans of our earliest overseas mission. This makes the project even more urgent, as unless they are shared and recorded people’s memories and insights will die with them and can never be retrieved.

Armin Michael Whelan (MA and Curator Air Corps Museum & Heritage Project) puts his case forward for recording the experiences of our soldiers’ overseas service, by a means similar to The Bureau of Military History 1913-1921, thereby making a valuable source available for both military historians and the public for the future…
In January Lt Col Matt Murray (OC 37 Inf Gp KFOR) opened refurbished facilities in the Emin Duraka School, Stimlje, Kosovo. The work included a newly built sports ground, complete with soccer pitch and basketball court. The school’s toilets and washrooms were rebuilt, with new toilets and sinks installed, walls tiled and parts of the school repainted.

As a result of this project, the surroundings in which the children of Stimlje are educated have greatly improved. Its completion reinforces Brig Gen Gerry Hegarty’s (Comd MNTF-C) recent commitment to Stimlje’s mayor, Mr Naim Ismajli, to working together on such jointly co-ordinated projects.

In September 2007, Mr Tom Kitt TD, (Min of State, Dept of Foreign Affairs) visited the school to see how the project, which cost €35,000, was progressing.

Before the end of its tour of duty, 37 Inf Gp will complete a number of projects, costing approximately €104,000, with the majority of this budget being spent on schools and health centres within and close to their Area of Operation. These humanitarian projects are part of the contingent’s primary mission, which is to develop and maintain a safe and secure environment, particularly at this important juncture in Kosovo’s history.

However, given the estimated 70% unemployment, poverty in the province is a huge problem. One recent report puts the average annual income of Kosovars at €758 per annum, a tenth of the average incomes of neighbouring Bulgarians or Rumanians and on a par with Ethiopia or Zambia. Improving the living conditions of the local population is therefore a huge challenge to Kosovo’s institutions and the international community. Chronic poverty is also a security concern.

Irish humanitarian efforts co-ordinated by the Defence Forces in Kosovo concentrate on working with local partners, such as the municipalities, NGOs and organisations like HandiKOS (a Kosovar organisation that runs facilities for the handicapped). The aim is to assist the people of Kosovo in increasing the capacities of their local social structures, in particular health, education and social housing.

In addition to the formal aid budget, Irish soldiers serving with KFOR have raised thousands of euro for other humanitarian projects, through sponsored events and collections both at home and in Kosovo.

Before their tour ends, 37 Inf Gp will have built three houses in the Stimlje area from the money they raised. Sgt Maj Seanie Cosgrave (12 Inf Bn) has played a leading role in this effort and over €3,000 has been raised to assist various needy families by Sgt Leo Weymuss (3 Inf Bn) and Cpl Amy Hopkins (CIS DFTC). Meanwhile, two NCOs serving with Task Force HQ, Sgts Brian Reed (DFHQ CIS Coy) and John Chapman (DFTC) ran the Athens Marathon, raising over €750 to aid the refurbishment of a primary school in Lipljan. The efforts by the Irish currently serving in KFOR continue the work undertaken by previous contingents, beginning as far back as 1999 when the Defence Forces commenced operations with KFOR.

With money provided mainly from the Department of Foreign Affairs’ Irish Aid Scheme, and augmented by funds raised by Irish troops serving in Kosovo, the member of 37 Inf Gp have been helping the local population get on their feet…
The Field Military Police Companies (designated 1 to 6) were part of the Fórsa Cosanta Áitúil (FCÁ) element of the Military Police Corps, whereas the PDF MP units were known as Garrison Companies (see next month’s issue).

As was mostly the case throughout the Defence Forces at the time it was the FCÁ units who introduced the first unit flashes, followed in time by the regular units. Cork based 1 Fd MP Coy was first to introduce a flash in 1969.

After the RDF restructuring in 2005, the FCÁ MP Companies were amalgamated into three new MP units, part of the new Army Reserve. This saw 1 and 3 Fd MP Coys reformed into 31 Res MP Coy, based in 1 S Bde; 2 and 6 Fd MP Coys reformed into 62 Res MP Coy, based in 2 E Bde; and 4 and 5 Fd MP Coys reformed into 54 Res MP Coy, based in 4 W Bde. 

For more on Irish military badges, log onto: www.irishmilitaryinsignia.com

**Field Military Police Companies**

The Field Military Police Companies (designated 1 to 6) were part of the Fórsa Cosanta Áitúil (FCÁ) element of the Military Police Corps, whereas the PDF MP units were known as Garrison Companies (see next month’s issue).

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**MILITARY INSIGNIA**

By Flt Sgt James G Perkins
On display in the Soldiers & Chiefs exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland is a Bofors L60 light anti-aircraft gun, one of the few surviving weapons that opened fire on unauthorised aircraft during the Emergency. The Bofors L60 became the most successful air defence weapon of the last century and during World War II the British, Americans, Russians and Germans all used it.

The Bofors Company of Sweden initially developed the weapon as a naval gun (Model No 1934) before they created a land-based model in 1938, the Bofors L60 1936. The new 40mm gun was designed to counter low-level aircraft flying at altitudes up to around 3,000 metres: heavy anti-aircraft guns could tackle high-altitude aircraft such as bombers while machine guns were on hand to counter very low-flying aircraft.

The Defence Forces purchased four Mark I L60s from England, where they were made under licence, in June 1939 and a further two Mark III L60s in May 1943. In 1952, twenty-four L60 1936s were purchased from Bofors in Sweden and used by the Reserve units of 1 Air Defence Regiment in Dublin, Cork and Limerick until 2002.

During the Emergency two Bofors were based in Baldonnel and another two at the Hibernian School (now St Mary’s Hospital) in Phoenix Park. These last two were moved to Collinstown, (now better known as Dublin Airport) in March 1941, thereby providing protection to both aerodromes. As more equipment was purchased, a Bofors was sent to Cobh in February 1942. The small numbers of anti-aircraft guns were at first concentrated in Dublin and the city’s air defences in 1940 consisted of Air Defence Command; the Anti-Aircraft Battalion with three medium- and one light- batteries; a searchlight battalion; and four Air Corps Gladiator aircraft.

In many ways the Anti-Aircraft Battalion, as it was known at the time, was a front-line unit and 217 rounds of ammunition were fired by its 40mm anti-aircraft guns from 1939 to 1943.

The principal weapon of the Anti-Aircraft Battalion was not the Bofors L60 but the larger 3.7” AA gun, stocks of which went from two in 1940 to 18 by 1943. The remaining weapons were the six Bofors light anti-aircraft guns and four 3” AA guns.

The initial standing orders were that all anti-aircraft positions were to open fire on all unidentified aircraft that presented reasonable targets. The last such shoot was on May 31st 1941 during the North Strand bombing in which 31 civilians were killed. After this date, only a brigade commander could authorise opening fire against aircraft engaged in bombings.

A new variant of the Bofors 40mm anti-aircraft gun is still in service with the Defence Forces, the E/L70 Bofors with the Flycatcher radar that is now in service with 1 Battery, 1 Air Defence Regiment, based in the Defence Forces Training Centre; 2 Battery in Dublin; 3 Battery in Limerick; and 4 Battery in Cork.

The Bofors on display in the exhibition is originally numbered L29 and was restored with the assistance of Artillery Corps and Hughes Fabrication.

Continuing our series, written on behalf of The Military Heritage of Ireland Trust Ltd, in which visitors to the military exhibition at the National Museum, Collins Barracks, give their views on their favourite exhibit, Lar Joye talks about the Bofors L60 light anti-aircraft gun.

### Bofors 40 mm L60 MkI Anti-aircraft Gun

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Specifications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calibre</td>
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<td>Rate of fire</td>
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<td>Weight of shell</td>
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<td>Types of shell</td>
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<td>Bofors, Sweden</td>
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</table>
Dear Editor

I am trying to trace the above NCOs who I served with in the ONUC Congo Operation 1961-1962.

Sgt Sean Keenan was the NCO I/C of the Rear Party of the 35th Bn Kamina Airport, Katanga, when the battalion had already rotated home in 1961.

Sgt Joe Foran was with the 36th Bn stationed in Elizabethville, Katanga in 1962.

I was a Royal Canadian Signals Cryptographer who was posted to our Signal Detachments in both locations.

On our return to Canada and Ireland we corresponded for twenty years until I retired from the Army and transferred to our Foreign Affairs Dept.

Over the past couple of years I have contacted the Irish UN Organisations but had no luck in locating either gentleman.

Recently I contacted your Defence HQ PIO Capt Kennedy and he suggested I send a letter to you as a number of UN Veterans subscribe to your publication, which I receive periodically from a UN Congo Veteran who I correspond with in Dublin.

It is a very interesting to see how other Armies live and work and the type of equipment they use.

I would appreciate any help you can give me on this issue.

Sincerely,

Bruce Davison
RC Signals

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