

Information Booklet for Adults

A Soldier's Life



Every soldier has a different story to tell, but most soldiers share common experiences at certain points in their career. This booklet shows how the general stages of a soldier's life are evident in the particular stories of individuals in the *Soldiers and Chiefs* exhibition.

Many aspects of soldiers' lives have remained the same through history. As you walk through the galleries of the exhibition, you will encounter the six stages that comprise the careers of soldiers.



Enlistment



Training



Battle



**After the
Battle**



Peacetime

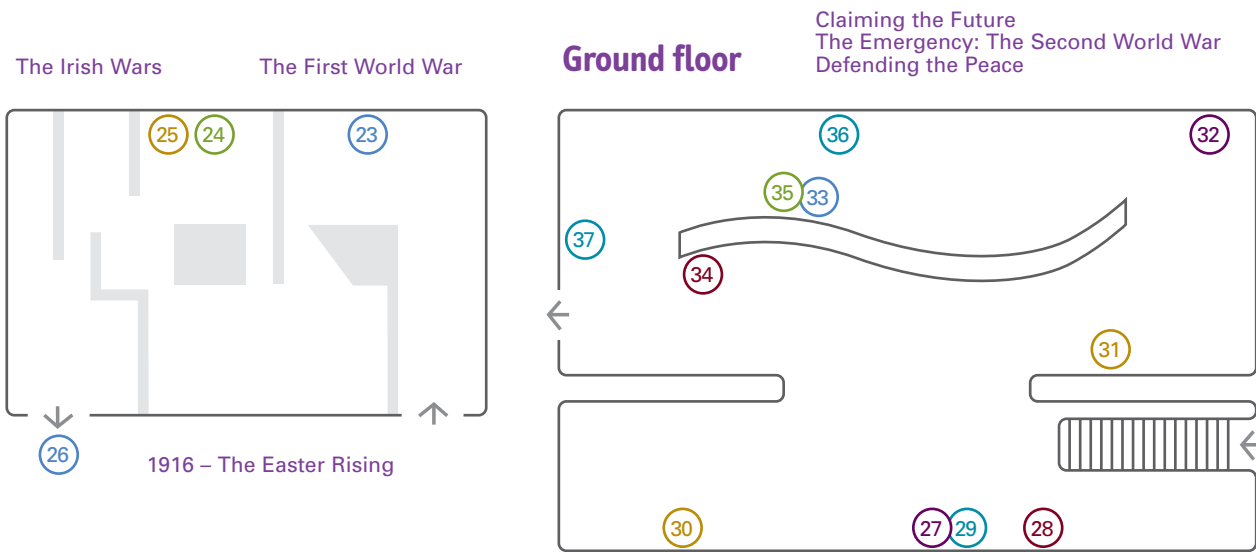
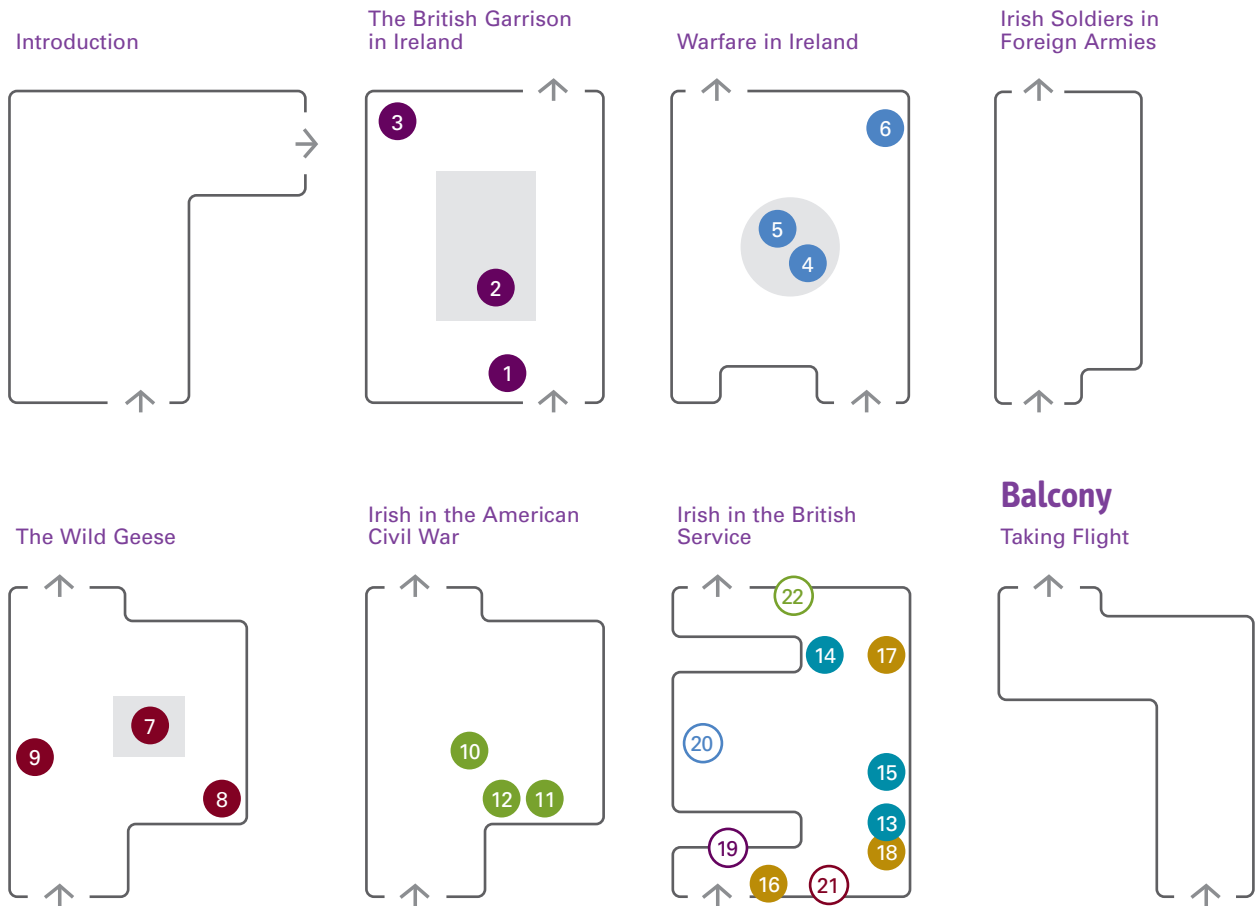


Retirement

Soldiers and Chiefs Galleries

To find the main examples for each stage of a soldier's life, follow the numbers from **1 to 18** as shown on these plans of all the galleries. The numbers from **19 to 37** are optional, additional examples. The title with each plan is the name of that gallery.

First floor



You can find explanations of military terms in the booklet, **'Military Speak'**, a glossary to accompany these Information Booklets, which is available at the start of the exhibition or at Museum reception.

Enlistment

1 A Soldier by Choice

Certain civilians had useful skills that the army needed. Experienced musicians were much in demand, since an effective and impressive regimental band was a major source of military prestige. Bandsmen were attracted by special privileges, such as an ornate uniform; many were professional performers.



2 A Soldier by Necessity

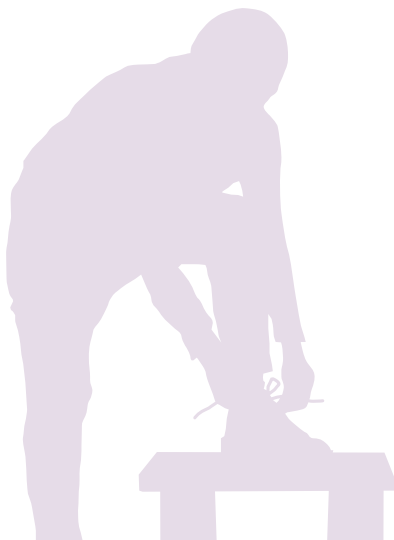
Stephen Stokes created a picture of an Irish rural labourer (the man carrying his belongings in a sack) being encouraged by two cavalymen to 'take the Queen's shilling' and enlist in the British Army. Until quite recently, poverty was a major incentive to join the armed forces. In the army, you could be sure of (at a minimum) regular food and wages, even if the food was boring and the wages skimpy.

3 Born to Be a Soldier

This figure of a school boy represents the boys who were expected to follow in their father's marching steps and join the army. Because his father is absent (either posted overseas or dead) he has been enrolled in a charitable military school. Other boys from military families would join the army directly, as soon as they could be accepted.

You can find more examples of soldiers enlisting in some of the other galleries of *Soldiers and Chiefs*:

- 19 in 'Irish in the British Service': 'Listed for the Connaughts' – a powerful painting of young men making a new life for themselves
- 27 in 'Claiming the Future': 'Building an Army' – check out the recruiting posters for the new Irish Army
- 32 in 'The Emergency': 'The Second World War': O'Reagain audio – listen to a civilian who joined up reluctantly



Training

4 Learning to Use a Firearm

A soldier is useless if he doesn't know how to use his weapon. New weapons (for instance the musket from the 1590s, carried by this musketeer) required training and practice for the soldier to become skilled in their use. Before this period, soldiers had basically used swords and spears, often receiving little formal training; with the advent of the musket they needed to be taught and drilled in the use of a new technology.



5 Trained as a Professional Soldier

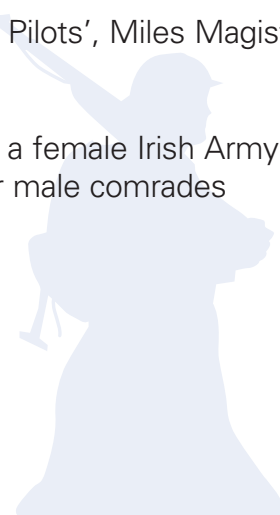
The 1690s saw the rise of formal military organisations with a continuous existence, replacing the ad hoc groups of men brought together for a single campaign. This allowed training to be more regular, and for trained men to remain available to serve in action or to train others. Such professional soldiers (like this Jacobite grenadier) were given a distinctive uniform to signal their new status.

6 Gunning for a Career

The men who handled this cannon were a highly-trained elite, charged with operating the most powerful type of weapon in an army's arsenal. Many of them were selected because they were able to work with numbers to calculate distances and flight times. The gunners also had to be able to handle the horses that pulled the cannon. Their special status in an elite corps (with a distinctive blue uniform) was a result of their extensive training.

You can find more examples of soldiers in training in some of the other galleries of *Soldiers and Chiefs*:

- 20 in 'Irish in the British Service': firearms interactives – find out what it was like to be trained to use a musket or rifle
- 23 in 'The First World War': 'Preparing for the Eventuality' – see how the Volunteers trained before the First World War
- 26 from the balcony after 'The First World War': 'Training Irish Pilots', Miles Magister – inspect a two-seat training aircraft from the 1930s
- 33 in 'Defending the Peace': 'Peacekeeping in the Lebanon' – a female Irish Army soldier would have undergone essentially the same training as her male comrades



Battle

7 A Famous Victory

Not many soldiers ever got to fight in such a great conflict as the Battle of Fontenoy. As you watch the presentation, you will see how soldiers fought shoulder to shoulder as a regiment. Any man who fought (and survived) would tell and retell his story for the rest of his life, often embellishing the details as time went on. By the 19th century, governments recognised this pride by issuing medals to all who had participated in key battles. Fighting in such a large and important battle was the goal of many soldiers, despite its danger to life and limb.



8 A Lesser Clash

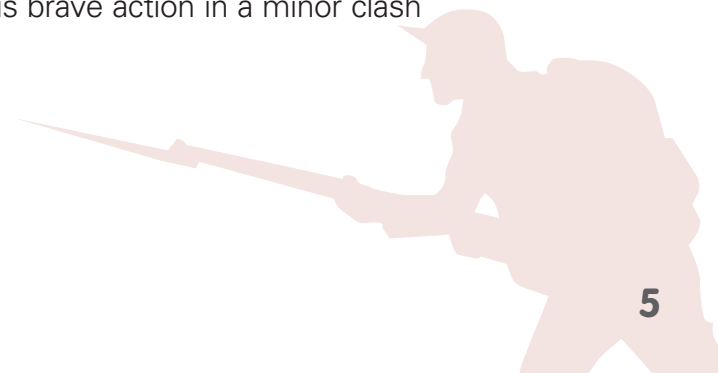
In every war there are lesser clashes whose names become forgotten but in which men fight and die. The battle of Flushing, an obscure conflict between the British and the French (including Irish soldiers) during the Napoleonic Wars was little-known, even at the time. An officer like Terence O'Reilly (in the audio at the display 'Irish in the French Army') might receive individual recognition; however most enlisted soldiers would remain anonymous despite equivalent bravery.

9 A Minor Skirmish

During the wars of the 17th and 18th centuries, soldiers were far more likely to fire their weapons in a minor skirmish with a few enemy soldiers than in a major battle. For professional soldiers like this Irishman in the Spanish Army, such skirmishes were all in a day's work. It is in such situations (away from senior officers and supporting arms) that the training of a soldier really becomes important.

You can find more examples of soldiers in battle in some of the other galleries of *Soldiers and Chiefs*:

- 21 in 'Irish in the British Service': 'Serving Among the Sassonach' – find the musket that an Irishman carried in several battles in India
- 28 in 'Claiming the Future': 'The Fight in Spain' – listen to a moving account of a little-known battle during the Spanish Civil War
- 34 in 'Training for Peace': 'Peacekeeping in the Congo' – find out how Sergeant Mulcahy was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his brave action in a minor clash



After the Battle

10 The Letter Home

After a battle, soldiers often took on the sad task of informing the parents of a dead comrade of their loss. Those who were unable to read and write would often ask an officer to write the necessary letter; by the American Civil War, when literacy was more widespread, enlisted men would write their own letters. Until the 20th century, governments were slow and inaccurate in providing casualty information.



11 Burying Your Dead

For the living, the aftermath of battle often included burying the dead (both men and horses). This photograph of some of the hundreds of Irish dead after the Battle of Antietam conveys both the scale of the task, and the way the corpses quickly bloated in the heat. Burial was not just a matter of respect for the fallen; it was also a vital step to prevent disease ravaging the survivors.

12 Food

Between battles soldiers spent a lot of time looking for food and thinking about food.

*Commissariat arrangements often broke down in the days leading up to a battle, leaving the soldiers scrambling to find something to eat. Officers, such as the Irish-American officer who owned these utensils, would frequently have their own stores of food, purchased privately and carried in their personal baggage.

*(an army department responsible for organising food and supplies)

You can find more examples of what soldiers did between battles in some of the other galleries of *Soldiers and Chiefs*:

22 in 'Irish in the British Service': 'On the Receiving End' – note the kind of things soldiers picked up as loot

24 in 'The First World War': 'War in the Mud - Life in the Trenches': passing the time – see what soldiers did between battles in the First World War

35 in 'Training for Peace': 'Peacekeeping in Lebanon' – look for the sign for 'Irish House', where soldiers relaxed between postings



Soldiering in Peacetime

13 Boredom

Fundamentally, army life in peacetime was boring beyond belief. The day was occupied with time-consuming repetitive tasks – participating in drills, inspections and parades, and cleaning kit. Traditionally, gambling and sports occupied the off-duty soldier living in barracks, but good officers looked for additional ways to engage the energy of these young men. Amateur theatricals and variety shows sometimes revealed surprising talents in the ranks.



14 Drink

These soldiers would probably rather be drinking than playing draughts, but alcohol was prohibited in this recreational centre. Soldiers have always enjoyed 'the consolations of the bottle' and Irish soldiers serving in the British Army were no exception. When the temperance movement (a late-Victorian campaign against alcohol abuse) came to the army, the emphasis was wisely put on encouraging soldiers to limit their drinking, rather than trying to get them to abstain entirely.

15 Women

When married soldiers were posted abroad, most of the wives were obliged to stay behind in Ireland, leading to moving farewell scenes such as this. Since these separations often lasted several years, married soldiers, like their single comrades, at times resorted to prostitutes. Armies recognised the soldiers' situation by tolerating (even licensing) brothels for soldiers in garrison towns.

You can find more examples of soldiers in peacetime in some of the other galleries of *Soldiers and Chiefs*:

- 29 in 'Claiming the Future': 'Building an Army' – find the flashy Blue Hussar uniform, an expression of the ceremonial role of the peacetime military
- 36 in 'Peacekeeping: 'Aid to the Civil Power' – peacetime armies may have policing roles; here are some recent examples
- 37 in 'The Future' – in peacetime governments have to make difficult choices about how to allocate limited funds most effectively



Retirement

16 A Distinguished Career

A career soldier might spend thirty years or more in uniform. His soldiering in peace and war would probably take him (in the case of the British Army) to India and Africa as well as army posts in Britain and Ireland. By the second half of the 19th century, his service in a specific campaign was recognised by a campaign medal; the soldier who 'kept his nose clean' was also eligible for a Long Service and Good Conduct medal.



17 Reaching the End of Your Service

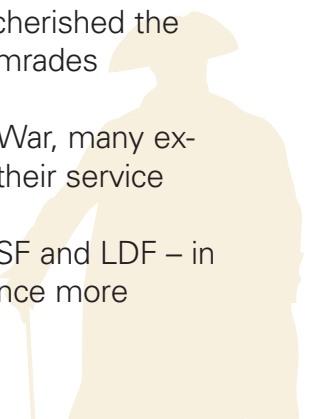
While most retired soldiers treasured their medals, some were forced to sell them after leaving the army to get enough money to live on. Long-serving soldiers (21 years was typical) were eligible to retire with a small pension, the size of which was determined by their length of service and rank upon retirement.

18 An Old Soldier Never Dies...

In earlier times the soldier retired as an old man, equipped with little more than a gift from his colleagues, such as this commemorative embroidery. A lucky few became residents at Kilmainham Hospital, a retirement home for soldiers. Most just lived a quiet life on a small pension; however their experiences in the army and the friends they had made remained an important part of their identity. Nowadays, many soldiers retire in middle age and adopt another career.

You can find more examples of soldiers in retirement in some of the other galleries of *Soldiers and Chiefs*:

- 25 in 'The First World War': 'Escape from Holzminden' – some ex-soldiers cherished the memory of their service, celebrating important anniversaries with old comrades
- 30 in 'Claiming the Future': 'Remembering the War' – after the First World War, many ex-soldiers (such as this cavalryman) bore wounds, a constant reminder of their service
- 31 in 'The Emergency': 'The Second World War': 'Part-time Soldiers', the LSF and LDF – in emergencies, the government might ask old soldiers to don a uniform once more



Want to know more?

For more information on exhibitions and education programmes, contact the Education and Outreach Department of the National Museum of Ireland.

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email: bookings@museum.ie

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Cover image: 69th New York Infantry, Knapsack c.1890-1900, Canteen c.1890- 1900 and Infantry Forage Cap c.1900, National Museum of Ireland

