



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

Ireland and the South African War, 1899-1902

By

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## Table of Contents

	Page No.
Title page	i
Table of contents	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of maps and illustrations	v
List of tables in main text	vii
Glossary	viii
Maps	ix
Personalities of the South African War	xx
'A loyal Irish soldier'	xxiv
Cover page: Ireland and the South African War	xxv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Irish soldiers' experiences in South Africa (October - December 1899)	19
Chapter 2: Irish soldiers' experiences in South Africa (January - March 1900)	76
Chapter 3: The 'Irish' Imperial Yeomanry and the battle of Lindley	109
Chapter 4: The Home Front	152
Chapter 5: Commemoration	198
Conclusion	227
Appendix 1: List of Irish units	240
Appendix 2: Irish Victoria Cross winners	243
Appendix 3: Men from Irish battalions especially mentioned from General Buller for their conspicuous gallantry in the field throughout the Tugela Operations	247

Appendix 4: General White's commendations of officers and men that were Irish or who were attached to Irish units who served during the period prior and during the siege of Ladysmith	248
Appendix 5: Return of casualties which occurred in Natal, 1899-1902	249
Appendix 6: Return of casualties which occurred in the Cape, Orange River, and Transvaal Colonies, 1899-1902	250
Appendix 7: List of Irish officers and officers who were attached to Irish battalions who died during the South African War	251
Appendix 8: Total casualties for Irish line regiments in Natal and Cape, Orange River, and Transvaal Colonies	255
Appendix 9: South African War diary of Trooper James Clarke, 45 <sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry	256
Appendix 10: Informal Will and letter of Lance-Corporal Hamilton Doake, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers	265
Appendix 11: Photographs of South African War veterans on their day of submission to the Richmond Asylum, Grangegorman, Dublin	268
Bibliography	274

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## List of maps and illustrations

	Page No.
Fig. 1: Map of the South African Republic, the Orange Free State and Natal	ix
Fig. 2: Map of Northern Natal	x
Fig. 3: The battle of Talana	Xi
Fig. 4: The battle of Elandslaagte	Xii
Fig. 5: Map of Ladysmith and surrounding heights	Xiii
Fig. 6: Battle of Nicholson's Nek	Xiv
Fig. 7: Birds-eye view of the country covered by General Buller's operations for the relief of Ladysmith	Xv
Fig. 8: Map showing the attempted passage of the river by General Buller at the battle of Colenso	Xvi
Fig.9: Battle of Colenso	Xvii
Fig.10: Final advance on Ladysmith	Xviii
Fig. 11: Battle of Lindley	Xix
Fig. 12: Sir Redvers Henry Buller, V.C.	Xx
Fig. 13: Field Marshal Lord Roberts	Xx
Fig. 14: Lord Kitchener of Khartoum	Xx
Fig. 15: Lieutenant-General J.D.P. French	Xxi
Fig. 16: General Sir George Stewart White, V.C.	Xxi
Fig. 17: Major-General Sir W. Penn Symons	Xxi
Fig. 18: Major-General A. Fitzroy Hart	Xxii
Fig. 19: Lieutenant-General Thomas Kelly-Kenny	Xxii
Fig. 20: Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., Secretary for the Colonies	Xxii
Fig. 21: Paul Kruger, President of the Transvaal Republic	Xxiii
Fig. 22: General Piet Joubert	Xxiii
Fig. 23: General Louis Botha	Xxiii
Fig. 24: 'Where do the Boers fight?'	Xxv
Fig. 25: 'Reservists at Kilkenny': 3 <sup>rd</sup> King's Royal Rifles enter Kilkenny Barracks	10
Fig. 26: The 5 <sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers departing to the front via Fort Napier, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa	18
Fig. 27: 2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Rifles embarking on the White Star Liner 'Britannia' at Queenstown, County Cork	18
Fig. 28: 'The last rites' at Dundee	33
Fig. 29: The battle of Elandslaagte - charge of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Lancers	37
Fig. 30: Victims of the disaster at Nicholson's Nek. British prisoners at Pretoria	43
Fig. 31: Fusiliers captured by Boers' and Blake's Brigade. Arrival under escort at Pretoria	45
Fig. 32: The 6 <sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers boarding the 'Siberian' at Queenstown	51
Fig. 33: Officers of the Irish Brigade and several war correspondents watching the bombardment at Colenso	54
Fig. 34: Map detailing the advance of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Irish Brigade at Colenso	58
Fig. 35: General Hart's flank attack from the Boer point of view	58
Fig. 36: The battle of Colenso - The Dublin Fusiliers attempt to ford the Tugela	63
Fig. 37: Satellite image of the Tugela River	72
Fig. 38: The final advance to Ladysmith - Hart's infantry bivouacking on the banks of Tugela	83

Fig. 39: After the fight: burying the dead following the battle of Inniskilling Hill	84
Fig. 40: The town of Ladysmith	85
Fig. 41: Trenches of Ladysmith	93
Fig. 42: 2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, heading relief troops, marching into Ladysmith	99-100
Fig. 43: Trooper Maurice Fitzgibbon, 45 <sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, 13 <sup>th</sup> Battalion, Imperial Yeomanry	112
Fig. 44: A drawing of the Duke of Connaught inspecting the 45 <sup>th</sup> Dublin Company	134
Fig. 45: A photograph of the Duke of Connaught inspecting the 45 <sup>th</sup> Dublin Company	134
Fig. 46: Some members of No. 1 troop of the Dublin Squadron, Imperial Yeomanry	136
Fig. 47: Temporary military hospital at Reitz with casualties of the 13th Battalion	142
Fig. 48: Officers of the 45 <sup>th</sup> and 47 <sup>th</sup> Companies, captured at Lindley	148
Fig. 49: Members of the 13 <sup>th</sup> Battalion inside a prison at Nooitgedacht	151
Fig. 50: Trooper N.F. Fenner and Trooper H.H. Fenner, 45 <sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry	151
Fig. 51: The Countess of Limerick's Shamrock League	180
Fig. 52: An inspection of Lord Iveagh's Field Hospital Staff at Dublin, prior to departure	185
Fig. 53: A group of Irish nurses for South Africa	185
Fig. 54: The founding sisters of the Mafeking Convent	187
Fig. 55: Irish Sisters of Mercy received by the Queen	189
Fig. 56: The Lower House, Richmond Asylum	197
Fig. 57: The Roman Catholic Church and unit '23' at the Richmond Asylum	197
Fig. 58: A contemporary drawing of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers memorial arch	198
Fig. 59: The return of the 61st Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry, to Dublin	202
Fig. 60: The return of the 1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers to Derry-Londonderry	202
Fig. 61: The Duke of Connaught's opening speech at the unveiling of Fusiliers' Arch	209
Fig. 62: A photograph of the crowds surrounding the memorial arch during the unveiling	210
Fig. 63: A photograph of Fusiliers' Arch circa 1907/08	213
Fig. 64: The 'dead' Dublin Fusilier once attached to Queen Victoria's memorial in Dublin	214
Fig. 65: A contemporary photograph of the damage caused by the explosion at the South African War memorial in Connaught Avenue, Cork (2014)	219
Fig. 66: A modern photograph of the front of Fusilier's Arch	226
Fig. 67: Men of the 6 <sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons slaughtering cattle	231
Fig. 68: 'Ireland in the war' article heading that appeared in <i>The Illustrated London News</i>	234
Fig. 69: 'Figuring it out': The world's leading nations attempt to estimate how much a world war would cost?	239
Fig. 70: Trooper James Clarke, 45 <sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry	256
Fig. 71: Attestation forms of Trooper James John Clarke, 45 <sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry	257
Fig. 72: Boer War diary of Trooper James John Clarke, 45 <sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry	258
Fig. 73: Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Hamilton Doake, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers	265
Fig. 74: Image of page one and four of Lance-Corporal Doake's letter home	266
Fig. 75: Private William McConnell, Royal Dublin Fusiliers	268
Fig. 76: Sergeant John Joseph Doherty, Royal Irish Regiment	269
Fig. 77: Sergeant Laurence Bradley, Royal Irish Fusiliers	270
Fig. 78: Private Patrick Brennan, 4 <sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers	271

Fig. 79: Private Thomas McCarthy, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	272
Fig. 80: Private Thomas McCarthy, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, with head injury sustained at Colenso	273

### List of tables in main text

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
Table		
A)	Information on Irish units based in South Africa, prior to war	21-22
Table	Information on Irish regiments ordered to the front (November-	
B)	December 1899)	47
Table	The character of wounds sustained by the 5th Irish Brigade at Colenso	
C)	(15 December 1899)	66
Table	Return of Irish battalion casualties sustained at the battle of Pieter's Hill	
D)	(27 February 1900)	84
Table	Registered County/Country of recruits in the 'Irish' units of the First	120-
E)	Contingent	121
Table	The religious denominations of the 'Irish' yeomanry in the First	
F)	Contingent	124
Table	Fifteen most common trades and profession of the 'Irish' units in the First	
G)	Contingent	126
Table		
H)	List of Irish war charities and money subscribed	171
Table	Number of widows supported by the Irish Regiments Widows and	
I)	Orphans Fund (1901)	174
Table	Number of widows supported by the Irish Regiments Widows and	
J)	Orphans Fund (1903)	175
Table	The minimum number of Irish war memorials erected during the	203-
K)	Victorian era	204
Table		
L)	List of regiment and battalion memorials in Ireland	217
Table		220-
M)	List of personal memorials in Ireland	222

## Glossary

**Arme blanche** – Or ‘white arm’, includes weaponry that involves the use of ‘cold weapons’, such as swords, lances, spears, axes and bayonets; it is distinguishable from firearms and explosives. The *arme blanche* was considered an effective tactic in damaging the morale of an enemy and shattering their resistance.

**Enfilading fire** – A military tactic describing a position in which weapons can be directed along an entire vulnerable target.

**Investment** – A military tactic performed by a besieging force. It is an attempt to blockade an enemy force within a fort or town, to prevent their escape or entry.

**Kopje** – An Afrikaner name for a small hill in a generally flat area.

**Kraal** – An Afrikaner word for an enclosure of cattle and livestock.

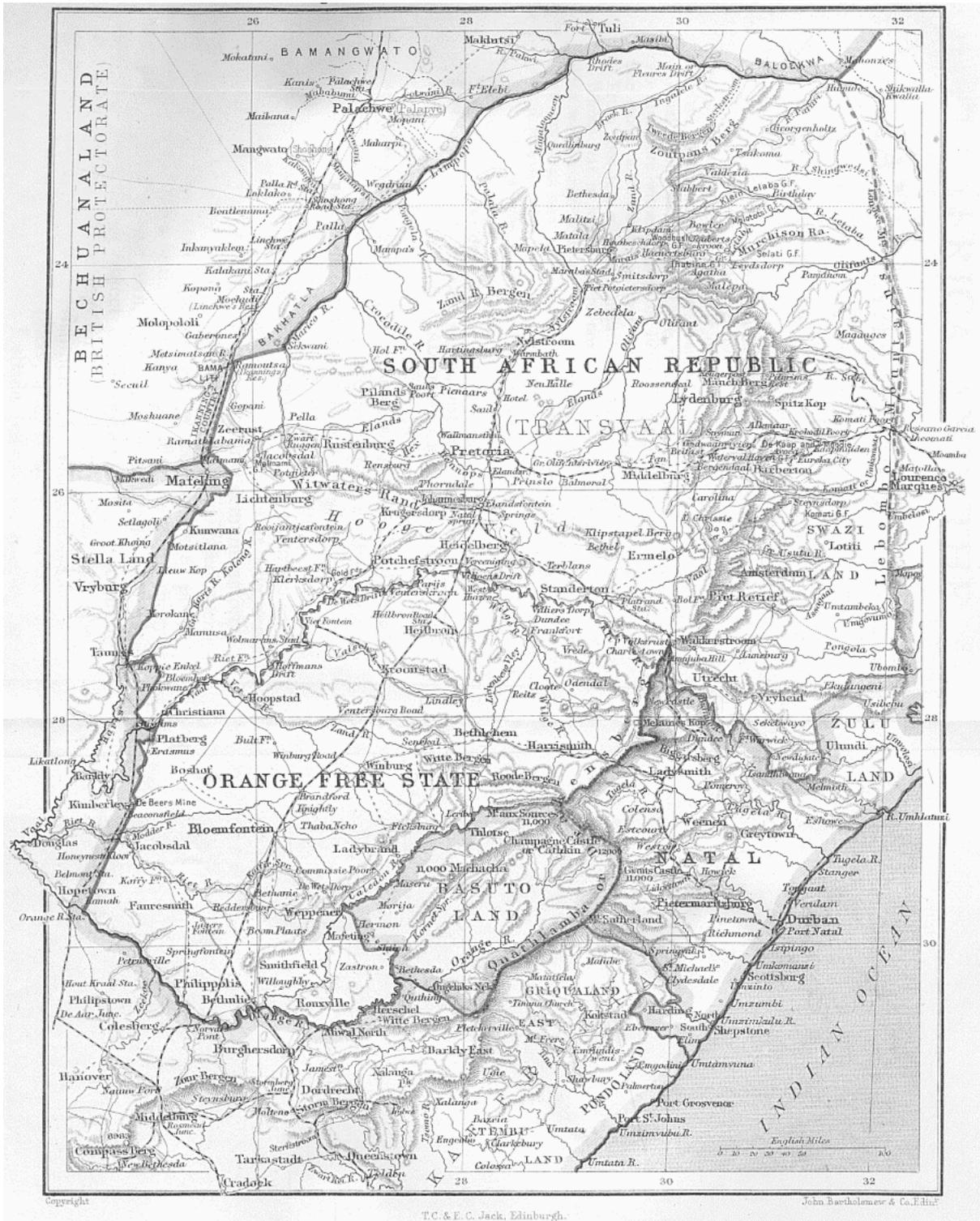
**Mounted Infantry** – A form of mobile infantry, in which soldiers rode into battle, and when engaged with the enemy, fought on foot.

**Sangar** – a temporary military breastwork fortification, usually built from rocks and stone. It is an ideal defensive measure, when entrenching is not possible.

**Uitlander** – An Afrikaner word for European migrants that did not have a political franchise in the Transvaal.

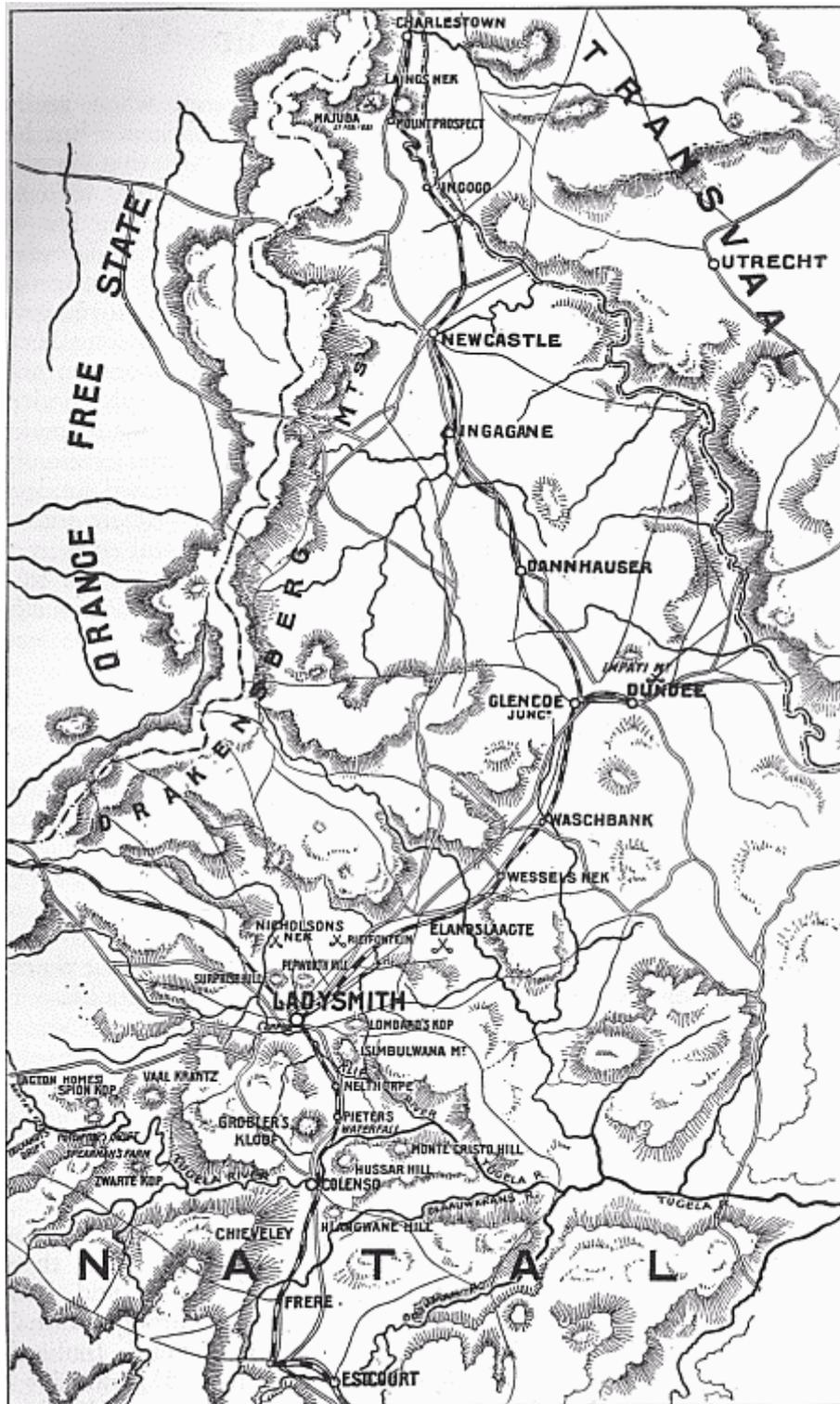
**Veldt** – A term to describe the open plain of Southern Africa.

**Fig. 1: Map of the South African Republic, the Orange Free State and Natal**



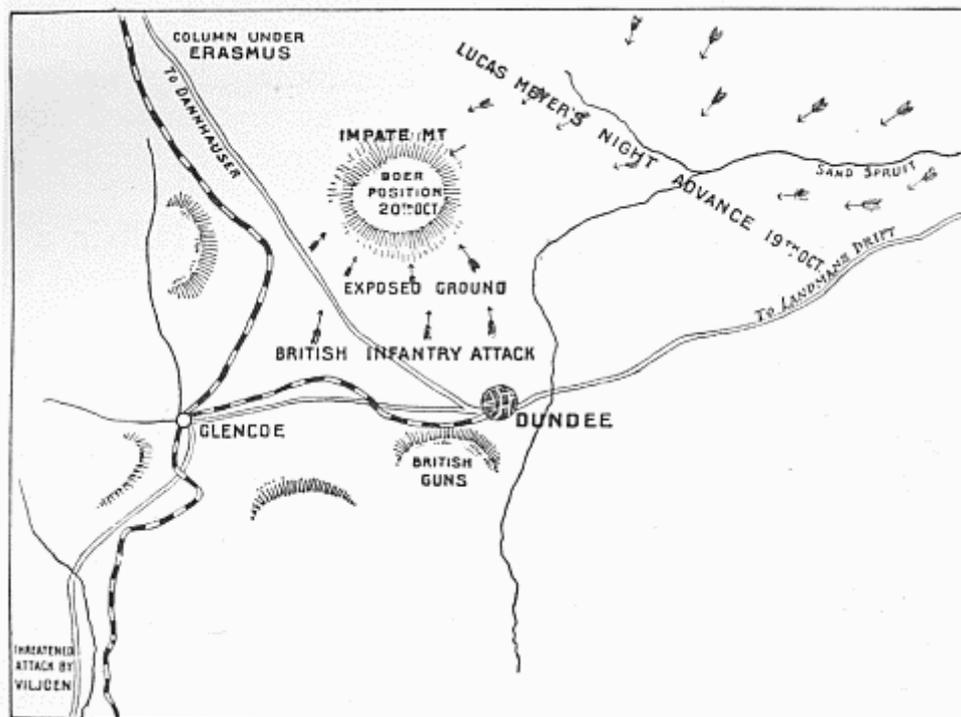
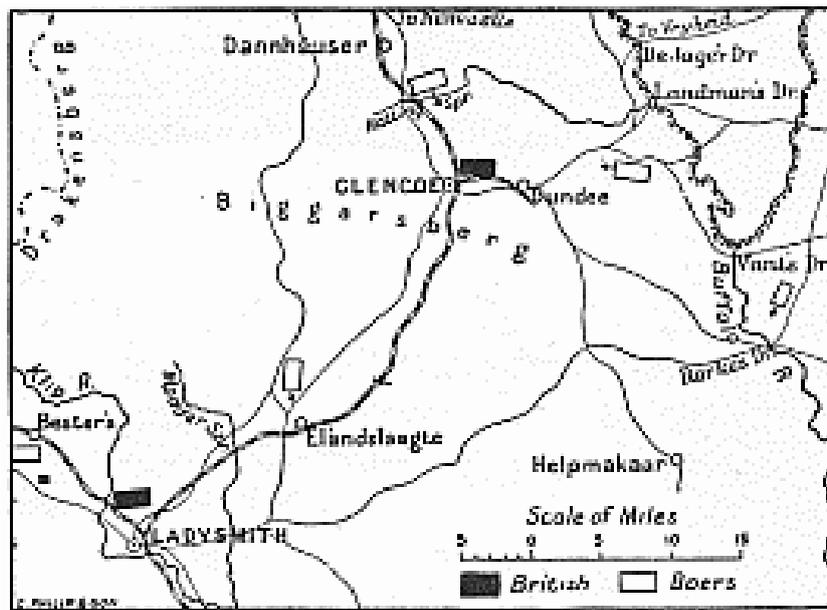
Source: Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p. x.

**Fig. 2: Map of northern Natal**



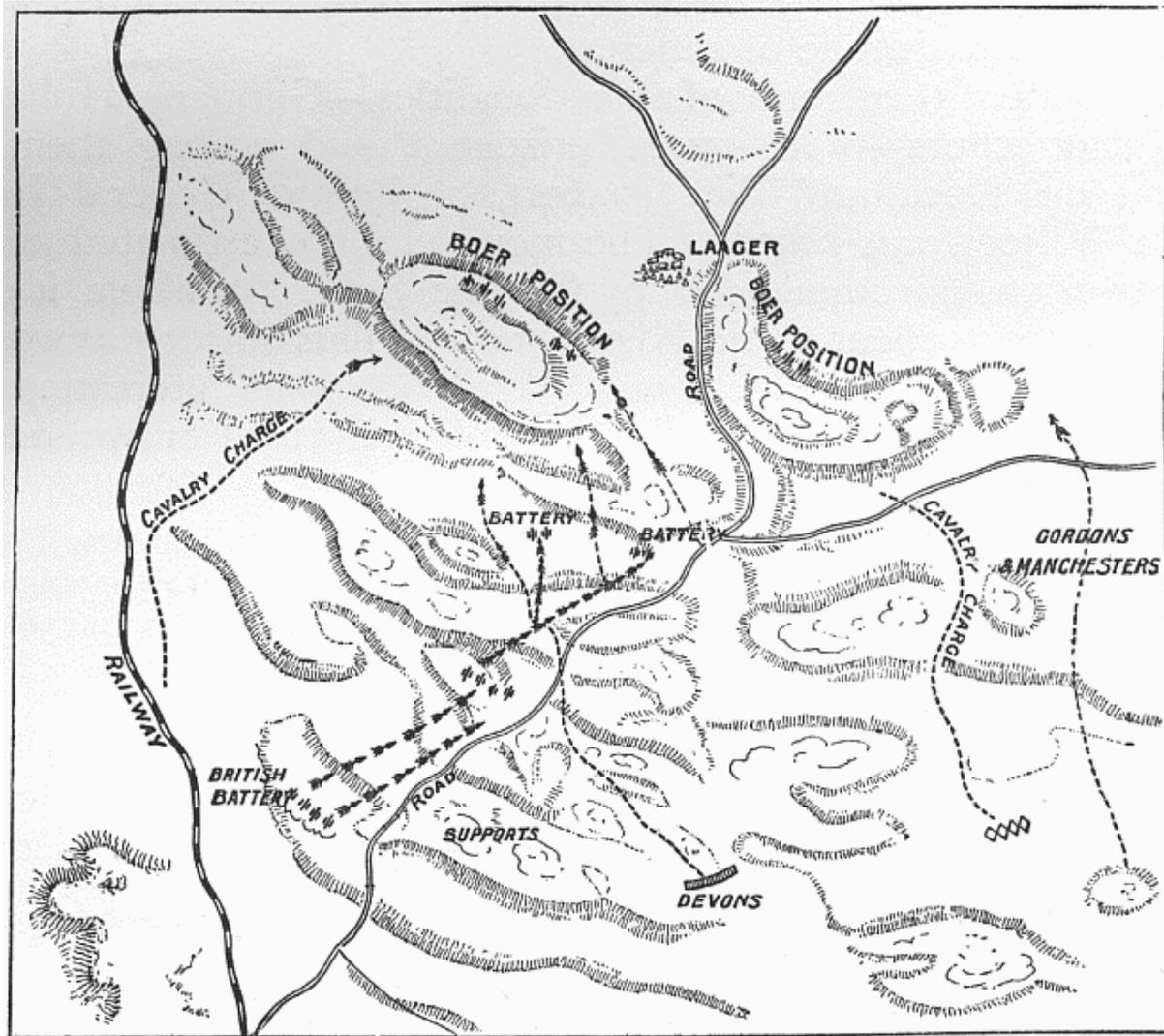
Source: Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p 9.

**Fig. 3: The battle of Talana (20 October 1899)**



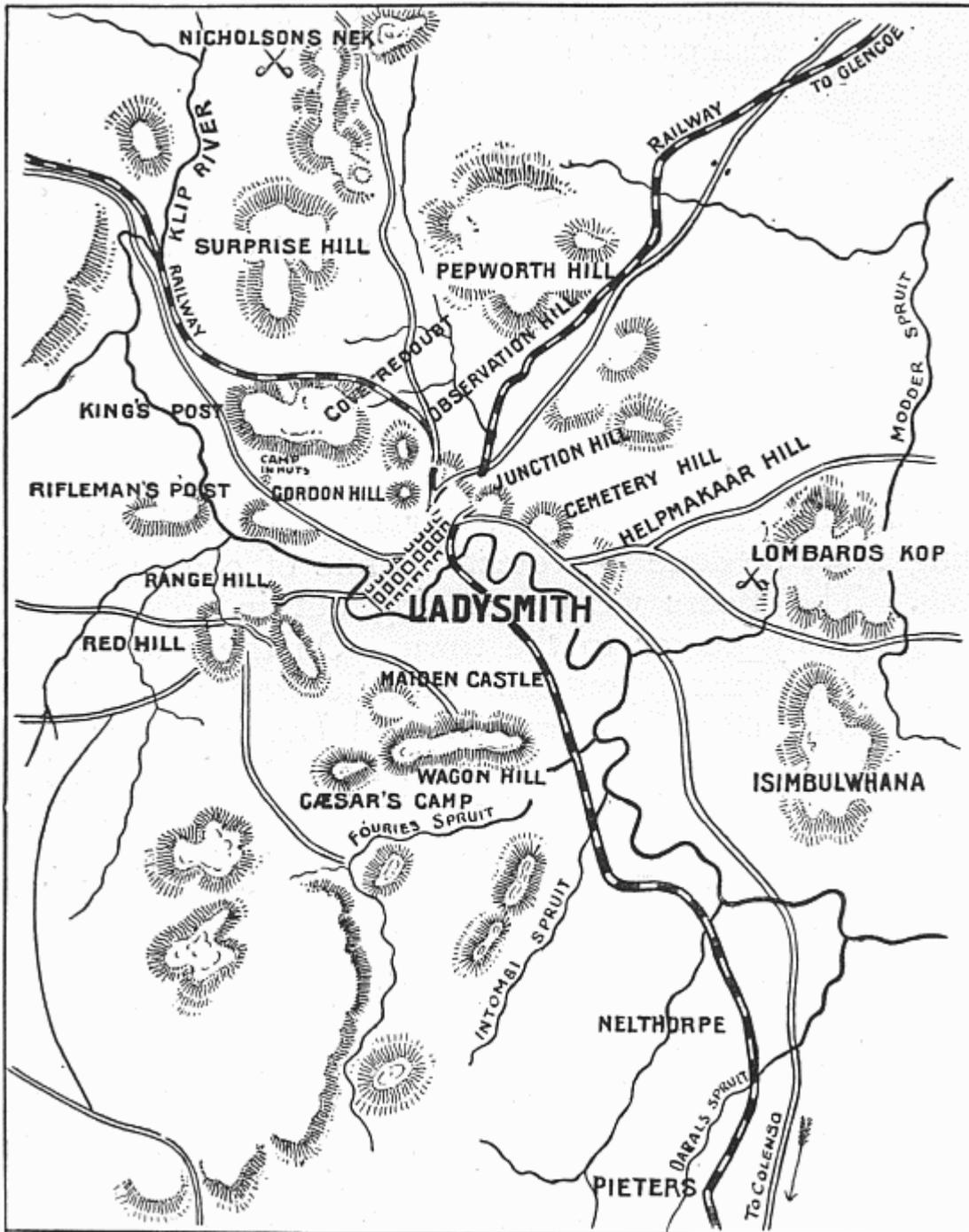
Source: Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), pp 15 and 17.

**Fig. 4: Battle of Elandslaagte (21 October 1899)**



Source: Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p. 25.

**Fig. 5: Map of Ladysmith and surrounding heights**



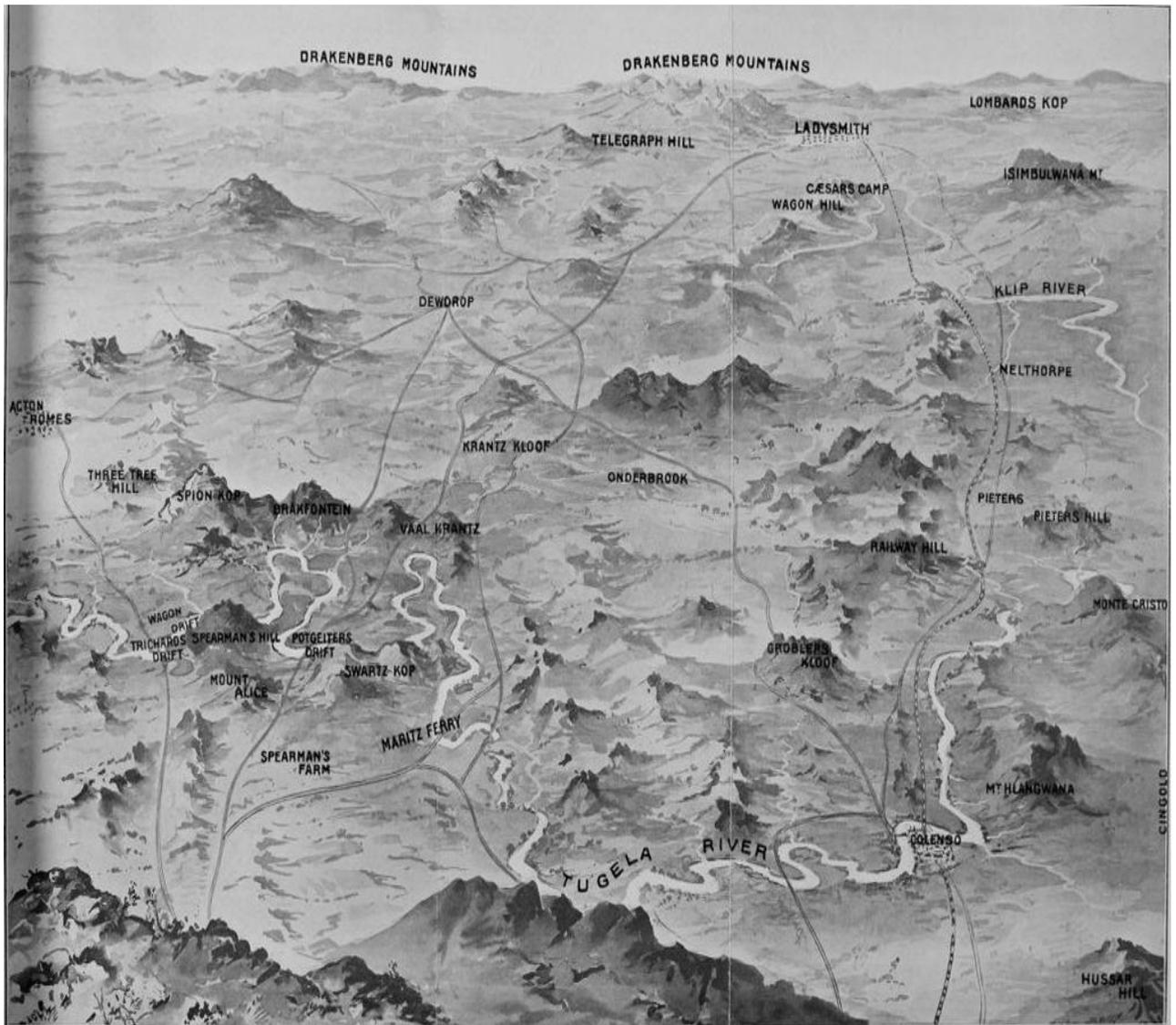
Source: Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p. 42.

**Fig. 6: Battle of Nicholson's Nek (30 November 1899)**



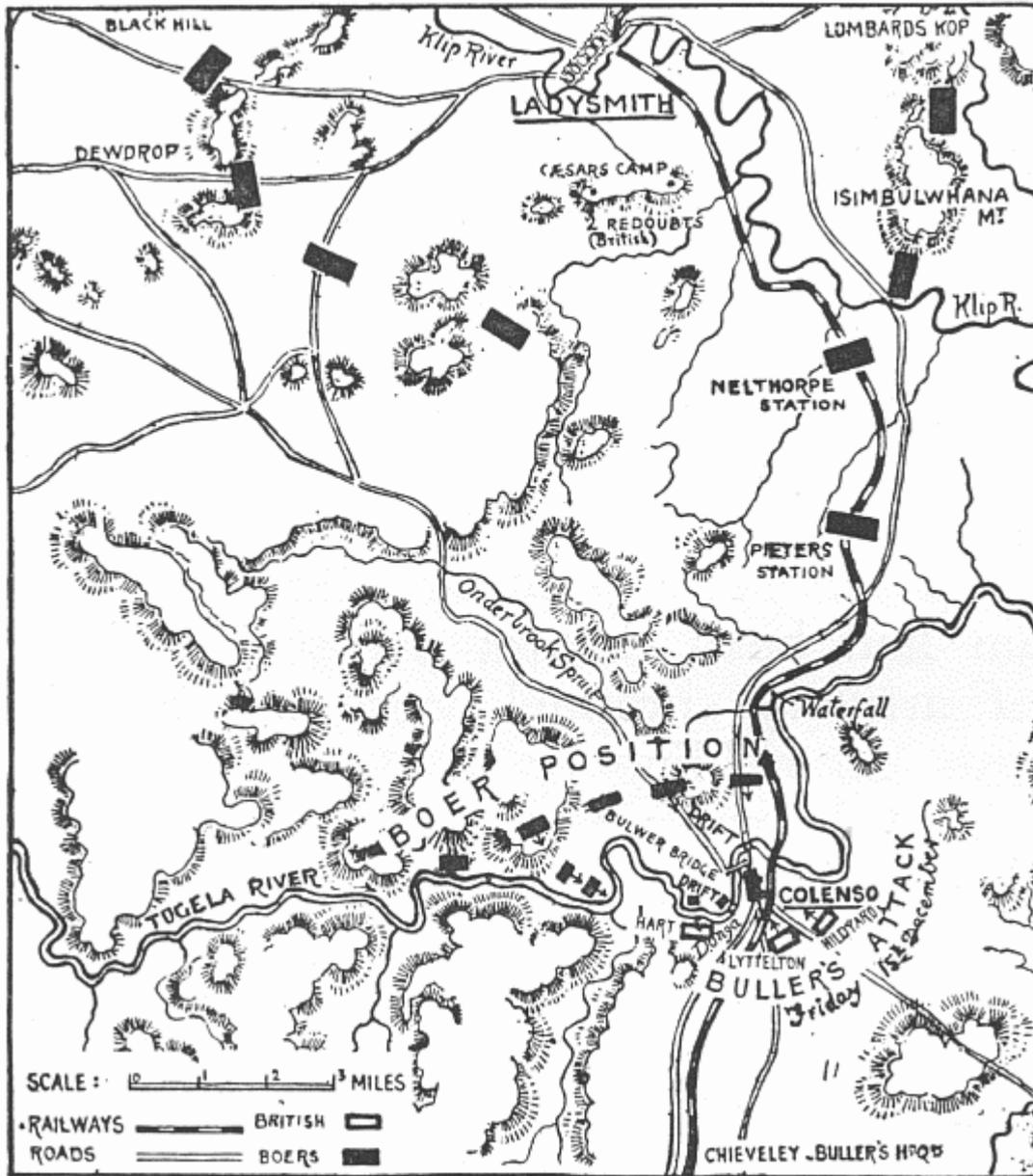
Source: Ben Viljoen, *My reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War* (London, 1902), p. 17.

**Fig. 7: Birds-eye view of the country covered by General Buller's operations for the relief of Ladysmith**



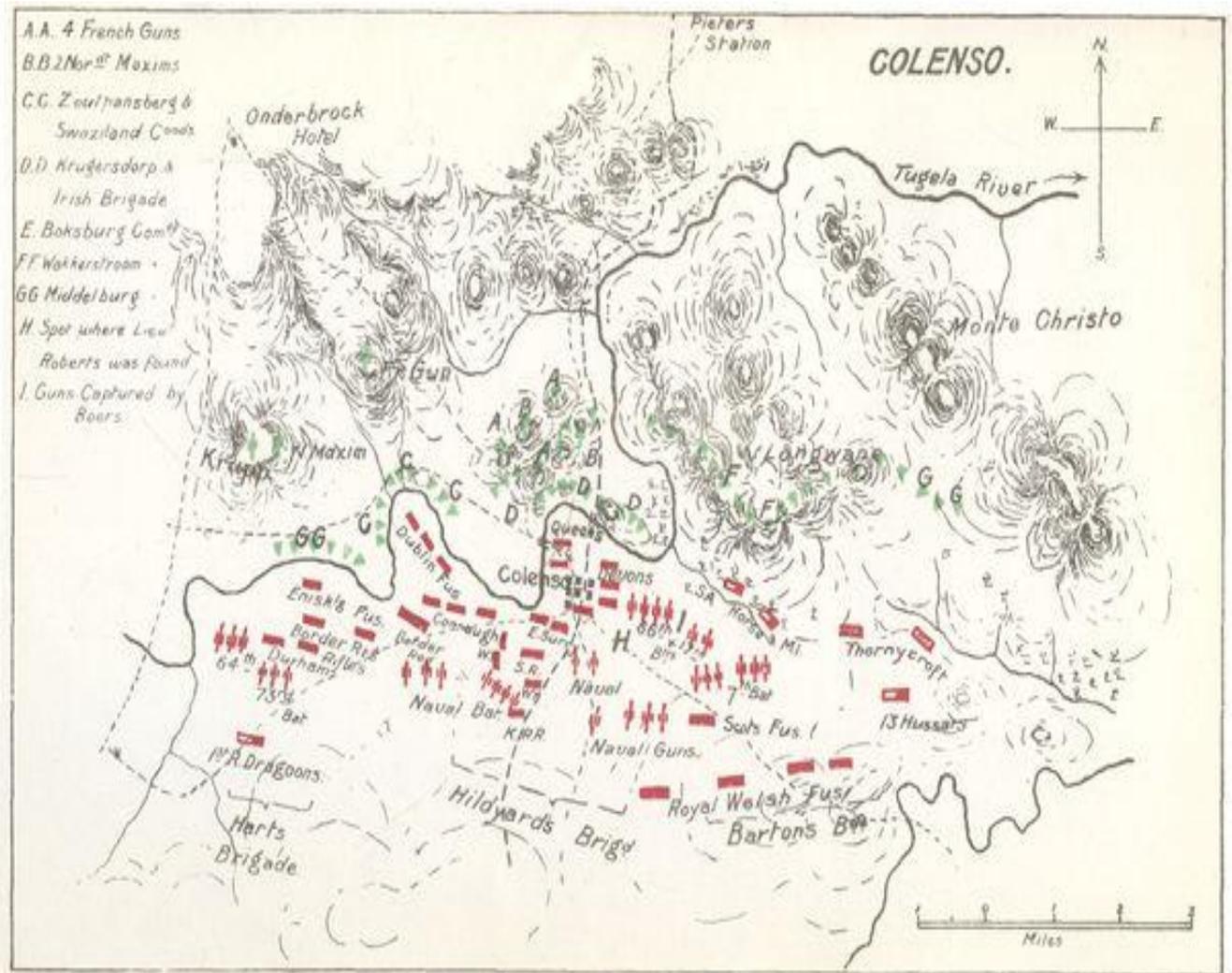
Source: Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p. ix.

**Fig. 8: Map showing the attempted passage of the river by General Buller at the battle of Colenso (15 December 1899)**



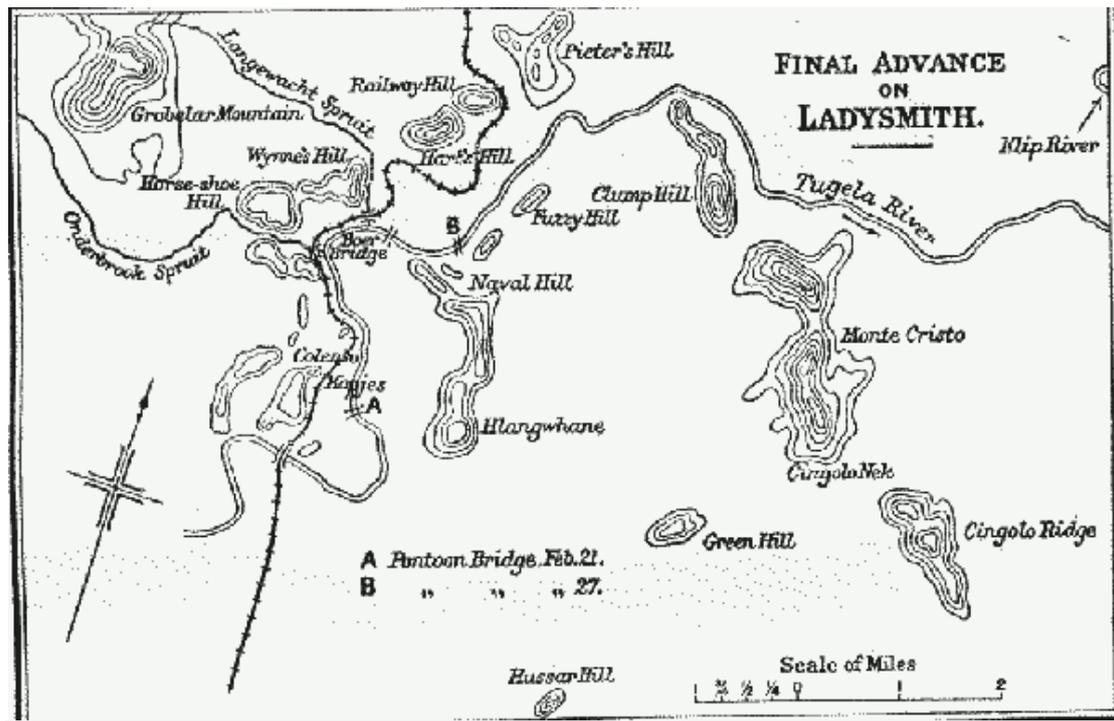
Source: Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p. 194.

**Fig. 9: Battle of Colenso (15 December 1899)**



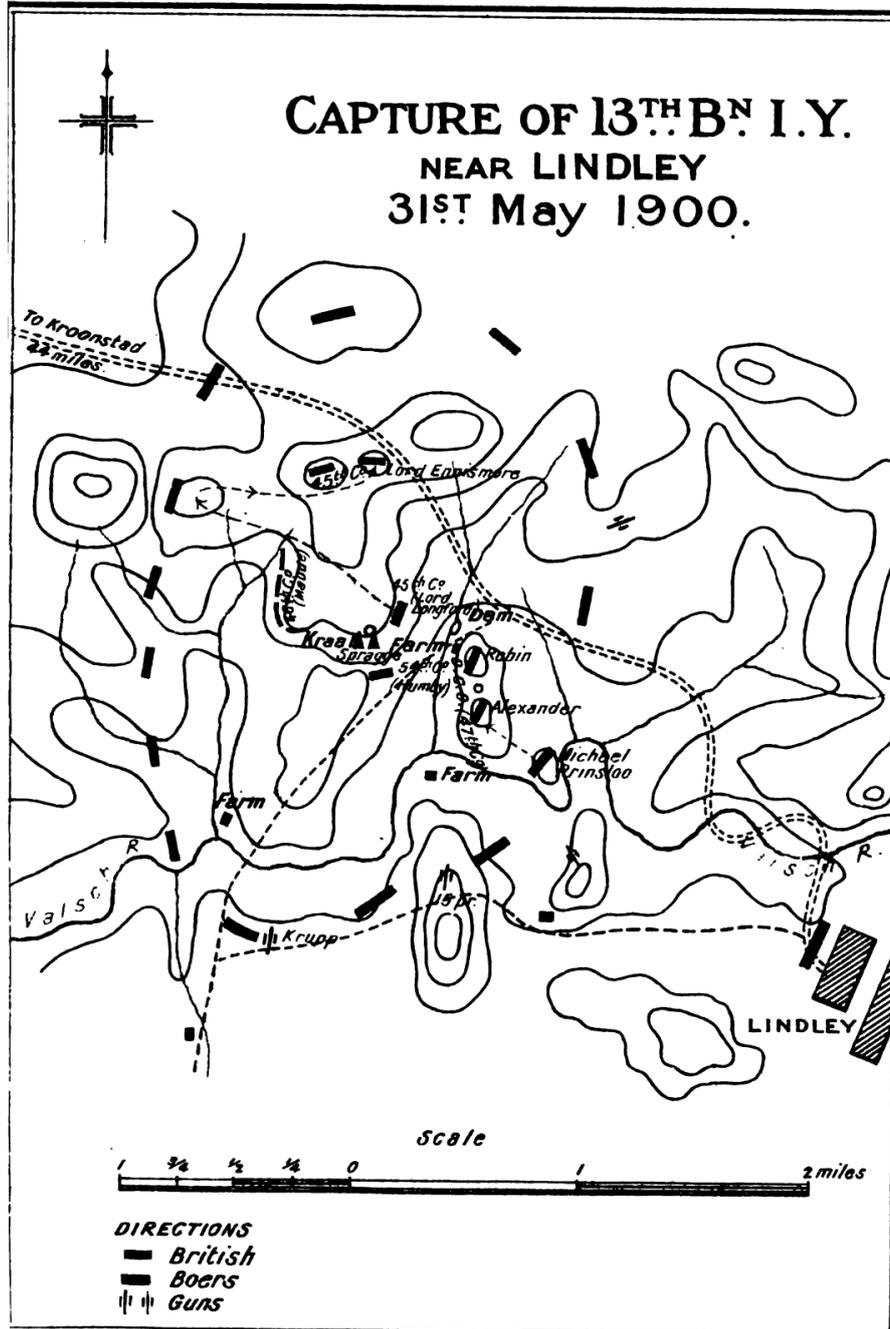
Source: Ben Viljoen, *My reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War* (London, 1902), p. 19.

**Fig. 10: Final advance on Ladysmith**



Source: Anon. *A Handbook of the Boer War* (London, 1910), p. 128.

**Fig. 11: Battle of Lindley (27-31 May 1900)**



Source: L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history of the war in South Africa, 1899-1902*, iv (London, 1906), pp 254-257.

## Personalities of the war<sup>1</sup>

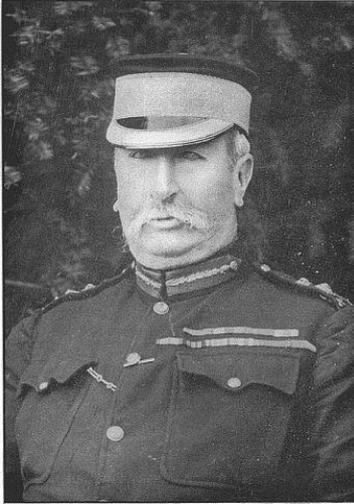


Fig. 12: Sir Redvers Henry Buller, V.C.



Fig. 13: Field Marshal Lord Roberts V.C.



Fig. 14: Lord Kitchener of Khartoum

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<sup>1</sup> All images sourced from Louis Cheswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, i, ii, iii, iv (London, 1900 and 1901), except the photograph of Louis Botha; C.J. Barnard, 'General Botha at the battle of Colenso 15 December 1899' in *Military History Journal*, i (1970) np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol017cb.html> (11 Nov. 2013).



Fig. 15: Lieutenant-General J.D.P. French



Fig. 16: General Sir George Stewart White, V.C.



Fig. 17: Major-General Sir W. Penn Symons



Fig. 18: Major-General A. Fitzroy Hart

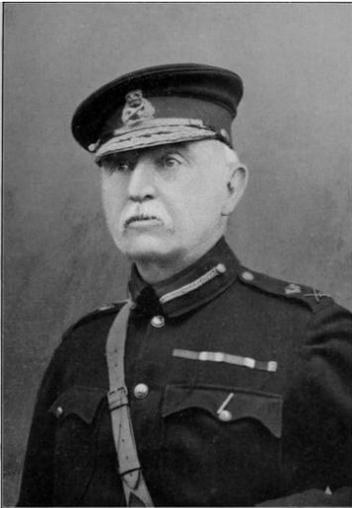


Fig.19: Lieutenant-General Thomas Kelly-Kenny



Fig. 20: Joseph Chamberlain, M.P.,  
Secretary for the Colonies



Fig. 21: Paul Kruger, President of the Transvaal Republic



Fig. 22: General Piet Joubert



Fig. 23: General Louis Botha

### 'A loyal Irish soldier'

The morning sunbeams dancing on accoutrements are  
glancing  
And excitement reigns throughout the barrack's  
borders,  
But all the men are steady, and in ranks are standing  
ready,  
For the regiment is under marching orders.  
With rifle on my shoulder, I'm a loyal Irish soldier,  
And with knapsack strapped upon my back I'm  
scorning  
To stay behind at Curragh, but it's South I want  
to hurry,  
And march on to Pretoria in the morning.

There will be some heavy slaughter in that land across  
the water,  
For the pot-shot, lurking Boer keeps well to cover ;  
And many a brave fellow, with the hard earth for a  
pillow,  
Will go down to death, far from his home and lover.  
With rifle on my shoulder, I'm a loyal Irish soldier,  
And old Kruger and his Dutchmen I am  
scorning,  
And when we cross the ocean, we will raise a big  
commotion,  
As we march on to Pretoria in the morning.

There are Fenians with the Dutchmen, but if only we  
can touch 'em,  
It is blazes we will knock out of the craters,  
'Tis gladly we will meet them, and as gladly will we  
beat them,  
And thus show how loyal Irishmen loathe traitors.  
With rifle on my shoulder, I'm a loyal Irish soldier,  
And old Kruger's dastard Fenians I am scornin';  
We'll give them one good volley, and then march  
through them as jolly  
As the divil did through Athlone in the morning.

So, comrades, as we're leaving home and friends behind  
us grieving,  
Let us raise three rousing cheers for Queen Victoria :  
We'll valiantly defend her great Empire, and hope to  
send her  
Our next loyal message from Oom Paul's Pretoria.  
With rifle on my shoulder, I'm a loyal Irish soldier,  
And old Kruger's Boers and Fenians I am  
scorning ;  
And when we cross the ocean, we will raise a big  
commotion,  
As we march on to Pretoria in the morning.

Source, *Black and White Budget*, 23 June 1900.

# Ireland and the South African War, 1899-1902

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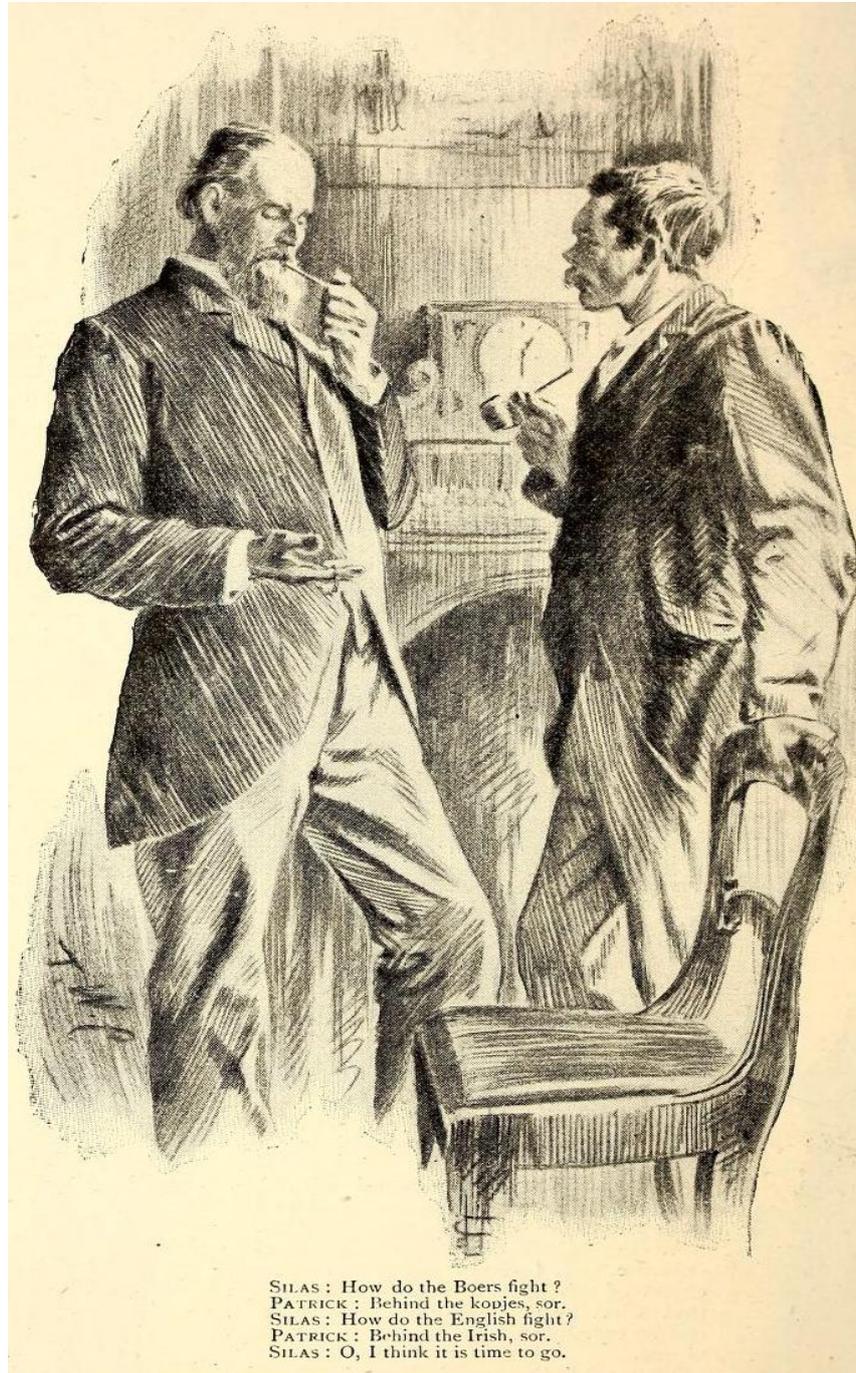


Fig. 24: 'How do the Boers fight?' Source, *Black and White Budget*, 5 Jan. 1901.

# Introduction

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## **Ireland and the South African War**

On 14 July 1900, the *Black and White Budget* published the following excerpt, written by George Essex Evans, of Queensland, Australia, entitled, ‘To the Irish dead’:

To Ireland, set in the silver water,  
To the fighting blood that is proved and tried –  
Our sharpest sword and our fairest daughter –  
Who saved the Empire and turn the tide!<sup>1</sup>

During the South African War, the Irish soldier was a prominent participant in the British army, actively engaging in some of the most infamous and important engagements of the conflict. Of course, for this period in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the strong military tradition that had once existed in Ireland, it was only natural that soldiers and citizens from Ireland actively engaged in imperial and military concerns. Throughout the nineteenth century, Irishmen enlisted into the British army and navy, establishing themselves as an integral element of the military. In addition, the Irish actively contributed to imperial development, finding employment in the civil service, politics, and administration. The importance of Irish recruitment in the British army is reflected in the following figures: in 1830, the Irish represented 42.2 per cent of the United Kingdom’s army; in 1868, 55,583 Irish NCOs and other ranks had enlisted, representing 30.8 percent.<sup>2</sup> Although Irish enlistment into the British army steadily declined towards the end of the nineteenth century, their participation was constant and Irish interest in the affairs of the British Empire increased. Irish interaction and interest in the military would be witnessed towards the end of the nineteenth century, when a relatively untrained and unprofessional citizen militia declared war on the British Empire.

The South African War witnessed the largest muster of Irish troops ever assembled during the nineteenth century. Conservative estimations have placed Irish participation in the region of 30,000 soldiers;<sup>3</sup> however, further analysis by Keith Jeffery demonstrated that some

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<sup>1</sup> *Black and White Budget*, 14 July 1900.

<sup>2</sup> E.M. Spiers, ‘Army organisation and society in the nineteenth century’ in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 337. According to Spiers, the figure may be understated, as some Irishmen were possibly considered as being born in either India or the colonies.

<sup>3</sup> D.P. McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003), p. 133.

47,000 Irishmen were involved in the war.<sup>4</sup> Arguably, if one includes the twenty-six militia battalions that were mobilised during the war and despatched across areas of Ireland and the United Kingdom, the figure could be in the region of some sixty thousand men that played some part in the war effort. Nevertheless, it is apparent that Irish participation was significant and distinctive throughout the course of the campaign; thirteen regular Irish infantry battalions and three cavalry units were deployed for active service in South Africa. Some of these units were involved in some of the most celebrated and renowned engagements of the conflict, including: Talana, Elandslaagte, Stormberg, Colenso and the siege of Ladysmith. In addition to the strong regular Irish contingent, the British army were reinforced by five militia Irish infantry battalions and two units of militia artillery that were despatched to the front; thirteen companies of the 'Irish' Imperial Yeomanry were established; and, the period also witnessed the creation of Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital, and the mobilisation of the Dublin District Company of the Militia Medical Corps and many Irish nurses and doctors.<sup>5</sup> In addition to Ireland's impressive military contribution, more Irish generals were involved in this conflict than in any previous war during the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Within those battalions and units, this researcher has been able to establish 4,879 casualties,<sup>7</sup> whilst the General Registrar of Ireland reported the deaths of 1,800 Irish natives that died during the South African War attached to the British army.<sup>8</sup> While Irishmen continued to enlist into Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh battalions, it is interesting to note that Irishmen were also to be found in South African colonial units. Irishman Major Daniel Patrick Driscoll formed the Driscoll's Scouts, as a reaction to the heavy losses suffered by the Irish in the British army during the first months of the war;<sup>9</sup> war correspondent, A.G. Hales, would later call him the 'King of Scouts'.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, of the 389 men that had enlisted into the Orange River Scouts,

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<sup>4</sup> Keith Jeffery, 'The Irish soldier in the Boer War' in John Gooch (ed.), *The Boer War: direction, experience and image* (London, 2000), p. 142. In order to come to that estimation, Jeffery took the figure of thirteen percent of Irishmen that were in the British army in 1900, and calculated it against the reported figure of 365,693 soldiers from the United Kingdom that served in South Africa.

<sup>5</sup> See pages 240 to 242 for a comprehensive list of Irish units involved.

<sup>6</sup> Alvin Jackson, 'Irish unionists and the British Empire, 1880-1920' in Keith Jeffery (ed.), *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), p. 131.

<sup>7</sup> See pages 249 to 255 for further information on casualties.

<sup>8</sup> Ciarian Wallace, 'Lest we remember? Recollection of the Boer War and the Great War in Ireland', in *E-rea*, x, (2012), np. Online version. <http://erea.revues.org/2888> (8 June 2013).

<sup>9</sup> O.E.F Baker, 'The South African Irish Regiment: an exemplar of the military traditions of the Irish in South Africa', in *Military History Journal*, vi (1983), np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol061ob.html> (2 Dec., 2013). Lieutenant-Colonel Driscoll played a prominent role in the Legion of Frontiersmen during the Great War, and thus, helped establish the 25<sup>th</sup> (Frontiersmen), Royal Fusiliers, which would serve in the African theatre.

<sup>10</sup> A.G. Hales, *Campaign pictures of the war in South Africa 1899-1900: letters from the front* (London, 1900), pp 242-252; A.G. Hales, *Driscoll, King of Scouts: a romance of the South African War* (London, 1901).

some eight per cent were Irish.<sup>11</sup> On the Home Front, the response was equally impressive; tens of thousands of pounds were raised through various war charities; thousands of Irish citizens lined the streets of Dublin, Queenstown, Belfast and other towns across the island, celebrating the departure and arrival of each Irish and British unit; Irish citizens wrote to the press, voicing their support for the imperial project, and fêting the contribution of Irish soldiers and generals; whilst hundreds of Irish acted upon their words of support, by volunteering for the Imperial Yeomanry, and various medical services in support of the war effort.

In contrast to the impressive military and civilian participation from sections of the Irish population, the South African War was also an important period for Irish Nationalists. With the support of Irish Nationalist Members of Parliament, the Irish Transvaal Committee, and the Nationalist press, enthusiasm for the Boer cause was prominent throughout Irish society. It helped galvanise support and raise awareness for the Nationalist movement and attempted to encourage anti-British and imperialist sentiment within the country. Moreover, the opposition to the war in South Africa and British foreign policy in general, was supported by eminent members of Irish society – W.B. Yeats, Sean O’ Casey, James Connolly, John MacBride (both Connolly and MacBride were executed during the 1916 Rising by the British authorities), Maud Gonne, Arthur Griffith (founding member of the Sinn Féin political party in 1905), and Lady Gregory. Throughout the war, Irish pro-Boers denounced British aggression in South Africa and instigated a public campaign against British recruitment in Ireland. It was the early months of the war that witnessed the formation of the Irish Transvaal Brigade, under the command of Major John MacBride. Although their participation and numbers were minimal, their involvement provided a symbolic gesture of support for the Boer war effort. Interestingly, as detailed throughout this thesis, several battles witnessed MacBride’s Brigade pitted against several Irish battalions of the British army. With the evident lack of research detailing pro-British support and active civilian and military involvement, the Irish pro-Boer response has been generally accepted as the established history for this period in Ireland.

Therefore, the main objective of this thesis is to offer an insight into an area that has been significantly under-researched and generally forgotten in modern Ireland. This thesis seeks to present elements of Irish society that were loyal and patriotic members of the British Empire, during the South African War. During the nineteenth and early twentieth-century,

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<sup>11</sup> War Office: Local armed forces, enrolment forms, South African War. Orange River Scouts (T.N.A., WO126/98).

sections of the Irish community demonstrated their support for the Crown, the military and the imperial project – such responsiveness and interaction with the British Empire are often considered ‘an uncomfortable Irish heritage’, in modern Ireland.<sup>12</sup> The thesis strives to readdress the imbalance in Irish historiography. Since the formation of the Irish state, the country has quite successfully distanced itself from its past with the British Empire and the part Irish people played in overseas colonialism. Irish society and its historiography has attempted to remain focused on events that secured the formation of the state, with an interest in presenting Ireland as a nation of dissidence and rebellion against the British Crown. Indeed, without serious research into Ireland’s participation in the British Empire during this period, the Irish pro-Boer movement and military contribution to the Boer war effort remains the accepted history.<sup>13</sup>

In order to present aspects of Ireland’s patriotic response to the war effort, the thesis has been split into five chapters. Chapter one and two will focus on the military contribution of regular Irish units in the army during the first months of the conflict. The chapters will be based on largely unused primary material, including eye-witness accounts that detail various aspects of the Irish experience and participation, from October 1899 to March 1900. The reasons for this choice are due to the vast wealth of primary material available during this period of the conflict; the importance of the battles in the context of the war; the press interest that existed in Ireland; the celebrated sacrifice and contribution of many of the Irish units; and finally, it would be impossible to include the entire thirty-two months of the conflict within the remit of this thesis.

Of course, it must be stated at this juncture, that the omission of almost two years of warfare, is not a reflection of the lack of importance of the protracted guerrilla campaign, or the insignificance of Irish participation during this period. Indeed, as detailed in the thesis conclusion, there remains a wide range of research that needs to be investigated, which would offer a full and comprehensive study of the Irish experience; including: their role in the guerrilla campaign, scorched-earth policy, the concentration camps, their attestation and contribution in various colonial units and the question of discipline and morale. There were a number of factors that resulted in this omission. The period that is included represents the most significant role that Irish units played during the entire war and the most interest that caught the imagination and attention of the Irish public; therefore, in order to sufficiently

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<sup>12</sup> Hiram Morgan, ‘Empire-building an uncomfortable Irish heritage’ in *The Linen Hall Review*, x (1993), pp 8-11.

<sup>13</sup> D.P. McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003); D.P. McCracken, *MacBride’s Brigade: Irish commandos in the Anglo-Boer War* (Dublin, 1999).

assess the experience and attitudes of Irish soldiers and civilians, it was essential to offer a thorough examination of this period. In addition, following the relief of Ladysmith and the capture of the Boer capitals, interest in the war increasingly waned, as the population of Ireland and Great Britain grew evidently war weary; this reaction was witnessed across the social and political divide in Ireland, as many lost interest in a conflict that did not conform to 'conventional' warfare. With this in mind, in order to examine the Irish reaction and responsiveness, it was thus appropriate within the confines of this thesis, to consider the Irish experience during a period of significant public interest and involvement during the course of the first six months. Finally, the omission was also a result of a lack of varied primary material that relates to the Irish experience during the 'unconventional' phases of the war. In contrast to the impressive array of sources available throughout the first year of the conflict, there appears to be lack of diaries and letters that relate to the latter stages of the campaign; this is perhaps as a result of: the monotony of service; boredom; and, having no contact with the enemy. Of course, it could also be the case that such primary material does exist, but at this stage of the research, there has been an insufficient amount sourced that would offer a detailed examination of the Irish experience. It would certainly be a disservice to this study and the topic in general, to present research without significant and varied primary material. With the continued process of gathering sources, in the future, it will be the intention of this historian to offer a full and comprehensive study of the Irish experience throughout the entire period of the conflict.

The third chapter is based on the first-ever investigation on the formation of several Irish units that helped established the First Contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry. The focus on this chapter will be to assess what influenced hundreds of men to enrol into volunteer units, despite the majority having employment and private means in which to financially support themselves. Was patriotism and the idea of loyalty a decisive factor for recruitment, or did economic motivation have an influence? In addition, this chapter will study their military contribution and performance, by focusing on the battle of Lindley and their subsequent surrender to Boer forces. Chapter four will discuss and analyse the response towards the war effort on the Irish Home Front, notwithstanding the sentiments of Irish Nationalists and pro-Boers; the chapter will include: an investigation into the various war charities that supported families affected by the war, and the several organisations and individuals that raised funds for hospital equipment and valuable material for Irish soldiers; the role of the loyalist press; and finally, the valued contribution of Irish citizens in aiding the military through various medical services and religious organisations. Through a number of

case studies, the fifth and final research chapter will discuss the commemoration of the war in Ireland, following the conflict. It will consider why influential members of Irish society and sections of the Irish public chose to remember and commemorate their country's sacrifice. Overall, in short, this thesis attempts to illustrate and assess Ireland's response to the war effort and the British Empire. This will have an offer a unique dimension to Irish history and contribute to the void in the country's rich historiography.

## **Literature Review**

### **Primary sources**

In order to address the level of Irish participation and interest in the conflict, a wide range of primary sources were accessed, contained in various repositories, databases and newspapers. In 2012, the National Archives of Ireland launched an online programme, containing the wills of over 9,000 Irish soldiers who died in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and during the Great War. Within that number, there were twenty-eight informal wills that were connected to Irish soldiers that had served and perished during the South African War. In the majority of cases the information contained within is excellent and the information is being used for the first time in this thesis. Not only do the wills offer information on the soldiers' effects in the event of their death, but also provide detailed accounts of battles, their life on the veldt (open plains of Southern Africa), and other personal information. These wills were supplemented by dozens of 'Letters from the front' that were published in various national and regional newspapers during the war, which included the *Irish Times*, the *Anglo-Celt*, the *Nenagh Guardian* and the *Kildare Observer*. The letters that appeared in print were generally uncensored, voicing criticism of officers, detailing the harrowing conditions of modern warfare, and the anger and resentment towards the level of pro-Boer sentiment in Ireland. With such unique primary sources from eye-witness accounts by Irish protagonists, it allows a wider understanding of the Irish experience during the war, their valued contribution and the type of information included by the soldiers and the press that was disseminated to the public. Considering this, the thesis has an advantage over other histories of the conflict which tend to rely heavily on official government and staff documents, which arguably prevents a true understanding of the nature of this war. Furthermore, it is of interest to note that irrespective of the political stance of a newspaper, the majority of them, published letters detailing various narratives and conditions from South Africa.

As many historians have overlooked this aspect of Irish history, the press proved extremely useful in attempting to understand public opinion during the conflict and the level of support for the British Empire and the war effort. In the absence of modern research, the newspapers provided essential information on: the establishment of various war charities; the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry; public reaction to the departure and arrival of troops, and their thoughts on the pro-Boer sentiment that thrived in Ireland; full lists of Irish casualties, often listing the soldiers' hometown and families. Moreover, the press provided extensive information that allowed the researcher to establish the process and motivation that underlined the unveiling of each war memorial in Ireland.

As a testament to the level of interest in Irish participation during and after the conflict, there were a number of contemporary histories and memoirs which are of significant interest. These include several Irish regimental histories, which contain a vast wealth of source material; the content includes battle narratives and descriptions of life in South Africa; casualty lists; maps, drawings and photographs. C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring's *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (1908) and Walter Temple Wilcox's, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers) from the foundations as Wynne's Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day* (1908) were particularly useful for detailed descriptions of the engagements that these units fought during the first months of the war. These books were further complemented by contemporary histories, including Leo Amery's, *The Times History of the South African War* (7 vols, 1900-1909), and Sir Frederick Maurice's *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902* (4 vols, 1906-1910). Whilst some of the analysis and information contained within these works can be considered dated and subjective, the studies remain integral for research for battle accounts, unit information, casualty lists, maps, drawings, paintings and photographs.

In addition, accounts and personal experiences written by contemporaries have been utilised. Works such as H.F.N. Jourdain's *Ranging memories* (1934) and *Natal memories, 1899-1900* (1948), who recorded his experiences during the Natal Campaign while serving as a captain with the 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers. Other South African War veterans produced accounts of their experiences during the conflict. These publications include Maurice Fitzgibbon's *Arms under arm - an university man in khaki* (1901), who was a trooper with the 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company of the Imperial Yeomanry; and, the edited collection, *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnott* (1912), the officer in command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Brigade. While one must always maintain a certain level of scepticism when using personal memoirs written

sometime after the events, the majority of the source material is invaluable and remains a largely untapped resource. Interestingly, this researcher was able to secure the privately held war diary of Trooper John James Clarke, 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry; it includes a chronology of events and gives information on the battle of Lindley, a battle-map drawn by the participant, and a full list of casualties sustained by his company.

In addition, this research will include rare source material that relates to Irish soldiers and veterans that were committed into the psychiatric institution of the Richmond Asylum, Grangegorman, Dublin, following their service in South Africa. The collection of documents contains valued information, including: name, address, religion, literacy level, army service record, previous medical history, description of the patient (noticeable features, scars, hair colour, height), a photograph of the patient on the day of admission, medical diagnosis, and arguably most interestingly and importantly, recorded conversations of patients, some of whom speak about their experience in South Africa. Over the past number of years there has been a growing interest on the effects of warfare on mental health, with studies on Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome following the two World Wars, Vietnam, the Gulf Wars and Afghanistan. While medical practitioners failed to connect mental illness with the effects of warfare during the nineteenth century, it is clear from the evidence detailed in this thesis, that the South African War had a detrimental impact on the lives of many soldiers – a range of mental illnesses that foreshadowed the conditions suffered during the Great War. Notwithstanding the significant amount of information obtained in the hospital's archive, the process of working with the sources was difficult at times. Due to the lack of funding and particular interest, thousands of documents that are available were in poor condition, with much of the material damaged through years of being stored in an unsuitable and damp environment. It was a difficult undertaking to process much of the material due to the poor condition of the binding of each document and in many cases, damaged pages and illegible writing. With the fragility and brittleness of some of the documents, it was only possible to conduct a sample of the source material available.

With an absence of modern research on Irish units' participation during the conflict, it was essential to view the wide range of sources available from the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers. The detail recorded in several volumes of the Royal Commission, a parliamentary investigation that followed the war, included important information on troop numbers, the militia, volunteers, recruitment, the quality of British soldiers and cavalry, tactics, strategic considerations, the enemy, surrenders, general observations, and many comprehensive interviews with officers and commanders of the British army. As there is an

obvious omission on information on the establishment of the 'Irish' Imperial Yeomanry, fortunately the aforementioned publications gave excellent detail on their formation, troop numbers and depots, training and eye-witness accounts of the battle of Lindley and the subsequent British surrender. In order to establish the formation of the Irish units of the Imperial Yeomanry, the Imperial Yeomanry Attestations Forms held in The National Archives in Kew, London were consulted. The administrative information contained within several files was essential to the success of the research; the information included: name, age, nationality/place of residence, religion, previous occupation and military experience. With such detailed information, it proved possible to establish a profile of 535 recruits, and attempt to address the reasons behind enlistment.

Throughout this thesis, there are many relevant contemporary photographs and drawings included. Combined with some previously unpublished primary sources, these illustrations offer a unique and interesting perspective and insight into Ireland's participation, the majority of which have never been published before in modern histories. The images are largely sourced from a wide variety of contemporary histories, personal memoirs, and illustrated periodicals and newspapers. Arguably the most important images sourced for this thesis and perhaps for the study of this war in general, were found in the Grangegorman Community Museum, Dublin. Included in the appendices, are several photographs of soldiers who had served in South Africa, later to be committed into the Richmond Asylum, for psychiatric treatment. Considering that personal photographs of NCOs and lower ranked soldiers were relatively uncommon during the nineteenth century, and that these images are associated with war veterans that suffered traumatic stress during the war, it is important to stress the significance of them to the historiography of Ireland, Great Britain, and the South African War. This is noteworthy, as these photographs represent aspects of Irish social and military history, and the history of the South African War, that have rarely been studied or considered. In the context of historiography and the war in general, these are the forgotten and unknown soldiers of the conflict. The lack of research is unsurprising, as there remains a continued focus on the idea of mental trauma during the Great War and future conflicts, with often little consideration or thought given to war trauma and the nineteenth century.

**Fig. 25 ‘Reservists at Kilkenny’. A photograph of the 3<sup>rd</sup> King’s Royal Rifles entering Kilkenny Barracks, as the regimental band plays them in.**



Source, H.W. Wilson, *With the flag to Pretoria: a history of the Boer War of 1899-1900*, i (London, 1900), p. 69.

### Secondary Sources

Notwithstanding, the impressive military and civilian contribution to the war effort, there is an obvious dearth of modern research on Irish involvement in the South African War. As a result, there remains a continued focus on the role of Irish Nationalists, the pro-Boer movement and their military contribution, which ultimately distorts the country’s historiography and the public’s perceptions of its past. The significant omission in Irish historiography would be understandable, had Irish interaction and contribution been irrelevant and insignificant. Moreover, important and influential general histories on Ireland, written or edited by historians such as F.S.L. Lyons, Alvin Jackson, and W.E. Vaughan provide little or no information on Ireland’s contribution to the war effort.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, as Scott Cook observes, Irish historians have ‘contributed to the portrayal of Irish history as a chronology of resistance and reaction to British domination’ yet ‘contrary to what most of the historical literature has stressed, was that of support ... encompassing conscious and active collaboration’.<sup>15</sup> Although there has been a gradual movement to readdress these issues amongst scholars and historians, in the opinion of one historian, the imperial connections between Ireland and Great Britain still remain understandably difficult for many Irish to this day; as Ciarian Wallace writes, ‘it has long been a part of the diplomatic image projected by

<sup>14</sup> F.L.S. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London, 1971); Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798- 1998: Politics and War* (Oxford, 1999); W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, vi: Ireland Under the Union*, ii (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> S.B. Cook, ‘The Irish Raj: Social origins and careers of Irishmen in the Indian Civil Service, 1855-1914’ in *Journal of Social History*, xx (1987), p. 507.

independent Ireland that the Irish were never invaders or colonisers ... It does not fit Ireland's official self image to recall the significant contribution made by Irish in creating colonies and maintaining the Empire.'<sup>16</sup> As a result, noteworthy aspects of Irish history have escaped the attention of scholars and the wider public.

Although the South African War is an area of immense study, with a surplus of historians detailing varied aspects of the conflict, little attention is given to Irish involvement. To this date, no comprehensive academic work has been completed that focuses entirely on the role of Irish soldiers and citizens during the two and a half year conflict. Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase in interest over the past number of years, and this is illustrated by a growing number of scholars and researchers highlighting Ireland's strong military tradition within the British Empire during the nineteenth and twentieth century. This growing trend has been supported by the royal visit to Ireland in 2011; the coming centenary of the Great War; and a growing interest amongst universities to provide students with modules that focus on aspects of Irish military history.

Through studying Irish involvement during the course of the war, it is evident that research is limited. References to the participation of Irish battalions, individuals and the impact of the war in Ireland, appear throughout various histories, with some material appearing in Keith Jeffery's *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (1996), Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery's *A Military history of Ireland* (1996), David Murphy's *The Irish Brigades, 1685-2006: a gazetteer of Irish military service, past and present* (2007), Richard Doherty and David Truesdale's *Irish Winners of the Victoria Cross* (2000), and a chapter on the Irish soldier during the war, in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image* (2000) by Keith Jeffery. Desmond and Jean Bowen's book, *Heroic Option: The Irish in the British army* (2005) is perhaps the most detailed work on the involvement of Irish battalions and men during the course of the war. The publication contains excellent information on the various events that had significant Irish involvement. It detailed the role of many Irish officers and generals; the numerous engagements which involved Irish units during the first year of the conflict; the Irish civilian involvement with the war in South Africa; and, the guerrilla campaign. However, the material offers little in the form of original research. While these secondary sources have been invaluable in researching the extent of Irish involvement, they offer little in-depth information and analysis. In addition, several articles have appeared throughout the last number of years in issues of the

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<sup>16</sup> Wallace 'Lest we remember? Recollection of the Boer War and the Great War in Ireland', in *E-rea*, x, np. Online version. <http://erevues.org/2888> (8 June 2013).

*Irish Sword*, *Old Limerick Journal*, and *Dublin Historical Record*. Although the material published provides little analysis, these articles illustrate different dimensions of Irish involvement during the course of the war, sometimes revealed through interesting diaries and letters written by Irish protagonists. However due to the limited scope of these articles, they fail to address wider aspects of Irish involvement and the role and impact of the Irish Home Front. Perhaps due to the physical reminder of Irish participation in South Africa, it is of interest to note that there have been two articles researched on the commemoration of the war in Ireland. Martin Staunton's *Boer War memorials in Ireland* (1996) offers a brief introduction to Irish involvement and the locations of many of the war memorials. Timothy Smyth's *The Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Arch and imperial commemoration in early twentieth-century Ireland* (2012) focuses on the erection of the arch, importantly placing the battalion's commemoration in the context of Irish society following the war. However, whilst the two works importantly add to Ireland's historiography, both historians' examinations on the subject of commemoration are not extensive, and offer only a brief introduction into the culture of remembrance in Ireland during that period.

Meanwhile, the most comprehensive studies of Ireland's reaction and involvement in the conflict portray the pro-Boer support in the country and the military contribution of MacBride's Brigade. Donal P. McCracken's *Forgotten Protest: Ireland and Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (2003) and *MacBride's Brigade: Irish commandos in the Anglo-Boer War* (1999) are works of immense importance that illustrate the extent and influence of the South African conflict on Irish politics at the turn of the century; moreover, the involvement of MacBride's Brigade reveals another interesting dimension of Ireland's military heritage. Notwithstanding the importance of the Irish pro-Boer reaction to certain elements of Ireland's historiography, these studies had a tendency to downplay the significant contribution made by Irish loyalists and Irish soldiers in the British army. Only a few pages are dedicated to Irish participation and the Irish Home Front, much of which is strewn with broad statements, supported by minimal research and evidence.

As a testament of the wider public's interest in the conflict, there are an abundance of modern histories completed on the South African War. Perhaps the most acknowledged publication that has emerged is Thomas Pakenham's *The Boer War* (1979), which offered the first comprehensive narrative and study of the conflict. Although the work requires revision and has gradually become somewhat dated, it still remains an established text and particularly useful study on the military narrative, the history of the conflict and the political situation. Other useful texts included: Byron Farwell's *The Great Boer War* (1999), Kenneth Griffith's

*Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900* (1974), Bill Nasson's *The South African War, 1899-1902* (1999) and *The Boer War: the struggle for South Africa* (2011) which offers a fresh perspective on the conflict and argues interesting parallels with the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. When researching the various engagements that witnessed Irish participation, several modern texts were utilised to establish the role of the Irish battalions and the general conduct of the war in the early months. Ian Knight's *Colenso 1899: the Boer War in Natal* (London, 1995) provided much detail, focusing on the main aspects of the Tugela Campaign, whilst being complemented with excellent battle maps. Howard Bailes's chapter on 'Military aspects of the war' in Peter Warwick's (ed.), *The South African War: the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (1980) provided a useful introduction to various aspects of the conflict. W.B. Pemberton's *Battles of the Boer War* (1964) contains a chapter on Colenso and several other battles of the first months of the war. While this may appear dated, it still remains a valued read and offers excellent insight into the conduct of modern warfare. In tandem with this research, it is important to detail the extent of the Irish experience in the context of modern warfare during the first six months of the war. In order to understand and appreciate this, several works were consulted that offered fresh perspective on this thesis, placing the role of Irish units and individuals in the context of modern warfare; the studies included: John Keegan's *The face of battle* (1976), Robert M. Citino's *Quest for decisive victory: from stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940* (2002), and Jeremy Black's *War in the nineteenth century* (2009).

In order to establish an understanding of the factors that led to the formation of the First Contingent, several texts were consulted that offered an interesting range of information. Stephen M. Millar's *Volunteers on the veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902* (2007) is the most comprehensive study on the recruitment and wartime experience of the Imperial Yeomanry and other auxiliary forces. Although there is little information on Irish volunteers, the study was invaluable to understand the varying factors that established dozens of companies across the United Kingdom following 'Black Week'. The study investigates the importance of patriotism and popular culture that propelled tens of thousands of men from Britain to volunteer for the military. In addition, the work helps to place in context, the circumstances and reasoning that motivated individuals to volunteer for service in Ireland; thus, it allows the opportunity to compare and contrast the recruitment of the Imperial Yeomanry across the United Kingdom.

Finally, Irish involvement in the war was briefly mentioned in *BBC Northern Ireland's* documentary series, 'The Story of Ireland: Age of Union' (2011). Within a six

minute segment, the narrator places greater emphasis on the pro-Boer movement, MacBride's Brigade and the wars' influence on the next generation of rebellion in Ireland. It failed to address or properly acknowledge the role of Irish soldiers and the loyalist community during the war and with such scant information provided to the general public, it will do little to remove past perceptions of Ireland's relationship with the British Empire. Therefore, it remains an important period for historians and the public to revise certain aspects of Ireland's historiography, and reflect on the importance of the country's shared history and past traditions with the British Empire. A failure in doing so, argues Kevin Kenny, distorts our ability to understand the full conditions in which Ireland came to constitute and define itself as a nation-state in the modern era.<sup>17</sup> Despite the growing awareness, appreciation and understanding of Irish contribution during the conflict, it has taken more than a century for any individual to properly assess the size and importance of Ireland's involvement. Therefore, it is the intention of this thesis to contribute original scholarship in this field of military and Irish history, and perhaps most importantly, to fill a significant and noticeable gap in the country's historiography.

### **The origins of the war**

In October 1899, the Boers of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State declared war against the British Empire, which lasted over thirty-one months. Within that period, the British lost over 22,000 men, whilst the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State suffered some 7,000 fighting casualties. The war not only embarrassed and damaged the reputation of the British Empire, it also cost the British government £200,000,000 to win the conflict. Through the British implementation of 'scorched earth', the deportation of thousands of Boers, and the establishment of concentration camps, the Afrikaners would experience unprecedented hardship and misery. With the destruction of their homesteads and livestock, the period during the guerrilla phase cost the Boer highly; nearly 30,000 Boer civilians – many of them children – died during the war. In addition, the native black population of South Africa suffered a minimum of 14,000 casualties, with some 116,000 interned in concentration camps.<sup>18</sup> Although the second major war between the British and the Boers is often named the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo-Boer War in literature and the media, it is deemed appropriate for this thesis to name the conflict the South African War. This title is judged to

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<sup>17</sup> Kevin Kenny, 'The Irish in the Empire' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), p. 94.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Warwick, *Black people and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Cambridge 1983), p. 4; Bill Nasson, *The Boer War: the struggle for South Africa* (Gloucestershire, 2010), pp 306-308.

be an accurate representation of the war as a whole, as in the opinion of historian Peter Warwick, the Anglo-Boer War gives the impression that only British and Boers fought in this conflict. In fact, it was a South African War, a conflict that also ‘touched the lives of thousands of black people’.<sup>19</sup>

In 1814, following the Napoleonic Wars and the British acquisition of the Dutch Colony, the Cape, the relationship between the Boer and the British remained tense for almost a century. The Boers (meaning farmers) or Afrikaners were a mixture of nationalities, descended from French, German and Dutch immigrants. The Boers, being fiercely independent, wished to remain away from British law and increasingly feared encroachment on their traditions and culture. With the British abolition of slavery - an integral element of the Boer work-force - several thousand Boers decided to move into the South African interior, away from British administration and interference - this is commonly known as the Great Trek (1830s and 1840s). Throughout the rest of the century, the Boers attempted to consolidate their position and autonomy in the country, by establishing the independent regions of the Orange Free State in 1854 and the Transvaal Republic in 1856. However, with the British policy of South African Confederacy, and the poor financial affairs of the Transvaal, the British annexed the Boer state in 1877, in a bid to approve economic stability and development in the region.

During this period, it was becoming increasingly evident that the British wished to have total control over Southern Africa. Following the annexation of the Transvaal, the British sought to extend British control across the east coast of Southern Africa. Under the guidance of Sir Bartle Frere, the British High Commissioner for South Africa, attention drifted towards Zululand, in an effort to exploit Zulu manual labour and resources. The autonomy of the Zulu Kingdom was brought to an end in July 1879, after eight months of war, resulting in significant economic costs for the British taxpayer, and thousands of lives lost on both sides; Zululand was thus brought under Britain’s expansionist policy and split into thirteen districts. However, despite relative British success, the region remained volatile with increased bitterness and anti-imperial feeling amongst the Boers of the Transvaal. In 1880, with growing resentment and anger towards British rule in the Transvaal, and with no sign of the British government re-establishing their independence in the region, the Boers rose up in rebellion. On 16 December 1880, the Transvaal again declared itself a republic, and four days later, the Boers attacked a British convoy of the 94<sup>th</sup> Foot (later to be merged

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<sup>19</sup> Warwick, *Black people and the South African War, 1899-1902*, p. 4.

with 88<sup>th</sup> Foot to form the 2<sup>nd</sup> Connaught Rangers), resulting in heavy casualties for the battalion.

The following year witnessed the war being centred on three major engagements, with the British Natal Field Force, under the command of Kildareman, Major-General Sir George Pomeroy Colley, Governor of Natal and High Commissioner for South-East Africa. On 28 January 1881, the battle of Laing's Nek, witnessed the British suffering heavy casualties as the Boers repelled a British breakthrough. On 8 February, George Colley retreated from Schuinshoogte (also referred as the battle of Ingogo) suffering some 162 casualties at the hands of Boer marksmen.<sup>20</sup> Three weeks later, the British would suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Boers at Majuba Hill, on 27 February 1881. The resultant defeat cost the British heavily; ninety-two killed, 134 wounded and fifty-nine taken prisoner; Major-General Colley was killed, having been shot once through the head; and, following the victory, the Transvaal succeeded in obtaining its independence.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately for the Boers, their independence would again come under serious threat. Following the discovery of gold at Witwatersrand outside the capital of Pretoria in 1886, thousands of foreign (Uitlanders) prospectors and entrepreneurs – many from Britain, Ireland and British colonies – travelled to the Transvaal. Due to the large numbers of Uitlanders in the region, it soon became a major concern for President Paul Kruger and the Transvaal government. Uitlanders demanded equal rights, a fair tax system and a political franchise; however, the Transvaal government were reluctant to allow such concessions that could have proved detrimental to their hegemony and their way of life. The political situation became increasingly difficult with the failed Jameson Raid (1895), instigated by Englishman Cecil Rhodes, businessman, miner and Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, in a bid to overthrow the Transvaal Government. The failure, in the words of the Royal Commission, 'immensely increased the suspicions with regard to British intentions in the mind not only of the Transvaal Dutch, but of the Dutch race throughout South Africa'; this in turn, allowed the Boers sufficient reason to begin accumulating armaments.<sup>22</sup> The British however were unperturbed, as the Secretary of State for Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, remained adamant

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<sup>20</sup> G.R. Duxbury, 'The battle of Schuinshoogte, 8 February 1881' in *The South African Military Journal*, v (1980), np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol052rd.html> (5 May 2013).

<sup>21</sup> G.R. Duxbury, 'The battle of Majuba Hill, 27 February, 1881' in *The South African Military Journal*, v (1980), np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol052gr.html> (5 May 2013).

<sup>22</sup> *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD.1789], H.C. 1xi, 5-6.

that the British would maintain their ‘position as the Paramount Power in South Africa’.<sup>23</sup> In May 1899, there were further attempts to address the Uitlander question, with the Bloemfontein Conference taking place (31 May to 5 June), between the High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner and President Kruger. Discussions failed, and war was becoming more likely.

On the eve of war, the Boers began an effective armament programme, purchasing a range of artillery and weapons from the continent of Europe. From France, Germany and England, the Transvaal Government purchased dozens of artillery pieces and machine guns, including: 120mm Krupp Howitzers; 75mm and 155mm Creusot guns; and, 37mm Maxim-Nordenfeldt. Their arsenal was further complemented by the purchase of tens of thousands of modern magazine rifles – the German 1896 7mm Mauser.<sup>24</sup> In the event of war with the British Empire, the Transvaal would also have the support of the Orange Free State, which brought together some forty thousand Boers; their forces would be further supported and reinforced by foreign volunteers across the globe, including some three hundred Irishmen under the command of Major John MacBride.

As fruitless, protracted negotiations continued in a bid to reach a suitable settlement between the two nations, the British concurrently continued to reinforce their garrisons in South Africa with regular troops. With anti-British sentiment and distrust growing, the Boers became increasingly adamant that war was inevitable, in an effort to finally establish their independence. On 9 October 1899, the President of the South African Republic, Paul Kruger issued an ultimatum to the British government of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland; the ultimatum included:

- That the troops on the borders of this Republic shall be instantly withdrawn.
- That all reinforcements of troops which have arrived in South Africa since 1 June 1899, shall be removed from South Africa...
- That Her Majesty’s troops which are now on the high seas shall not be landed in any port of South Africa.

The British government were allowed forty-eight hours to consider the ultimatum, and failing a ‘satisfactory answer’, the Boers would ‘regard the action of Her Majesty’s Government as a

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<sup>23</sup>*South African Republic. Correspondence on the subject of recent disturbances in the South African Republic.* [C.7933], H.C. lix.445, 51.

<sup>24</sup>*Report of His Majesty’s commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa,* [CD.1789], H.C. 1xi, 157.

formal declaration of war'.<sup>25</sup> The editor of the *Irish Times* considered 'the demands of the Transvaal Government preposterous, and so it will be a gloomy duty so to declare (war).<sup>26</sup> On 11 October 1899, at 1700hrs, the ultimatum expired and war officially commenced.

**Fig. 26: The 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Lancers departing to the front via Fort Napier, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa**



Source, *Black and White Budget*, 11 Nov. 1899.

**Fig. 27: 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Rifles, embarking on the White Star Liner, 'Britannia', at Queenstown (Cobh), County Cork.**



Source, *Black and White Budget*, 11 Nov. 1899.

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<sup>25</sup> *Irish Times*, 11 Oct. 1899.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

# Chapter One: Irish soldiers' experiences in South Africa (October - December 1899)

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Following the battle for Inniskilling Hill, Queen Victoria sent a telegram to General Sir Redvers Buller lamenting the extent of Irish casualties:

I have heard with the deepest concern of the heavy losses sustained by my brave Irish soldiers. I desire to express my sympathy and my admiration of the splendid fighting qualities they have exhibited throughout their trying operation.<sup>1</sup>

The message from Her Majesty demonstrated the extent of respect and appreciation for Irish participation and sacrifice during the campaign. It also revealed the importance of Irish recruitment in the British Army, where the Irish proved to be excellent fighters and staunch defenders of the Empire. Despite the growing concerns around Nationalist sentiment on the island, significant elements of the British and Irish press, and members of parliament heralded the value of Irish battalions in the war effort, lauding their martial prowess. War correspondent Winston Churchill recalled that Irish regiments fought 'with the usual gallantry of Her Majesty's Troops'.<sup>2</sup> He also noted with reference to the extent of suffering and heavy casualties sustained by the Dublin Fusiliers that 'Scarcely any (regiment) has suffered more severely, none has won greater distinction'.<sup>3</sup> 'English people are fond of praising', wrote newspaper correspondent John Black Atkins, 'with a paradoxical generosity, the deeds of Irish regiments'.<sup>4</sup> Before departure to the front, General Sir William Gatacre counted himself very lucky to have five crack Irish battalions for the war in South Africa.<sup>5</sup> In the House of Commons, J.H.M. Campbell M.P. for St Stephen's Green, Dublin, acclaimed Irish valour and bravery during the conflict, and in particular celebrated the participation of Irish generals White, French and Roberts.<sup>6</sup> In Ireland, despite the Irish pro-Boer sentiment that sought to damage the reputation of the British army, letters and articles began to appear in the daily press from Irish citizens praising the bravery and courage of their Irish soldiers. They praised their heroism and devotion to the Queen, with the word 'duty' being their

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<sup>1</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 Mar. 1900 and *Irish Times*, 1 Mar. 1900.

<sup>2</sup> W.S. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (London, 1900), p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p 332.

<sup>4</sup> J.B. Atkins, *The relief of Ladysmith* (London, 1900), p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> *Irish Times*, 28 Oct. 1899.

<sup>6</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 7 Feb., 1900, lxxviii, col. 845.

watchword.<sup>7</sup> The enthusiasm was also matched with the immense crowds witnessing the departure of Irish battalions to the front from army barracks and ports.

Despite the significant contribution of Irish troops, their impressive array of battle honours and the massive press interest, little modern research on this topic has been conducted. The lack of studies completed on the Irish experience might be understandable had participation been minimal; but the opposite was the case where Ireland contributed an estimated fifty thousand soldiers to the war in South Africa and were at the forefront of many engagements. The following two chapters attempt to fill the void in historical research by carrying out the first extensive study on Irish participation during the first six months of the South African campaign with a focus on soldiers' behaviour and overall experiences under the extreme conditions of modern warfare. It is impossible to present and gauge their entire service within the remit of this thesis, however, the author proposes to shed some light on how Irish soldiers performed, reacted and responded to varied situations in conflict. As there is no comprehensive study of the Irish experience, the chapters will explore extensive, largely unused and neglected primary material which includes eyewitness accounts, diaries, personal correspondence and private and regimental memoirs that detail the extent of participation. In order to evaluate the soldiers' experiences throughout the first six months, the research has been split into two chapters and has been divided into several subsections which will aim to provide a greater understanding of the main issues that affected the Irish soldier. This chapter will revolve around several engagements which occurred during the early months of the war in Natal, including the battles of Talana, Elandslaagte, Nicholson's Nek, and Colenso. Chapter two will include the battles of Inniskilling Hill and Pieter's Hill, and the siege of Ladysmith. These incidents have been chosen for inclusion because of: the wealth of primary material from these events; their relative importance to the early stages of the war; the extent of Irish participation and high level of Irish casualties; the immense interest they prompted in the Irish public and press; and, their relative neglect from historical research to date.

It is the purpose of this chapter, therefore, to highlight the soldiers' direct experience, and service and to provide a narrative which demonstrates the immense and constant difficulties that Irish regiments and soldiers faced against a highly motivated and well armed Boer, in an age of battlefield and technological advancement. Considering the vast amount of literature on the subject of the South African War, there are relatively few modern histories that have attempted to provide a narrative that details the extent of the 'human experience'

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<sup>7</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 Dec. 1899.

during this war. Much of the historical research on the conflict revolves around politicians, generals, the operational theatre, tactics, weaponry and the social and cultural impact, often researched with little interaction with sources written by the rank and file. With such a selective use of sources, the human element can often be absent and thus hamper a complete appreciation and understanding of the conflict. In *The Victorian Soldier in Africa* (2004) and *Letters from Ladysmith* (2010), historian Edward Spiers provides the reader with an excellent insight into the ordinary soldiers' experience on campaign by using a vast array of letters written by the protagonists. In this approach, the reader is given an excellent opportunity to explore the experience of the ordinary soldier on duty, within the wider context of the war, society and the military tradition of the British army. In short, the following two chapters of this thesis will detail the Irish 'human experience' in the context of several battles, the Natal Campaign and noted military issues that emerged during the first six months of the conflict. It will be revealed through an extensive inclusion of letters, correspondence, diaries and memoirs written by men of all ranks.

### **Mobilisation in South Africa**

Due to the expectation of hostilities, the War Office and the British government allowed for sufficient reinforcements for the Natal region and between 1 August and 11 October 1899, 12,546 British troops were deployed in South Africa as reinforcements to the 9,940 soldiers already garrisoned in the country (see page ix for map of the South African Republic, Orange Free State, and Natal).<sup>8</sup> Following the outbreak of war on 11 October 1899, six companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers were stationed across the Cape Colony; in Natal, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers were stationed in Dundee, whilst the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers were based at Ladysmith. The numbers of troops in each battalion in Natal are noted below:<sup>9</sup>

**Table A) Information on Irish units based in South Africa, prior to war.**

Unit	Officers	Other Ranks	Public Horses	Mules
5th Irish Lancers	24	569	433	20
1st Royal Irish Fusiliers	28	984	118	20

<sup>8</sup> *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. 1xi, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Information obtained from Sir Frederick Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, i (London, 1906). As a side note, on 12 December 1899, Arthur Graham and John Hodgson, aged seventeen and sixteen respectively, appeared at Guildhall Police Court, London, as deserters of the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers: 'They surrendered, being anxious to go to the front'. *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 Dec. 1899.

2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	28	984	118	20
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Despite the dearth in primary material, the initial mood towards the possibility of conflict with the famed Boer was noted at the time. In the regimental history of the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers recorded by participating officers in the war, an officer's diary entry following the failure of the Bloemfontein Conference,<sup>10</sup> remembered that the troops shouted 'who-woop' on hearing the news of the failed discussion, as the 'excitement of a probable war began'.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the British army the war was seen as an opportunity to wipe the slate clean with regards the British defeat at Majuba; 'I think Mr Kruger will find his master this time, and Majuba Hill will be avenged by the British army', wrote a resolute private from the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancers.<sup>12</sup> Despite the unprecedented difficulties of the last campaign against the Boers in 1881, the infantry and cavalymen sought adventure and action. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancers, who had been garrisoned in the country following their departure from India in 1897 as a reaction to the growing possibility of conflict in the region, were subjected to military manoeuvres, parades, fatigues, and some detailed reconnaissance work. This activity notwithstanding, the general monotony of service was not broken until the partial mobilisation during the summer of 1899, and as rumours of war began to spread, excitement began to prevail. The prospect of war was seen as an ideal opportunity for adventure and exploration across the South African veldt, and the eagerness of the troops was compounded by their confidence over the Boer. The zeal is explicable given the position of the British Empire, their military training and modern arms, and the inferiority of the Boer citizen army in European 'conventional' tactics. However, such preconceptions about the unworthiness of the opponent would be brushed aside within the first two months of the war.

### **The battle of Talana (20 October 1899)**

Following the declaration of war, Boer troops from the Orange Free State and the Transvaal made a series of movements into the British controlled areas of South Africa. Forces under the command of General Piet Cronje invested the towns of Mafeking and Kimberly in the

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<sup>10</sup> The Bloemfontein Conference (31 May – 5 June 1899) was a series of talks in which the High Commissioner in South Africa demanded equal right for the 'Uitlanders' which included political representation and the right to vote; the conference failed as the President of the South Republic Paul Kruger refused such concessions.

<sup>11</sup> W.T. Willcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers) from the foundations as Wynne's Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day* (London, 1908), p. 210.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900* (London, 1974), p. 4. For other examples of British soldiers anticipating war, see Edward Spiers (ed.), *Letters from Ladysmith: eyewitness accounts from the South African War* (Barnsley, 2010), pp 7-11.

Cape Colony, whilst General Joubert prepared to consolidate their position in the eastern theatre by invading the British colony of Natal (see page x for map of Natal). What followed within the first three weeks of the war was three extensive engagements with significant Irish participation – the battles of Talana (20 October), Elandsplaagte (21 October), and Nicholson’s Nek (30 October). Following the Boer invasion of Natal, General Sir George Stuart White was tasked with the defence of the British colony. George White (1835-1912) a native of Rock Castle, Port Stewart, County Antrim, held a distinguished career in Her Majesty’s Forces; he served throughout the Indian Munity with the 27<sup>th</sup> Foot Inniskilling Fusiliers, and for his exploits during the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880) won the Victoria Cross and was promoted to brevet lieutenant-colonel. He assumed command of the British forces in Natal at the age of sixty-four, following employment as the Commander-in-Chief of India (1893-1897) and Quartermaster General at the War Office (1898-1899).<sup>13</sup>

The main intention of the British force under White was to concentrate on the town of Ladysmith, which was Natal’s military centre and acted as an important railway junction. From there, it would be possible to conduct an effective theatre of operations across the surrounding countryside and to protect their interests. However, due to the interference of the Governor of Natal, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, an Irish peer, the British forces remained split prior to the arrival of General White. Under certain political pressures, the governor persuaded the then commander of the Natal Forces, Major-General Sir Penn Symons to remain at the coalmining town of Dundee, some forty-five miles from Ladysmith, with a strong force of British troops, as reinsurance to the inhabitants of the region. It was a political consideration to demonstrate the intent and force of the British army, by reminding Boer farmers who were located in northern Natal to remain at their farms and also to keep the local Zulu communities calm.<sup>14</sup> White had voiced concerns about this action upon his arrival; in a telegraph to the Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne, he considered his force ‘short’ in numbers and believed it made reasonable military sense to withdraw the British forces under Symons back to Ladysmith. However upon the advice of the governor, he was compelled to hold both positions in an effort to avoid a political disaster.<sup>15</sup> Major-General Archibald Hunter was present at the interview between White and Hutchinson, remembering a compelling argument made by the governor:

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<sup>13</sup>F.B. Maurice, ‘Sir George Stuart White (1835-1912)’, in James Lunt (ed.) *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004) online (ed.) [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com) (26 May 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Bill Nasson, *The Boer War: the struggle for South Africa* (Gloucestershire, 2011), p. 100.

<sup>15</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 151.

...there are 70,000 Zulus sitting on the border waiting exactly to see which side of the fence to take, which side to jump, and how the cat is going to jump ... If you withdraw now, (from Dundee) without a blow having been struck, the Zulus will interpret it and accept it as a sign of your being afraid to meet the Boers, and they will acknowledge the Boers as your masters, and the future effect of that I shudder to contemplate.<sup>16</sup>

Major-General Symons maintained this division of troops with over four thousand men, which included the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers. With forty-five miles of distance between Symons and the main Natal Field Force at Ladysmith, the Boers were presented with the opportunity to defeat the British position at Dundee before turning their attention to the garrison at Ladysmith (see page xi for map). The precariousness of the situation was further augmented by Symons' choice of camp. Though the British encampment was under a mile west of the town of Dundee, surrounded by a series of imposing hills, an overconfident Symons did not order an occupation of the hills, which in essence highlighted the ignorance of basic military procedure and an evident lack of respect for the fighting qualities of the Boer. The tactical mistake allowed the enemy to prepare a dangerous position which maximised the potential of enfilading fire (a military tactic describing a position in which weapons can be directed along an entire vulnerable target) and capitalise on suitable placements that offered concealment and protection from British fire. The Boers under the command of General Piet Joubert (1831-1900), a veteran of the First Anglo-Boer War, deployed under twenty thousand men from the Transvaal and Free State along the Natal Front with their main strategic task to isolate and destroy any British forces in the region, and thus hamper the deployment of reinforcements resulting in a rapid conclusion to the war. Joubert sent upwards of four thousand men and six artillery pieces under the command of General Lucas Meyer to overcome the British position at Dundee, paving the way for an unimpeded march towards Ladysmith.

A few days before the battle, an Irish soldier stationed at Dundee described the situation in a letter:

This affair we are engaged in at present is a most deplorable business ... I believe (Dundee) was a most prosperous and happy little place, but for the past few days I have seen a lot of misery. The male population are staying to take up arms, but it is pitiful to see them parting with their families ... The Boers are hanging about the hills here, and have been within six miles of our camp ... we want them to attack, as we are only here in defence of Natal. We find them very annoying, we sleep in full kit every night, and out early in the morning for nothing. It is fully expected that we will have a brush with them in a few days.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>17</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 10 Feb. 1900.

Before daylight at 0500hrs, on Friday 20 October 1899, contact was made between a Dublin Fusilier's sentry piquet and several Boers; following a brief skirmish the entire camp was placed under arms. However, with regards to the tactical environment, Boer numbers and intentions, a *fog of war* still existed from a British perspective; following a period of inactivity, the British were ordered to stand down, and fall out to get breakfast. Soon after, the Boers were preparing their artillery positions along the summit of the hills unhindered; Lieutenant T.B. Ely, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers could see 'hundreds of men on top of the mountain all working away...' The British camp remained relatively immobile, which demonstrated a complete ignorance of Boer intentions, coupled with the arrogance of British superiority. At 0530 hrs the Boers opened fire from their artillery pieces; Lieutenant Ely described it as a 'roar followed by a rushing noise' as the shell passed harmlessly over their heads.<sup>18</sup> Now with the knowledge of Boer positions, the British artillery responded in kind, firing shell and shrapnel. Symons ordered an infantry advance on Talana hill in a bid to dislodge the strong concentration of Boers, with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers giving the 'privilege' of leading the firing line; the 1<sup>st</sup> King's Royal Rifle Corp in support and 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers remaining in reserve. The 18<sup>th</sup> Hussars, the 1<sup>st</sup> King's Royal Rifles Mounted Infantry (M.I.) and the Royal Dublin Fusiliers M.I., were dispatched to turn the right flank of the Boer positions on Talana Hill, to threaten their rear and prevent a retreat. An anonymous soldier from Cavan wrote to his relative that the enemy 'appeared in force on a large-hill overlooking the camp ... So we had no alternative but to fight them, and went straight for them. A tremendous fight ensued...' <sup>19</sup> General Symons, a man with a wealth of experience in colonial warfare, had never experienced combat with an opponent that chose to remain on the defensive, armed with modern firepower; nevertheless Symons, like so many of his peers, was confident in the European professionalism of the army, placing faith in their superior discipline, their training and the morale impact of the 'cold steel'. With determined close ordered assaults, supported by a barrage of artillery, the Boers would increasingly become aware of British methods of fighting. With such a lack of innovation, the awaiting Boers would naturally become accustomed to exploiting the British army's tactical weaknesses.

As the infantry advanced in extended order through the town of Dundee, the Boers directed fire along their approach. Despite the inaccuracy of fire, Captain C.F Romer of the Dublin Fusiliers, concluded that the artillery piece the 'pompom' was a 'under-rated weapon,

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<sup>18</sup> *Irish Times*, 19 Dec. 1899.

<sup>19</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 2 Dec. 1899.

whose moral effect is so great ... it is always likely to exercise a marked influence, more especially on young troops...'<sup>20</sup> Although the conditions was relatively new for the majority of the soldiers present, their rigid training in discipline and professionalism paid dividends. Regardless of the gunfire, the infantry remained a solid fighting unit, as they made their way to the bottom of the hill, which afforded some protection as the area consisted of several buildings, walls and woods. At 0730 hrs, two hours following the initial bombardment, the men began to climb Talana Hill which stood six hundred feet above sea level. The advance up the hill stalled due to the intensity of enemy fire as the Boers unleashed a fierce fusillade from both artillery and rifle. Captain Romer remembered:

...all three regiments ... dashed over the wall and began to clamber up the steep and rocky slope. The artillery quickened its fire and covered the crest with shrapnel. But the Boers still remained firm. Many of them standing up ... and poured a deadly fire on the assaulting infantry.<sup>21</sup>

In a letter to his mother, Private Patrick Champion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers, remembered his experiences, stating that 'ware (sic) is a terrible thing'. He illustrated the concentration of Boer fire – 'when the shell Come with whiss over you and the bullets fling by you you (sic) would think you would be shot every second'.<sup>22</sup> Private Francis Burns, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusilier detailed the unforgiving reality of battle, remarking on the marksmanship of the Boer: 'When within a thousand yards shot and shell began to fly about us. There is no mistake they can shoot. Dead and dying were all around, but we lose all feeling in battle'.<sup>23</sup> As the men passed through the wooded area that covered the base of the hill, the Boer fire intensified, aided by the protection of boulders along the crest, and supported by enfiladed fire from an adjacent hill. Unlike future engagements with the Boers, the British army managed to exploit the environment which afforded some cover and as they continued their advance the men progressed to within 150 yards of the Boer positions. The following account from Lieutenant Ely is worth quoting at length to illustrate the intensity of their final advance, and the close nature of the struggle for the hill:

The noise all this time was indescribable, and everybody nearly was covered with blood and dust ... You cannot imagine the missiles flying, the hissing, splashing, banging and rearing, quite deafening, and the rattle tattle of the maxims ... Our men, the Dublins, boldly rushed to the top of the hill. Private Merrill of E Company was the first up on the top and was instantly shot dead; Captain A. Dibly was the second, and

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<sup>20</sup> C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (London, 1908), p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Informal Will of Private Patrick Champion, 23 Nov., 1899 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119).

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 Dec. 1899 and *Anglo-Celt*, 16 Dec. 1899.

shot through the eye but not killed ... The Boers along the front sold their lives to cover the retreat of their friends. They were shot, some falling on their faces, others on their backs, more doubling up ... an awful sight ... The sight at the top you may imagine, but I could not describe: all our poor fellows, men and Boers in heaps...<sup>24</sup>

Sergeant-Major Burke, Dublin Fusiliers following his ascent of the hill, was hit in the leg and shoulder. As he lay down sheltered, he recalled two men 'were shot dead so close that they fell across my legs, effectively pinning me to the ground'.<sup>25</sup> Reported in the *Irish Times*, Private Dawn of the 1<sup>st</sup> Kings Royal Rifles remembered that 'we were picked off one by one. Worse than that, we had a flat little piece of ground to go over right in the open'.<sup>26</sup> Private Francis Burns recalled the 'dead were on top of each other. It was terrible ... The world will never know what Irishmen did those fearful nights'. Yet the fearful effect of battle, notwithstanding, he continued to write with enthusiasm about the exploits of his fellow countrymen:

The papers say the Dublins were first on the hill, but it was the Royal Irish – it does not matter anyhow, for we were all Irish. Tell my mother England's first battle was won by the Irish Brigade.<sup>27</sup>

Another Irish soldier of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers spoke passionately about the role the Irish regiments played at the battle, expressing pleasure in the fact that the hills were to be christened the 'Irish mountains'. Moreover, the soldier had a warning for the Irish pro Boers:

I was reading in the papers where the Irish people were subscribing to the Boers, and are backing them up; but the Irish people will want to be careful of themselves, or we will do the same with them as we are doing with the Boers.<sup>28</sup>

In a similar sentiment, a soldier of the Dublin Fusiliers wrote the following piece, which demonstrated the doggedness and motivation of the Irish soldiers during the battle, undeterred by Irish pro-Boers:

Oh, those awful Irish members, could I only let them know  
How the Boers liked Irish sympathy that day above Glencoe.  
Old Joubert didn't like it when we got atop the hill,  
And routed out his gunners with a rare old Irish will,  
And the Irish cheer that followed as down the hill they fled,  
Will be ringin' in those dead burgher's ears until those chaps are dead.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Irish Times*, 19 Dec. 1899.

<sup>25</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Irish Times*, 2 Dec. 1899.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 Dec. 1899.

<sup>28</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Irish Times*, 13 Nov. 1899.

Such examples typified that Irish soldiers understood the level of support that existed in Ireland during this period for the Boer cause. Furthermore, the response demonstrated the anger and resentment that was evidently prevalent from within the Irish battalions. Battles such as Talana were opportunities for Irish regiments to live up to their famed military prowess, which were dramatically illustrated throughout Britain's military annals; Irish soldiers immediately understood the value of their participation during this war. Moreover, the failure of Nationalist sentiment to affect the opinion of Irish soldiers at the front demonstrated strong morale, cohesion amongst the ranks, and professionalism in carrying out their duty to the best of their ability.

The battle of Talana was the first major engagement of the conflict, which revealed a wide range of modern battle conditions that would be largely present in the coming months, and throughout the Great War itself. Therefore, as illustrated throughout this section of the chapter, Irishmen were witnesses to the advent of modern warfare. Outside of the town of Dundee, the use and exploitation of potent and dangerous weaponry was revealed, coupled with the utilisation of artillery support and close ordered assaults on prepared positions. Similarly to conditions experienced across the battlefields of South Africa and Western Europe, professionalism, superior numbers and artillery, were deemed appropriate tactics to breakthrough defensive positions and achieve decisive victory. Although it is generally unclear whether the soldiers understood this relative change in warfare, it is plausible to believe that they personally acknowledged a drastic difference in the combat of war. With an array of graphic eyewitness accounts illustrated throughout, the Irish soldier experienced conditions of a modern battlefield, contrasting greatly with previous wars that the British army had fought.

General Lucas Meyer managed to extract his men rapidly with an Irish soldier describing their retreat as cowardice, remarking they 'ran like sheep'.<sup>30</sup> Upon the hill top Captain A. R. Burrowes, 1<sup>st</sup> Irish Fusiliers walked amongst the dead and wounded Boers, noticing the scene strewn with 'Mauser rifles, bandoliers, ammunition, (and) great-coats etc'.<sup>31</sup> The British had taken the hill but with heavy casualties sustained. The British forces suffered some five hundred casualties, with eleven officers and forty NCO men killed, included the death of their general;<sup>32</sup> an impatient General Penn-Symons who rode up to the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 23 Dec. 1899 and *Anglo-Celt*, 16 Dec. 1899.

<sup>31</sup> Marcus Cunliffe, *The Royal Irish Fusiliers 1753-1950* (London, 1952), p. 251.

<sup>32</sup> Sir Frederick Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, i (London, 1906), p. 462.

ranks, shouting ‘Dublin Fusiliers, we must take the hill!’<sup>33</sup>, was within a few minutes, hit by a bullet in the stomach, which proved a fatal wound. Captain George Anthony Weldon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was the first officer killed during the South African War, whilst attempting to rescue a wounded soldier during the battle.<sup>34</sup> Also amongst the dead were 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Arthur Hugh Montgomery Hill and Captain Frederick Henry Connor of the Royal Irish Fusiliers.<sup>35</sup> Of the five hundred casualties, ten officers and 205 men under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel B.D. Moller, comprising the 18<sup>th</sup> Hussars, 1<sup>st</sup> Kings Royal Rifles M.I. and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers Mounted Infantry (M.I.), were captured by Boer forces. In their attempt to cut off the Boer retreat Moller’s command got isolated in an area where a strong force of the enemy was present. Following continued pressure, the mounted units retired to Adelaide Farm, several miles north of Dundee, and decided to make a stand. As ammunition ran short, and Boers began a bombardment of their position with Krupp guns, the defence was deemed untenable; their poor situation was further compounded by their lack of mobility due to the majority of their horses being dead or stampeded due to artillery fire.<sup>36</sup> In a rather controversial statement, Irish-American John Dunn of the Irish Transvaal Brigade remembered that in their capture the Irish M.I. did not show any hostility towards their fellow brethren, and ‘didn’t seem to be very sorry they were taken’.<sup>37</sup> The contemporary ballad below depicts the capture of eighty-one Dublin Fusiliers:

On the mountain side the battle raged, there was no stop or stay;  
 Mackin captured Private Burke and Ensign Michael Shea, Fitzgerald got Fitzpatrick,  
 Brannigan found O’ Rourke  
 Finnigan took a man called Fay-and a couple of lads from Cork.  
 Sudden they heard McManus shout, ‘Hands up or I’ll run you through’  
 He thought it was a Yorkshire ‘Tyke’ - ‘twas Corporal Donaghue!  
 McGarry took O’Leary, O’ Brien got McNamee,  
 That’s how the ‘English fought the Dutch’ at the Battle of Dundee.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> M.G. Dooner, *The “last post”: a roll call of all officers (naval, military or colonial) who gave their lives for their queen, king and country, in the South African War, 1899-1902* (London, 1903), pp 412- 413. His actions were affirmed in a letter by a soldier of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers from Naas; he remembered following the death of his comrade that: ‘Captain Weldon came up to me and said, “Are you shot, L--?” That moment he was shot by my side, and his little dog was wounded’. *Kildare Observer*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>35</sup> ‘It was Captain Connor, of the Irish Fusiliers, but his personal magnetism carried with him some of the Rifles as well men of his own command. He and half his little forlorn hope were struck down’. A.C Doyle, *The great Boer War* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., London, 1900), p. 90.

<sup>36</sup> Full list of 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers captured can be seen in the *Irish Times*, 3 Nov. 1899.

<sup>37</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 17 Feb. 1900.

Although the Court of Inquiry into the surrender exonerated all men present, in the opinion of Lord Roberts, Moller was deemed incapable of exercising command, and was asked to leave his regiment, the 18<sup>th</sup> Hussars, on half pay.<sup>39</sup>

The battle was an unheeded warning of the determination and effectiveness of the Boers and the high risk of advancing towards a prepared defence, coupled with impressive firepower. It also demonstrated that the Boers would attempt to retreat at any opportunity when hand-to-hand fighting was a possibility; thus inhibiting a decisive victory. This battle should have provided suitable warning to the British command that the Boers were capable and adaptable fighters, possessing effective and modern firearms, and artillery pieces. One soldier of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers accurately believed: ‘The war will not be over without very great loss of blood on both sides’.<sup>40</sup> However, the ‘victory’ reinforced the belief that British soldiers were technically superior and maintained a high level of professionalism in the face of modern weaponry. Despite the victory, as one historian, Howard Bailes, notes, the battle demonstrated an ‘unwise and even reckless choice of positions, scanty defensive preparations, and over reliance upon the stolid bravery of British troops’.<sup>41</sup> In spite of the obvious limitations of a frontal assault in modern warfare, this was just the beginning of a series of battles during this conflict that demonstrated the futility of the tactic; a tactic that would be deemed appropriate by many British officers during the Great War. It highlighted that in many respects, the command structure was unable or refused to adhere to the changing face of warfare, and thus relied on ‘conventional’ tactics and trust in the professionalism of the British soldier on the offensive.

The Boers reportedly lost thirty men and sustained 112 casualties – relatively high fatalities for a civilian army.<sup>42</sup> Despite the hardship of the battle and the heavy British casualties, one Irish soldier remained optimistic and demonstrated pride in his role in the fight for the hill: ‘I long wished for a medal and won it at last, and I mean to exhibit it ... and I hope I may wear mine as long as father is wearing his’.<sup>43</sup> ‘Talana created a respect for British valour’, wrote contemporary historian Amery.<sup>44</sup> The Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, Sir Peter O’ Brien, believed that the valour shown by the Irish regiments, emulated the spirit and

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<sup>39</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 402.

<sup>40</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>41</sup> Howard Bailes, ‘Military aspects of the war’ in S.B. Spies and Peter Warwick (eds), *The South African War: the Anglo-Boer 1899-1902* (Essex, 1980), pp 72-73.

<sup>42</sup> Sir Frederick Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, i, p. 462.

<sup>43</sup> *Irish Times*, 26 Dec. 1899.

<sup>44</sup> L.S Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii (London, 1902), p. 173.

courage of the British forces at the battle of Albuera (1811) during the Peninsular War.<sup>45</sup> The *Kildare Observer* credited the ‘brilliant display’ by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, whilst rejoicing the close relationship that existed between the regiment and the county of Kildare.<sup>46</sup> *The Graphic* believed that when the campaign was over, Talana would be an outstanding episode that highlighted the effectiveness of British infantry and involved a noteworthy and ‘magnificent’ performance by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, Irish Nationalist and former British Member of Parliament Michael Davitt, believed that regardless of how the British victory was portrayed by the press, ‘it was a disastrous experience for British arms’, and ‘It was the Boer, and not the Briton, who remained the actual victor at the battle of Talana’.<sup>48</sup>

Amongst General Meyer’s men, there were between thirty and forty Irishmen belonging to the Irish Transvaal Brigade.<sup>49</sup> It was reported through several eyewitness accounts that as the Boers were pushed back across the hill, members of the Irish Brigade failed to retreat in time as the Royal Dublin Fusiliers charged forward; as they fell behind ‘they received no mercy at all’ at the hands of the Irish battalion.<sup>50</sup> A further account emerged that described the ‘murder’ of an Irish volunteer in the Transvaal Brigade, by a soldier of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.<sup>51</sup> Although these accounts may be largely anecdotal, it demonstrated that certain Irish soldiers viewed the Irish pro-Boers with disgust and as enemies of their country, and evidently had no hesitation in killing them. However one soldier noted his upset, as he recalled that wounded members of the Irish Transvaal brigade claimed that they were made to fight alongside the Boers; the soldier recorded ‘It is hard times when we have to fight against our own countrymen’.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 4 Nov. 1899 and *Belfast News-Letter*, 31 Oct. 1899. On the first anniversary of the battle, a ‘Talana’ smoking concert was held in Naas, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers in attendance and several veterans of the engagement. *Kildare Observer*, 27 Oct. 1900.

<sup>46</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 28 Oct. 1899.

<sup>47</sup> *The Graphic*, 15 Dec. 1899.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Davitt, *The Boer fight for freedom* (New York, 1902), pp 118-119. The Tipperary Board of Guardians and District Councils wished the South African Republic and Irish Nationalists congratulations during their recent ‘victory’ at Dundee. In addition they acknowledged the participation of the Irish battalions in the battle, claiming they were ‘thoughtless, ignorant and dispirited’. *Cork Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1899.

<sup>49</sup> D.P. McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003), p. 127 and D.P. McCracken, *MacBride’s Brigade: Irish commandoes in the Anglo Boer War* (Cork, 1999), pp 41-44.

<sup>50</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 6 Jan. 1900 and *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1 Jan. 1900.

<sup>51</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 23 Dec. 1899.

<sup>52</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Dec. 1899. Following one account emerging in the newspaper, it was evident in cases that English soldiers detested their countrymen fighting for the enemy; following the battle of Magersfontein, the British caught a Birmingham man fighting for the Boers; he begged to be spared but ‘about seven bayonets went through him; serve him right ... there is no excuse for them’. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 Jan. 1900.

As the British secured Talana Hill, the battle was deemed a tactical success; however, the British failed to capitalise on their victory and due to their subsequent withdrawal from the area, the British lost the initiative to alter the strategic picture in the region. The British retreat from Dundee towards Ladysmith, allowed the Boers an opportunity to strike further into northern Natal, and fight an effective war on their own terms. Thus, the battle was considered a strategic failure for the British. The decision to withdraw to Ladysmith was effected on 22 October, when the newly appointed commander Major-General James Herbert Yule received orders from General White to retreat towards the town, fearing a reinforced attack on their position. It appeared that the decision to withdraw was supported by Lieutenant Ely, as he noted they were ‘practically surrounded by 17,000 of the enemy with 40 guns and ‘Long Tom’.<sup>53</sup> However the decision to withdraw meant the abandonment of some two hundred wounded soldiers, including the dying Symons, of many British subjects, of the coal mines and of thousands of pounds worth of British army stores in the town of Dundee. The wounded were left in charge of Regimental Medical Officer of the Royal Irish Fusiliers Surgeon - Major Francis Augustus Bonner Daly, a Dublin man born in 1855. Educated at Trinity College Dublin, he served in various campaigns with the British Army, including the Egypt Campaign (1882). As Yule’s forces retired to Ladysmith, Daly was allowed to enrol four privates from each infantry battalion to aid him in his work; consequently this decision rendered the entire wounded and medical team prisoners of war. The wounded were brought forward to a Swedish Mission station in Dundee, and in the words of Daly, ‘the sight was an appalling one’:

All the wounded were lying shoulder to shoulder on the floor of the building, some delirious. All were wet from exposure from the rain, which was falling all day, and their uniforms were marked with mud and dirt off the battlefield<sup>54</sup>

The withdrawal was deemed a cruel act by the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, naturally considerate of their fellow comrades.<sup>55</sup> Brevet-Major Douglas Wilfred Churcher, 1<sup>st</sup> Irish Fusiliers, believed that the abandonment of stores and their sick and wounded was ‘most ghastly’; he estimated that £400 of mess stores and £200 of band instruments was being discarded by his battalion.<sup>56</sup> Unknown to the Boers, the British managed to retreat from their position and began a difficult journey back towards Ladysmith. An Irish soldier described the

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<sup>53</sup> *Leinster Leader*, 23 Dec. 1899. Cited from Gary Owens, ‘Dear Mother – It’s a terrible life’: Irish soldiers’ letters from the Boer War 1899-1900’ in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 178.

<sup>54</sup> F.A.B. Daly, *Boer War memories: personal experiences* (Melbourne, 1935), p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Cunliffe, *The Royal Irish Fusiliers 1753-1950*, p. 253.

difficulties of the withdrawal, marching the entire distance within three days in arduous conditions:

The day after this fight (Talana) we found ourselves surrounded by the enemy, and on Sunday night our brigade stole through the lines and marched day and night until we reached Ladysmith. The last day we did 30 miles and you should see the poor men when we would halt for a rest, lying down in the wet gutter and dead asleep in a minute ... I have nearly lost all my kit as we had to fly from Dundee.<sup>57</sup>

Corporal Hallahan, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers also described the exhaustion of the march as they neared Ladysmith; 'It started raining again ... When we would halt some of the men would fall asleep on their feet in the mud'.<sup>58</sup>

**Fig 28: 'The last rites' at Dundee.**



Source, C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (London, 1908), p. 10.

### **The battle of Elandslaagte (21 October 1899)**

On the same day that Major-General Symons's forces were engaged at Dundee, a considerable force of Boers with two artillery pieces advanced into Natal under the command of Commandant Johannes Hermanns Michiel Kock in an attempt to harass the British at Ladysmith and cut the line of communication between Symon and White.<sup>59</sup> It was recorded

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<sup>57</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 4 Dec. 1899.

<sup>58</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, p. 63.

<sup>59</sup> Commandant Kock had relevant experience as a military commander, having been a general during the First Anglo-Boer War. He distinguished himself as a leader under General Cronje during the siege around the British garrison at Potchefstroom. Ian Bennett, *A rain of lead: The siege and surrender of the British at Potchefstroom* (London, 2001), p. 25.

that Kock's column comprised of several different nationalities- including Dutch, German and Irish.<sup>60</sup> The following morning, General White wanted to remove the threat of this force which was stationed at Elandslaagte some seventeen miles north of Ladysmith, and repair the damaged railway and telegraph lines cut by the Boers in order to reopen communications with Dundee. He despatched Major-General John Denton Pinkstone French (1852-1925), an Anglo-Irish officer to intercept the entrenched Boers amongst the kopjes (small hill) at Elandslaagte. His staff comprised capable and experienced officers: Colonel Ian Hamilton a veteran of the First Anglo-Boer War and survivor of Majuba who was considered by French 'an excellent Infantry leader',<sup>61</sup> and Major Douglas Haig (1861-1928) a veteran of the Sudan Campaigns, and now his chief of staff. Following a short engagement with Boers in the town of Elandslaagte, General French's column, containing the Imperial Light Horse, 1<sup>st</sup> Manchester Regiment and Natal Volunteer Artillery, redirected their attention to the surrounding hills. British subjects that remained in the town gave valuable information concerning the strength and position of the Boers.<sup>62</sup> French, realising that the present force was inadequate for a decisive attack, requested reinforcements from Ladysmith; White was eager to strike a decisive assault so he sent forward seven companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Devonshire Regiment, five companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gordon Highlanders, two batteries of field artillery, one squadron of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoons Guards and a squadron of the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers; White also joined the reinforcements acting as observer.

Upon their arrival the infantry were directed out in open formation as the seven companies of the Devons made an extended frontal attack on the Boer positions, whilst the Imperial Light Horse, Gordons and Manchester regiments marched to the right, attempting to attack the Boer left flank. In the event of a Boer retreat the cavalry were ordered to cut them off. Following a barrage of artillery and Mauser fire, the Devons were ordered to charge, eight hundred yards from the summit of the hill. The flanking movement, the determined charge of the Devons and a failed counter-attack by Commandant Kock, left the Boers defending an unsustainable position and a general retreat behind the hill was ordered. The 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancers under Captain M.P.R. Oakes supported by the 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards were then 'let go', charging past the right flank of the Boer defence (see page xii for map of the attack). Unlike the debacle at Talana, the mounted units demonstrated the effectiveness of cavalry against a retreating enemy – the subsequent slaughter of Boer men was reminiscent of the

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<sup>60</sup> Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 303.

<sup>62</sup> L.S Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii (London, 1902), p. 178.

Zulu retreats at Gingindlovu and Ulundi in 1879. Although the charge appeared barbaric, ‘uncivilised’ and archaic, cavalrymen such as French and Haig supported the idea of *arme blanche* (see glossary, page vii), believing that Elandsplaagte demonstrated the profound effect of ‘shock’ tactics on the enemy; supporters of steel weapons, such as the lance and sword, understood the value of such weapons to morale for cavalrymen and the fear it generated amongst their foe, who never before experienced such assaults.<sup>63</sup> The effect of the *arme blanche* was illustrated by several accounts by 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancers; Private Head, 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers, noted that ‘we got nicely amongst them, and made them cough’, as they caused chaos in the Boer retreat.<sup>64</sup> A Lancer remembered ‘We went along sticking our lances through them – it was a terrible thing, but you have to do it in a case like this’.<sup>65</sup> The carnage of the attack was aptly illustrated from a private of the 1<sup>st</sup> King’s Royal Rifles, as he remembered the horsemen, ‘hacking, cutting, slashing’ their way through the Boer men, with some dying in ‘praying attitudes’.<sup>66</sup>

Some forty Boers were speared by the lance, with one account emerging of Lance-Corporal Kelly of the Irish Lancers, who speared two Boers simultaneously, as they shared the same mount.<sup>67</sup> It was said that the Lancers’ ‘charge created the greatest terror and resentment among the Boers, who vowed at the time that they would destroy all Lancers they captured’.<sup>68</sup> As historian Bill Nasson states, the ‘virtual annihilation of the escaping Boers left the republicans with a legacy of virulent hatred of British cavalry’.<sup>69</sup> It appears that the cavalry charge did not provoke much indignation throughout the Irish press, but according to Michael Davitt, the American and continental press were outraged by ‘British civilised savagery’ and ‘inhumanity’.<sup>70</sup> In the words of historian Kenneth Griffith, the British army’s ‘sport of pig-sticking had certainly conditioned the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers’;<sup>71</sup> with support from several eyewitness accounts, the cavalry charge could easily have been judged as a sporting occasion for the units. As a result, in the opinion of Bill Nasson, with continued publications throughout the press of the *arme blanche* and close combat, the conflict was created as a

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<sup>63</sup> Spencer Jones, ‘The influence of the Boer War (1899-1902) on the tactical development of the regular British Army 1902-1914’ (PhD., thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2009), p. 144.

<sup>64</sup> *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, 7 Apr. 1900.

<sup>65</sup> Davitt, *The Boer fight for freedom*, p. 136.

<sup>66</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, p. 52.

<sup>67</sup> See an illustration of this incident in *The Illustrated London News*, 2 Dec. 1899.

<sup>68</sup> Willcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers) from the foundations as Wynne’s Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day*, pp 218 – 219.

<sup>69</sup> Nasson, *The Boer War: the struggle for South Africa*, p. 105.

<sup>70</sup> Davitt, *The Boer fight for freedom*, pp 135-137.

<sup>71</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, pp 52-53.

‘metaphor representing the war in South Africa as the hunt’, with the Boers unable to sustain the force of the ‘cold steel’.<sup>72</sup>

Elandsplaagte convinced General French that cavalry charges had an important morale impact on an enemy, and the British cavalry should continue to use such tactics.<sup>73</sup> However others were not convinced about the future of the British cavalry armed with lances and sabres; throughout the South African War, the *arme blanche* was gradually replaced by the mounted infantry (mobile infantry that rode into battle and fought on foot), armed with carbines, which was more suited to the changing tactical developments in South Africa. Indeed, in the opinion of military historian, Robert M. Citino, ‘it was increasingly clear that the man on horseback represented nothing on the modern battlefield so much as a huge, hard-to-miss target for the rifle-armed defender.’<sup>74</sup> Individuals such as Lord Roberts, Ian Hamilton, Erskine Childers and Arthur Conan Doyle, debated that the *arme blanche* and shock tactics were becoming irrelevant in modern warfare; with the progression of effective long range rifles and increasing rapid fire, Erskine Childers argued that the ‘steel weapons ought either to be discarded or denied all influence on tactics’, followed by the substitution of mounted infantry armed with carbines.<sup>75</sup> In Arthur Conan Doyle’s analysis of the conflict, he stated that the lance and the sword belonged in a museum.<sup>76</sup> Whilst Lord Roberts appreciated the power of shock tactics, he understood that the age of the lance and sword was coming to an end, believing that they should be abandoned for the carbine, and for the cavalry to be trained and prepared to fight dismounted.<sup>77</sup> Although the lance was removed from the lancer’s kit following the conflict, it managed to be reinstated in 1909, by French’s insistence. Despite preconceived ideas, Spencer Jones states that the ‘cavalry had learned from its South Africa experience’, prior to the Great War, being effectively capable of adapting their cavalry to the demands of the situation; with relative success the British cavalry were able to perform dismounted, and if opportunity allowed, a cavalry charge to break through enemy lines.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Nasson, *The Boer War: the struggle for South Africa*, pp 270-271.

<sup>73</sup> Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and reform in the British army 1880-1918* (Hampshire, 2008), p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> R.M. Citino, *Quest for decisive victory: from stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940* (Kansas, 2002), p. 42.

<sup>75</sup> Erskine Childers, *War and arme blanche* (London, 1910), p. 1. See also Stephen Badsey, ‘The Boer War (1899-1902) and British cavalry doctrine: a re-evaluation’ in *Journal of Military History*, lxxi (2007), pp 75-97.

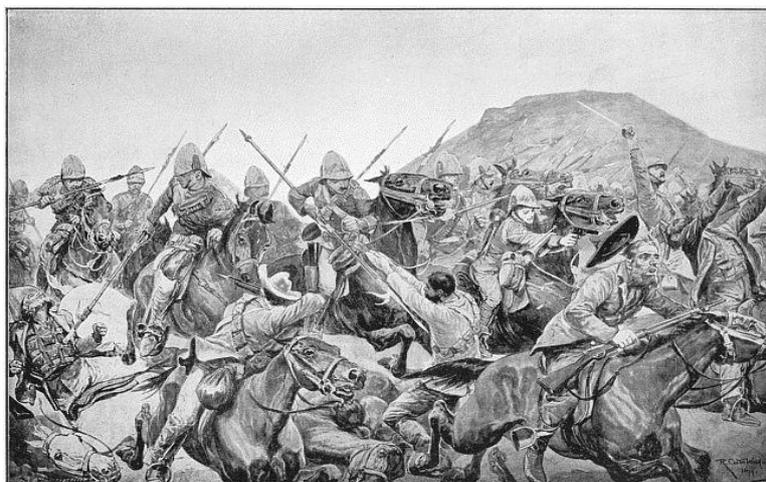
<sup>76</sup> Doyle, *The great Boer War*, p. 519.

<sup>77</sup> *Report of His Majesty’s commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. 1xi, 51.

<sup>78</sup> Spencer Jones, ‘The influence of the Boer War (1899-1902) on the tactical development of the regular British Army 1902-1914’ (PhD., thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2009), p. 158.

However, with the tactical supremacy of the defensive, and the restricted environment of the Western Front, cavalry attacks became increasingly futile on the modern battlefield.<sup>79</sup>

**Fig. 29: The battle of Elandslaagte – charge of the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancers.**



Source, Louis Cheswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p. 26.

British casualties for the battle were high, with four officers and forty six NCOs and men killed, and thirty one officers and 182 men wounded. The losses in the Irish Lancers were minimal - three casualties, the loss of two horses and Private O.T. Kinsey lost his life in the charge. The Boers reportedly suffered 363 casualties, which included 188 prisoners and the death of their general, Kock.<sup>80</sup> A year following the battle, His Majesty King Edward VII approved the decoration of the Victoria Cross to two officers of the Imperial Light Horse; South African, Captain Herbert Mullins and Captain Robert Johnston of County Donegal.<sup>81</sup>

Due to the isolation of the post at Elandslaagte, and the threat of Boers from the north on the town of Ladysmith, General White ordered a full withdrawal back to the town. White maintained that his first duty was the security of the town. It was now the intention to protect Yule's column from Boer interference, as they approached from Dundee. Following minor engagements at Rietfontein and Tinta Inyoni, Yule's men managed to arrive safely at Ladysmith after an arduous march through miles of mud and rain. The entire British army was now stationed at Ladysmith, numbering some thirteen thousand, yet the Boers continued harassing surrounding areas of the town, with some twenty-four thousand men. On 29 November, an officer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers wrote describing the situation:

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<sup>79</sup> See *Nenagh News*, 9 Dec. 1899, for a short description of the battle and its aftermath, by a Nenagh native of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gordon Highlanders.

<sup>80</sup> Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, i, p. 464.

<sup>81</sup> *London Gazette*, 12 Feb. 1901. See page 245 for Captain Johnston's medal citation.

This town is fairly full of troops now, but the country rather fuller of enemies. I fancy we are going to-morrow to try and give them another hammering. There's plenty of beer and port wine, and lots of food, thank goodness. The only things one goes short of are sleep and washing. But I've never been fitter, and the same with the men – you feel as if you couldn't tire.<sup>82</sup>

On the same day an Irish soldier wrote home 'We have a strong force here and expect to give the Boers a good "licking" one of these days'.<sup>83</sup>

### **The battle of Nicholson's Nek (30 October 1899)**

Throughout the last week of October, Boers began to entrench along the surrounding hill sides of Ladysmith, preparing positions for their artillery pieces. Following reconnaissance, the six inch artillery piece, 'Long Tom', was spotted on top of Pepworth Hill, which was situated north, some 7500 yards from the town of Ladysmith. At the Royal Commission into the war, White explained his position:

I was most unwilling to settle down to the secondary position of a besieged force without making an effort in force to defeat the enemy in the field before he had entrenched himself round Ladysmith. A partial victory could do no permanent good. I therefore thought the occasion called for incurring certain risks in order that if I might gain any advantage over the enemy, I might have the means of making it as decisive as possible.<sup>84</sup>

In order to protect the lines of communication and the town from bombardment, White ordered Colonel Hamilton with three battalions and a division of artillery to be dispatched three miles north of Ladysmith; their mission brief was to storm Pepworth Hill and capture the guns. On his right flank, Colonel Grimwood with several infantry regiments and artillery batteries was ordered to hold down Boer forces at Lombard's Kop. On the extreme right, General French with his Cavalry Brigade, composed of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers, 18<sup>th</sup> Hussars and mounted volunteer units, were ordered to protect Grimwood's flank. In conjunction with this attack, White ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Carleton, with six companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers, five and half companies of the Gloucestershire Regiment, and a mounted battery to protect the left flank of Hamilton's force by seizing the kopjes at Nicholson's Nek (see xiii for map of Ladysmith and surrounding heights). It certainly was a risk, as a decisive victory needed the attack to go smoothly and complete surprise to be maintained. With regards the march towards Nicholson's Nek, White placed his trust in his Field Intelligence

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<sup>82</sup> Spiers (ed.), *Letters from Ladysmith: eyewitness accounts from the South African War*, p. 26.

<sup>83</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 4 Dec. 1899.

<sup>84</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 147.

Officer Major W. Adye, of the Royal Irish Rifles, who had personally examined the route. Fearing that the march would not meet the required target, White was reassured by Adye, that there were several positions that could be utilised for a short term defence. White understood the dangers of a night march of a column through difficult terrain, especially with a threat of mobile Boers in the vicinity; however White's trust in Adye was significant in discouraging any reservations. White therefore believed that the outcome he hoped for justified the hazards – 'war is balancing of risks against results', he later claimed.<sup>85</sup>

On Sunday 29 October, at 2300hrs, the 1<sup>st</sup> Gloucester regiment, the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers and the No.10 Mounted Battery, moved out of the camp in a north westerly direction. The difficulties of the night march emerged as the column stumbled and staggered its way along the rough terrain in the dark, with the Irish Fusiliers leading. As the column proceeded, it soon became apparent that they would not make Nicholson's Nek by first light, and so they ascended Tchrengula Hill which was situated nearby and held a waiting position. As the column began the difficult climb, panic struck the march as the mules attached to the mounted battery stampeded and broke from their minders, scattering into the darkness and crashing into the Gloucester regiment below - the Boers were now alerted to their presence. The mules carried with them the majority of their reserve ammunition boxes and parts of the No.10 Battery rendering it effectively useless. The soldiers now had a dangerously low limit of rounds (twenty per man), no water kegs, no heliographs and no artillery.<sup>86</sup> This would seriously reduce the combat effectiveness of the column in preparing a defence, let alone allow for an advance to protect the left flank of the coordinated attack. With few resources and no artillery, a defence could only sustain limited pressure until capitulation. Moreover with no heliographs, Carleton could not warn the command staff at Ladysmith of his predicament.

Order was restored some time later, and the remaining force scaled the hill and gathered on the crest. Colonel Carleton ordered his men to begin preparing defensive positions by building sangars (stone breastworks) to offer some protection. At first light it became overwhelmingly clear to the column that its position was commanded by nearby kopjes, ideal for enfilading fire. Carleton's situation was now precarious as any hope of surprise had evaporated following the commotion. The Boers adapted to the situation and began to surround the occupying hills, with one hill commanding a position over the British

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>86</sup> Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii, p. 241.

location, while two other spurs gave the Boers an ideal area of attack. Captain Rice, Adjutant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers, recollected the events following first light:

When it began to dawn we saw our hill was completely surrounded by other hills, which towered over ours, and although we could not see a single Boer the enemy kept pounding us from every side.

As time went on the rifle fire became terrific, and our men began to drop on every side. The worst of it was that, of course, we had lost every gun, and had no ammunition but what was in our pouches.

We tried putting the best marksmen on to volley fire, but that did not seem to even shift the Boers...<sup>87</sup>

The incessant fire, rising casualties and lack of ammunition meant that their position became increasingly difficult. At around 1030hrs the British forces were engaged on all sides and the Irish Fusiliers and the Gloucester regiment gradually began to lose ground, as they were becoming outflanked by the encroaching Boers. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant C.E Kinahan of the Royal Irish Fusiliers recalled the frustration and intensity of the battle:

You don't know what it means to shoot a Boer; he is behind a rock, and all you can ever see is his rifle sticking out. For the last hour of the fight I had a rifle and ammunition which I took from a dead man, and blazed away for all I was worth.<sup>88</sup>

The difficulties of fighting the Boer were again confirmed with this engagement; the Boers adoption of smokeless technology and maximising the potential of defence amongst the kopjes, allowed an impressive advantage. The British, limited in ammunition, no artillery, poor defensive structures, and being unaware of the exact location of the enemy's position, were placed in a difficult situation. At first the British attempted to overcome their situation by adopting independent fire, but soon they were ordered to switch to volley fire to conserve ammunition, and fire only when a Boer came into sights; historian Ian Knight observed that independent firing 'was frowned upon', not only for wasting ammunition but because it lacked the 'moral effect of volley-fire'.<sup>89</sup> The Boers readily exploited the outdated and ineffective tactic, by choosing to fire in-between volleys. The failure to allow British soldiers to act on their own initiative was indicative of this period, which revealed the limitations of the British army with regards training, their inability to adapt to a changing situation, placing overwhelming faith in the power of volley fire, and revealing the lack of independent thought

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<sup>87</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, pp 84-85.

<sup>88</sup> *Irish News*, 28 Dec. 1899. Quoted in Owens 'Dear mother-It's a terrible life': Irish soldiers' letters from the Boer War 1899-1900' in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 179 and Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii, p. 49.

<sup>89</sup> Ian Knight, *Colenso 1899: the Boer War in Natal* (Oxford, 1995), p. 21.

within the command structure; the volley fire thus wasted ammunition and hampered their defence.<sup>90</sup>

At noon a heliograph message was received from Ladysmith, ordering a withdrawal 'as opportunity suits'. However, Carleton later told the Royal Commission that the 'engagement was too hot to permit of this being done ... and retirement to Ladysmith had become impossible'. At 1245hrs a 'cease fire' was heard by Carleton, who first believed it to be a ruse by the enemy; it soon transpired that the white flag had been raised on the left flank by an isolated company of the Gloucester Regiment. Captain Duncan of the said regiment told the court that the 'fusillade directed upon them was terrific, and shortly only two or three could fire, all the others being killed or wounded'. The position being hopeless he ordered a handkerchief to be raised, and subsequently a towel. He wished to maintain that his surrender was solely for his small isolated position.<sup>91</sup> Carleton held a consultation with Major Adye for some minutes, and as they agreed that it was necessary to honour the white flag, they went about burning papers.

The surrender was recollected by Captain Rice, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers, revealing some levels of insubordination and fierce indignation felt by his men:

Now, as the white flag had been raised, and we believed an order, it was our duty to make the men put down their arms. We gave the order, but were not obeyed, and for some time the men flatly refused. In many cases we had to take their rifles from them. They were furiously angry, and though most of them had not a cartridge left, they had all made up their minds to fight to a finish.

The other officers and myself had to well, we had to break up our own swords. That is not a nice thing at all. Finally, a lot of men and the subalterns flung themselves on the ground and wept with rage. Even when they had no weapons they wanted to go on fighting.<sup>92</sup>

The court of inquiry heard that many companies had expended their ammunition prior to capitulation, yet according to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant C.E Kinahan this had no bearing on their motivation to fight, as moments before the cease fire was sounded his men had fixed bayonets preparing to rush the Boers.<sup>93</sup> In conversation with officers of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, Winston Churchill recorded several statements made by the officers in relation to the surrender:

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<sup>90</sup> Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii, p. 246.

<sup>91</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 403-404.

<sup>92</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, p. 86.

<sup>93</sup> *Irish News*, 28 Dec. 1899. Quoted in Owens 'Dear mother-It's a terrible life': Irish soldiers' letters from the Boer War 1899-1900' in *Irish Sword*, p 179 and Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii, p. 49.

The officers of the Irish Fusiliers told me of the amazement with which they had seen the white flag flying. 'We still had ammunition,' they said; 'it is true the position was indefensible – but we only wanted to fight it out'.<sup>94</sup>

Father Lewis Joseph Matthews, chaplain of the Royal Irish Fusiliers believed that the surrender was a 'great blunder'.<sup>95</sup> At the Court of Inquiry into the surrender, Father Matthews relayed to the court that Colonel Carleton and Major Adye requested him to return to Ladysmith as a non-combatant; he was to tell General White that 'we could have held the place for 48 hours if the white flag had not been put up without authority'.<sup>96</sup> Yet that claim is contradicted by the commanding officer himself at the inquiry, stating that the defence could not hold 'an hour longer' due to the enemy's superior numbers and the scarcity of ammunition.<sup>97</sup> Lieutenant Hill, 1<sup>st</sup> Gloucester Regiment, rather controversially believed that, Carleton and Adye did not complain at surrendering and hailed the raising of the white flag as a 'relief'; Hill judged that it decided 'a difficult matter without having themselves to take the initiative'.<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to note that all officers and men were exonerated for surrendering, except Captain Duncan of the Gloucester Regiment; the court found that for hoisting the white flag, he therefore became a 'prisoner of his own misconduct, and not by chances of war'.<sup>99</sup>

It was the largest surrender of British troops since the Napoleonic Wars; twenty four officers and 973 men surrendered, while thirty-eight men were killed and seven officers and ninety-eight men wounded.<sup>100</sup> The Boers suffered sixteen killed and fifty-five wounded; the figure included two dead and five wounded from the Irish Brigade.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, p. 157.

<sup>95</sup> Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii, p. 50.

<sup>96</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 404.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 404. Upon these findings Lord Roberts noted that 'further resistance was impossible ... I do not concur in the opinion of the Court, as I consider Captain Duncan was taken prisoner by the chances of war, and not through neglect or misconduct on his part'.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>101</sup> Davitt, *The Boer fight for freedom*, p. 160.

**Fig. 30: Victims of the diaster at Nicholson's Nek. British prisoners at Pretoria**



Source, *The Graphic*, 16 Dec. 1899.

As a prisoner of war, Colour-Sergeant Jack Maradan, Royal Irish Fusiliers, wrote home to his wife in Armagh, from Pretoria; in the letter he details his experience of the battle:

We were sent out on Sunday night ... and were cut off from Ladysmith, and after 7.5 hours' fighting we had to surrender. We had a lot of casualties. I could not tell you all of them; but, thank God, I came out safely, although I had some narrow escapes.<sup>102</sup>

In a letter to his sister in Mongahan, Thomas Brannigan, Irish Fusiliers, gave some detail of his incarceration at Pretoria:

There are about 1,400 English soldiers here altogether. We get fairly well treated. We get plenty to eat, only it is very cold at night, and we have scarcely enough to keep us warm.<sup>103</sup>

Officers, as expected, were treated with the consideration that was due to their rank; in a letter to his father, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant C.E. Kinahan, Royal Irish Fusiliers, gave a number of reasons why 'all you read about the Boers in England is absolutely untrue':

We were all taken then taken prisoner ... and marched to the Boer laager and sent off that night to a station twenty miles distant in wagons. While we were in the laager we

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<sup>102</sup> *Irish Times*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

were treated extremely well and they gave us food and tobacco ... They are most kind to the wounded and prisoners, looking after them, and anything they have got they will give you if you ask them, even if they deprive themselves.

We came up to Pretoria in first class sleeping carriages ... They provide us with everything, from clothes down to toothbrushes ... In fact, we can have anything we like except our liberty...<sup>104</sup>

The disaster at Nicholson's Nek damaged the reputation of General White, with some colonists comparing the general to his fellow countryman Sir George Colley; for the South African, the name Colley, 'signifies an unsullied ignorance of the conditions of warfare in South Africa'.<sup>105</sup> The *Anglo-Celt* described the defeat as a 'humiliating fall' which caused great 'consternation' in Cavan as many of the locals had enrolled in the Royal Irish Fusiliers.<sup>106</sup> The attack on his character and military leadership, gave White no option, but to defend himself at the Royal Commission.

I am always doubtful of reaching a desired point by a night march through a difficult country, but the result I aimed at seemed to me to justify the risk ... In this case the result is known, and was disastrous.<sup>107</sup>

The defeat at Nicholson's Nek also revealed the importance and necessity of preparing an effective position of defence; the sangars constructed by the men, were considered 'pitiful' by Lord Roberts; he believed that the British regulars were unable to improvise with cover individually, as the Boers were so capable of doing.<sup>108</sup> Throughout the British campaign to relieve Ladysmith, inferior Boer numbers were able to hold areas of tactical importance with the construction of entrenchments; they proved effective for protection from artillery and rifle fire, and reconnaissance. Although the British favoured manoeuvrable warfare, stressing the importance of remaining on the offensive, veterans of the war began to notice the importance of cover and entrenchments. The construction of suitable entrenchments was considered vital by Lord Kitchener, to provide cover under the 'modern conditions of rifle fire', and he believed, that in the future it would be imperative, with the increased accuracy of weapons, that infantry and the artillery should carry sufficient tools for digging in;<sup>109</sup> Lieutenant-

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<sup>104</sup> *Irish News*, 28 Dec. 1899. Quoted in Owens 'Dear mother-It's a terrible life': Irish soldiers' letters from the Boer War 1899-1900' in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 179 and Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 49.

<sup>105</sup> J.B. Atkins, *The relief of Ladysmith* (London, 1900), p. 63.

<sup>106</sup> *The Anglo-Celt*, 4 Nov. 1899.

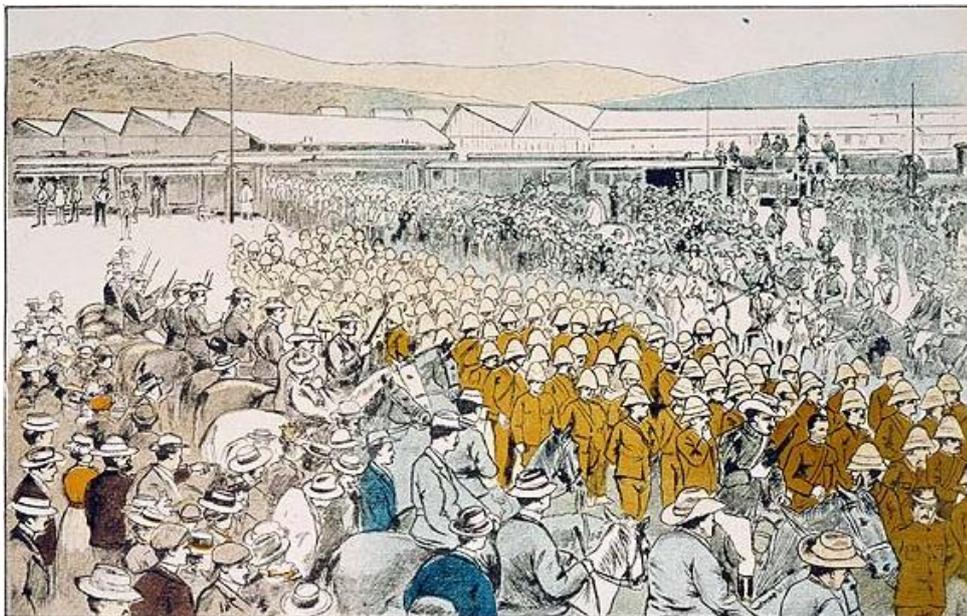
<sup>107</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 147.

<sup>108</sup> *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. lxi, 46.

<sup>109</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1790], H.C. xl325, 8.

General Sir Ian Hamilton understood that trenches played an important role during the South African War, and advocated, that in future, large quantities of entrenching tools should be provided, so soldiers would be sufficiently prepared to dig in.<sup>110</sup> The Boer method of constructing deep narrow entrenchments, barely invisible to an attacker, was an important lesson for Lord Methuen; he believed that the conditions of modern warfare, made it vitally important for British officers and soldiers to be effectively trained in future to instinctively exploit cover.<sup>111</sup> Major- General Sir H. M. Leslie Rundle believed that the soldiers ‘ought to entrench just as naturally as he eats his dinner’.<sup>112</sup> Although the South African War never reached the same levels of static warfare commonly associated with the Great War in Europe, the entrenchments provided a suitable and interesting prelude to the vast construction of trenches on the Western Front. Trench warfare in the Boer context, demonstrated an unheeded warning that relatively few troops with deadly weaponry, could defend an area against a frontal assault with superior numbers and artillery barrage.

**Fig. 31: 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers captured by Boers’ and Blake’s Brigade. Arrival under escort at Pretoria.**



Source, *The Weekly Freeman and National Press*, 11 May 1901. Available on the website of the National Library of Ireland (<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Search/Results?lookfor=boer+war&type=AllFields&page=2&view=list>) (10 Jan. 2014)

<sup>110</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 112.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

Returning to the Ladysmith theatre, the coordinated attacks mounted that morning by the British were all indecisive, and all withdrew to the confines of the town (see page xiv for map of attacks on 30 October 1899). Thus, the Boers were able to continue their advance on the British position and begin preparations for besieging the town. ‘It is all over’ cried war correspondent Bennett Burleigh of the *Daily Telegraph*, ‘we are beaten, and it means investment (being besieged). We shall all be locked up in Ladysmith’.<sup>113</sup> With regards the defeat, the *Southern Star* remained sceptical and unconvinced by the British defence; the newspaper concluded that the ‘less that is said about the “glorious stand at Nicholson’s Nek” the better’.<sup>114</sup>

### **The relief column and the battle of Colenso (15 December 1899)**

The following day General Sir Redvers Buller arrived at Cape Town, becoming the newly stated commander-in-chief of the forces in South Africa; White’s independent command in Natal subsequently came to an end.<sup>115</sup> It was Buller’s first autonomous command of a large force; an army corps including the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, a Cavalry Division, Corps Troops and troops for the lines of communication, totalling 47,081.<sup>116</sup> Buller’s initial plan was to strike at the heart of the Orange Free State by taking the capital of Bloemfontein, thus relieving in Buller’s opinion, the pressure on Kimberly and Ladysmith. However, it became clear that Buller’s original plans had become void given the grave situation in Natal; General White was deemed powerless to protect the colony within the confines of Ladysmith, and his condition would become precarious if aid failed to materialise. The relief of Ladysmith became the principal objective and it would be led by the commander-in-chief. Buller, ‘very reluctantly’ decided to divide his forces in order to support further theatres of operation. As he became increasingly aware of the plight of Kimberly, he decided to despatch Lord Methuen, along with a division, as a relief force. Upon the arrival of the Cavalry Division, General French, having escaped from Ladysmith, was posted near Colesberg to hinder any advance of Boer forces; General Gatacre was positioned at Queenstown to cover East London and King Williamstown; and General Clery was appointed in command of three brigades in Natal, of which, Buller subsequently took control. With this thinking, Buller

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<sup>113</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, p. 88.

<sup>114</sup> *The Southern Star*, 18 Nov. 1899.

<sup>115</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvii, 6.

<sup>116</sup> *Report of His Majesty’s commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. lxi, 37.

believed that if each operation was successful, the strategic situation would be restored to its pre-war make up.<sup>117</sup> From November to December 1899, further British reinforcements were arriving in South Africa; below are listed the Irish regiments that were ordered to the front.<sup>118</sup>

**Table B) Information on Irish regiments ordered to the front (November-December 1899).**

Unit	Officers	Other Ranks	Horses	Guns	Ship	Date of embarkation	Date of disembarkation
6th Inniskilling Dragoons	25	557	498	1	<i>Persia</i>	24 October 1899	11 November 1899
1st Inniskilling Fusiliers	29	969	3	1	<i>Catalonia</i>	5 November 1899	5 December 1899
2nd Royal Irish Rifles	25	875	3	1	<i>Britannic</i>	26 October 1899	16 November 1899
1st Connaught Rangers	28	855	3	1	<i>Bavarian</i>	10 November 1899	1 December 1899
1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers	28	923	0	1	<i>Bavarian</i>	10 November 1899	1 December 1899
2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers	29	946	3	1	<i>Hawarden Castle</i>	23 October 1899	10 November 1899

The departure of these troops was typified by scenes of enthusiasm in towns and cities across Ireland, as civilians gathered together to bid fond farewells. The thousands that witnessed the departure of each battalion, was testament to the public's interest in the British military and the conflict in South Africa. The appearance of solidarity, with citizens waving Union Jacks and singing patriotic songs, demonstrated that sections of the Irish public remained unresponsive to the strong and constant pro-Boer rhetoric witnessed throughout the country. In Ireland, following the declaration of war, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers were the first regiment to be mobilised and sent to South Africa on board *Hawarden Castle*. On 25 October 1899, the Royal Irish Rifles left Victoria Barracks in Belfast for departure to the front; a large crowd of friends, family and well-wishers congregated along the route that the regiment

<sup>117</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 171-173.

<sup>118</sup> Information obtained from Sir Frederick Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, i (London, 1906).

would take to the train station. The following contemporary account taken from the *Belfast News Letter* illustrates the public excitement that prevailed in Belfast:

Along the whole line of route the illuminated windows were thronged with numbers of spectators, who waved handkerchiefs and flags and shouted friendly and encouraging farewell to the troops. The cavalry escort could not withstand the pressure of the crowd, who broke in in (sic) all directions upon the ranks, and the men had the utmost difficulty in preserving their formation...Many of the men were almost, in the literal sense of the word, "killed by kindness"...There were women weeping inside the barrier at the impending departure of husbands, sons, or sweethearts; others outside it who struggled in vain to reach their relatives.<sup>119</sup>

The departure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers on board the transport ship *SS Catalonia* was accompanied by similar scenes; on 5 November 1899 in Queenstown, Private Bryant recorded in his diary the events at the harbour:

Our band played a few patriotic airs to while the time whilst everything was being got on board the ship before she sailed. We left Queenstown about 4 p.m. amid loud cheering and waving of handkerchiefs from the crowd assembled on the Quay ... Many of the people of Queenstown had their houses beautifully illuminated with coloured lights etc., which they displayed as we steamed out of the harbour.<sup>120</sup>

On board that same ship was Major-General Hart, in which he recorded, 'The send-off from Queenstown was the most splendid demonstration I ever saw...'<sup>121</sup> Prior to the departure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers to board the transport ship, *Bavarian*, the *Irish Times* reported scenes from Athlone Barracks:

At 2 o' clock on Friday morning under a heavy downpour, the military gates were opened for the exit of the Connaught Rangers ... hundreds of people at the early hour named had congregated in the Market Square, close to the barracks, to take part in the farewell programme. The morning being intensely dark, the Urban Council had a band of torchbearers to light the streets traversed by the soldiers ... The bands played at intervals their favourite regimental airs, and all the time the concourse of civilians who accompanied cheered vociferously ... many affectionate leave-takings as the trains moved off for Queenstown amidst great cheering.<sup>122</sup>

Such scenes, in the opinion of Captain Jourdain demonstrated that the 'Irish are immensely proud of their old Regiments'.<sup>123</sup> He recorded:

... the rangers had a wonderful send-off at Athlone, and it was simply amazing to see the vast concourse of people at the barrack gates so early on that cold, wet November

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<sup>119</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 Oct. 1899.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Cassidy (ed.), *The Inniskilling diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa* (Barnsley, 2001), p. 27.

<sup>121</sup> B.M. Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot* (London, 1912), p. 291.

<sup>122</sup> *Irish Times*, 11 Nov. 1899.

<sup>123</sup> H.F.N. Jourdain, *Ranging memories* (Oxford, 1934), p. 24.

morning, and the torchlight procession to the station. At Queenstown the whole front was lighted up with fireworks and coloured lights. A wonderful sight.<sup>124</sup>

Preceding the departure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers and a squadron of the 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons, the Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's Forces in Ireland, Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, V.C., inspected the troops at the Curragh Army Camp, County Kildare. Addressing the Dublin Fusiliers he recalled the battle honours of their regiment throughout its existence, their proud tradition and the honour that they bestowed on the British Army. Lord Roberts was confident in their 'splendid reputation in the future' and acclaimed the regiment was 'privileged' in taking part in a 'great campaign'.<sup>125</sup>

The excitement was infectious and would certainly have boosted the spirits of many men as they boarded their respective transport. The departing speeches attempted to rally the troops by providing a sense of occasion; by emphasising their purpose for the forthcoming campaign; and, highlighting their participation within the confines of their regiments' historical annals and legacy. Naturally, however, soldiers' thoughts and prayers remained with their families, friends and sweethearts. As soldiers departed from the United Kingdom, many took the opportunity to write a few lines to their loved ones. On the eve of war, Private Joseph Robinson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers wrote home to his girlfriend:

i wish I could see you before we go abroad i would be contented then but i dont think I see you anymore till the war is over and then i see you keep your heart up dont be fretting i am all right i mind my self till i see you again so i think this is all this time from your fond sweetheart ... remember me to all the boys as i taught (sic) i would see them this furlough dont get married till I go back and we will be happy i am always thinking of you and i love you and no one else.<sup>126</sup>

Conversely, the Irish pro-Boers and Nationalists did not express such enthusiasm at Ireland's contribution to the war effort and the departure of Irish troops to South Africa. The soldiers were considered by the Tipperary Board of Guardians as, 'thoughtless, ignorant and dispirited'.<sup>127</sup> Prior to the conflict, the Cork Corporation further stated that 'any Irishman who joined the English army ... was no Irishman and should be regarded as a great foe as the worst type of Englishman'.<sup>128</sup> Such rhetoric was understandable considering the stance undertaken by the Irish Transvaal Committee attempting to dissuade recruitment; pro-Boer placards

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<sup>124</sup> Jourdain H.F.N. *Natal memories 1899-1900* (London, 1948), p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 Nov. 1899.

<sup>126</sup> Informal Will of Private Joseph Robinson, 9 Oct., 1899 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119). Private Robinson would die at Vryheid, northern Natal, of 'severe wounds' on 23 September 1901, after his battalion of Mounted Infantry was ambushed at Blood River on 17 September. List of casualties in the army in South Africa from the 1 January 1901 – 30 June 1901 (T.N.A., Administration and Correspondence, WO 108/338), p. 72.

<sup>127</sup> *Cork Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1899.

<sup>128</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 Oct. 1899.

distributed across Dublin read: ‘Enlisting in the English Army is Treason ... the recruiting sergeant is an enemy, and it is a disgrace to any decent Irishman seen in his company ... in preventing recruitment for the English army you are working for Ireland’s honour.’<sup>129</sup> While some condemned the role the Irish played in the war, others lamented the participation but found room for praise; in the House of Commons John Redmond understood the soldiers’ duty and obligations to the army: ‘I, as an Irishman, cannot help feeling a thrill of pride at the record of heroism of the Irish lads ... who have suffered so terribly in this war.’<sup>130</sup>

Despite the obvious schism in Irish society regarding the conflict and Irish participation, others considered the war beyond politics and focused on the human impact; one observer of these departures viewed the occasion as poignant, as the individual looked beyond the fanfare and celebration, and focused on the family that was left behind:

In several instances I observed them (the soldiers) with their wives and children, and I noticed how the little fair-headed lasses and the little lads surrounded their father in this, possibly, their last companionship together, and I felt exceedingly sad at the approach of Christmas and the deep shadow it will bring to many little homes. The men march past, with crowds cheering, with bands playing, with colours flying, to embarkation, full of resolve. The women return to their little homes, alone, full of anxiety, full of grief, full of care about to-morrow. The breadwinner is gone, his chair is empty, he speeds to Table Bay.<sup>131</sup>

The initial excitement of embarking amid widespread elation naturally ebbed away, and the difficulties and hardship of service became immediately clear on their transport ships; cramped and insanitary conditions; high temperatures (above and below deck); rough weather; sickness and inoculation. In three weeks their transports would take the men down the Portuguese coast, past Las Palmas and forward towards Cape Town. The rough weather was a continuous problem for the men on board, especially for those not accustomed to the sea and not familiarised with the regular visitor ‘Father Neptune’.<sup>132</sup> On board the *SS Catalonia*, Private Bryant and his regiment the 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers suffered four days of storms from the day of departure, with the private falling victim to sea sickness.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Dublin Daily Express*, 16 Oct. 1899.

<sup>130</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 7 Feb., 1900, lxxviii, col. 834.

<sup>131</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 Dec. 1899.

<sup>132</sup> J.W. Morton, 8<sup>th</sup> (*King’s Royal Irish*) *Hussars: diary of the South African War, 1899-1902* (Aldershot, 1905), p. 13.

<sup>133</sup> Cassidy, *The Inniskilling diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa*, p. 28.

**Fig. 32: The 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons boarding the ‘Siberian’ at Queenstown on 24 October 1899.**



**Source, J.W. Yardley, *With the Inniskilling Dragoons: the record of a cavalry regiment during the Boer War, 1899-1902* (London, 1904), p. 2.**

The men passed their time by playing cards, reading periodicals, magazines, and newspapers, playing bingo, singing, concerts, boxing, church parades and in cases, discussing Irish politics, religion and their concerns regarding the war. The soldiers had relatively little time to think about the coming campaign as free time was a luxury, and their time on board was filled with varied occupations. The soldiers partook in rifle, small-arms and maxim machine practice (which included shooting bottles, boxes, make-shift targets, and passing birds), gymnastics, physical drills, guard duty, cleaning the messes and troop decks, and if present, exercising, grooming and feeding the horses. There was, however, one activity that all soldiers on board were ordered to take part in: the dreaded ‘pig sticking drill’. It was a typhoid vaccination with far from savoury effects; Captain Jourdain of the 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers recalled the procedure whilst *en route* to South Africa:

Inoculation was in its infancy at this time and was clumsily performed. Thus of the seventeen who underwent this rather drastic mode of making a hole in one’s arm and putting in about a tablespoon or more of serum, I was the only one who was on his legs at 9.30 p.m. that night and the only one except one who had breakfast the next morning. One youth fainted even before the overdose of liquid was put inside him.<sup>134</sup>

Upon their arrival in South Africa, the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers were assigned to the relief of

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<sup>134</sup> Jourdain, *Ranging memories*, p. 84.

Ladysmith. Private W.J. Steele, 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers described the reaction of the loyalist population, as the Irish battalions journeyed to the British camp at Frere, Natal:

We met with the greatest enthusiasm all along the line, kind ladies giving us fruit, tea, bread and butter, tobacco, pipes and matches; in fact offering to write home for us if we could only give them our addresses. It was great to us tired chaps to meet with so much kindness. Everyone, old and young, showed it in many ways. I heard lads and girls not more than eight years old shouting ‘Kill the Boers, kill the Boers...’<sup>135</sup>

Joseph Drumgoon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers recalled the above scenes in a letter to his parents from Cootehill, County Cavan; he also gave his opinion on the country:

Dear parents, this is a very nice country, though very hilly, and that makes the place more beautiful, and it will be a splendid place, when we have British laws, for any person to make a fortune, though at the present state of affairs you would not be long spending a small sum.<sup>136</sup>

General Buller’s aim was to lift the siege of Ladysmith, but to do so he would have to push the Boers out of the region at the Tugela Heights, which blocked the main route to the town (see page xv for theatre of operations). Overall, Buller had within his command, four infantry brigades, one mounted brigade, five batteries of artillery and a range of naval guns which included the Irish 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade under the command of Anglo-Irish General Arthur Fitzroy Hart of Ballymoyer, County Armagh (1844-1910).<sup>137</sup> Prior to his appointment in South Africa, the general had served a distinguished career in Her Majesty’s Forces; he saw service as captain during the Zulu Campaign (1879) seeing action at the battles of Nyezane and Gingindlovu and present during the siege of Eshowe; he served with the Natal Field Force under the command of Sir Evelyn Wood during the First Anglo Boer War (1881); appointed Deputy Assistant Adjutant – General, he was stationed during the war in Egypt (1882), mentioned in despatches for his role during the battle of Tel-el-Kebir. Although Hart had a wealth of experience in the British army, his military familiarity was consigned to tactics more suitable for colonial warfare - combat that usually rested on the professionalism of the British soldier’s ability to sustain fanatical attacks and rout the enemy through a close ordered assault. However, British officers’ infallible belief in close order assaults, their inability to adhere to the changing environment of the battlefield, and the Boers possession of modern long range rifles in defensive positions, made the process of assaulting a position a precarious

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<sup>135</sup> *Northern Whig*, 13 Jan. 1900; quoted in Spiers (ed.), *Letters from Ladysmith: eyewitness accounts from the South African War*, pp 53-54.

<sup>136</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 23 Dec. 1899.

<sup>137</sup> Sir Bernard Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic history of the landed gentry of Ireland* (London, 1912), p. 679.

and dangerous task.<sup>138</sup> Interestingly, General Hart, a veteran of the First Boer War, wrote in 1881 following the declaration of peace: ‘The Boer has been underrated as a fighting man ... A nation of rifle sportsmen must and ever will be the best shots in the world’. He remarked that the British army ‘cannot compete with him in *that*’; however they possessed two things that would ultimately smash a Boers defence – superior numbers, and artillery.<sup>139</sup> Hart carried forth this belief into the South African War, and thus at Colenso, the Irish Brigade suffered considerable losses due to the tactics deployed by the general, and his belief in the superiority of his forces.

With regards to the Irish Brigade, officers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers initially feared that their battalion would become ‘nobody’s child’ and sent away defending lines of communications following their escape from the siege at Ladysmith; yet to their relief they replaced their sister battalion in Hart’s Brigade.<sup>140</sup> The brigade now comprised the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers consisting of eleven companies (which included three companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion under Major Hicks with a fighting strength of 287), the 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers, the 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers and the 1<sup>st</sup> Border Regiment. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers was also present in the relief forming a part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Fusilier Brigade under Major-General Barton.

After news of Major-General Gatacre’s defeat at Stormberg (10 December), in which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Rifles had suffered over two hundred casualties, and upon hearing that Lieutenant-General Methuen had suffered a heavy repulse at Magersfontein (11 December), Buller believed that decisive action was needed to halt the recent reverses. Buller knew that the Boers occupied the hills along the Tugela River but he had little knowledge of their strong points due to the difficult topography of the area, coupled with poor reconnaissance and inferior maps. The day before the attack, Buller sent for his staff and commanders in order to personally explain his plan; that night Irishman Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Clery, a veteran of the Anglo-Zulu War (1879), and one of the few Imperial officers who survived the massacre at Isandlwana (1879) and a veteran of the Nile Expedition to relieve General Gordon at Khartoum (1885), drew up the plans for the attack. In the words of Hart, his brigade was given the task of attacking ‘one of the strongest natural positions in the world—a mountain range and a river at its base’.<sup>141</sup> While this observation was recorded days after the

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<sup>138</sup> Edward Spiers, *The army and society 1815-1914* (New York, 1980), p 230 and, Spencer Jones, ‘The influence of the Boer War (1899-1902) on the tactical development of the regular British Army 1902-1914’ (PhD. thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2009), p. 64.

<sup>139</sup> Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot*, p. 187.

<sup>140</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 32.

<sup>141</sup> Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot*, p. 294.

battle, the inherent difficulty of the operation did not alter Hart's tactical mindset and he continuously urged the necessity of keeping his men 'well in hand'.<sup>142</sup>

The mission for Buller's two attacking brigades was to 'force a passage of the Tugela', in a bid to force a decisive victory. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, under Major-General Hildyard, was ordered to cross the iron bridge at Colenso and gain possession of the kopjes. The official order for the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Brigade was as follows:

The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade will move from its present camping ground at 4.30 a.m. and march towards the Bridle Drift, immediately west of Doornkop Spruit and the Tugela. The Brigade will cross at this point, and after crossing, move along the left bank of the river towards the kopjes north of the iron bridge.

With little innovation or forethought in their approach, the British command ordered a frontal assault, despite the lack of reconnaissance and information on Boer positions or any true understanding of how effective their preparatory bombardment might be. Moreover, the manner of the attack demonstrated that the British failed to realise or acknowledge the military prowess of the Boer, the unsuitability of the environment for frontal assaults, and the importance of mobility and reconnaissance. Previous military engagements with the Boers should have demonstrated this during the First-Anglo Boer War (1880-1881), but with British arrogance and/or ignorance, the British senior command inexplicably failed to analyse and learn from past engagements. The results from past encounters would have demonstrated that the Boers were extremely tough opponents, excellent at exploiting cover and had the courage to hold their positions in difficult situations.

**Fig. 33: Officers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Brigade (Captain Jourdain on the left) and several war correspondents, watching the bombardment of Colenso, on 13 December 1899.**



**Source, *Black and White Budget*, 3 Feb. 1900.**

<sup>142</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 34.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade under the command Major-General Lyttelton would advance in support of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Brigades respectively. The right flank attack of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade was to be protected by Major Barton's 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade and if necessary, Lord Dundonald's mounted brigade while endeavouring to take a position on Hlangwane. The infantry attack was to be supported by British artillery.<sup>143</sup> Hart was shown on a map the river which his brigade would cross (see page 58). A local native was consigned to the brigade and after some initial reservations Hart was convinced that he could be led by the 'trusty kaffir'.<sup>144</sup> In a letter dated 14 December 1899 a 'Naas lad' attached to Buller's column described the preparations to his parents.

We are shelling Colenso, where the Boers have taken up our forts. We have cleared them out with lyddite. They left their guns and convoy behind. They tried to get it back, but the fire from our guns sent them away again. We are well looked after in every way. We expect to be up in Ladysmith next week. We have a very strong force here now, about 25,000 troops and 100 guns. It will be nearly all artillery fighting...<sup>145</sup>

This letter expresses optimism with regards the effect of bombardment and the use of high explosive lyddite shells on the Boer positions. Prior to the battle of Magersfontein, Nenagh native Private Bernard Murray of the Grenadier Guards wrote to his family explaining that lyddite shells were imperative for victory. He noted that 'nothing else will drive them out of the hills and trenches'.<sup>146</sup> On the advance to their preparatory positions at Colenso, Private Sheridan of the Royal Irish Fusiliers claimed to his parents 'we will give the Boers "socks"'.<sup>147</sup> It was an ignorant overestimation of the effectiveness of artillery on strong hidden positions; 'Except, perhaps, for those who had studied the effect of artillery upon earthworks during the Russo-Turkish War' wrote historian Bailes, 'the British assumed that the bombardment would shatter the Boer defences and demoralise the occupants'.<sup>148</sup> The artillery barrage had little consequence, inflicting minimal casualties. In fact, it turned out to be a counterproductive tactic which alerted the enemy of imminent attack. Conversely to the optimism expressed by Private Sheridan, Lance-Corporal Thomas O'Neill of the same regiment, had little confidence. Writing from Estcourt Camp, O' Neill conveyed his doubts in a letter to his family; dated 8 December, it was also an ideal opportunity to settle his affairs in the event of his death:

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<sup>143</sup> For full instructions of the attack see Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii, pp 189-190 and Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, i, pp 347-350.

<sup>144</sup> Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot*, pp 295-296.

<sup>145</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 20 Jan. 1900.

<sup>146</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 3 Jan. 1900.

<sup>147</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 13 Jan. 1900.

<sup>148</sup> Howard Bailes, 'Military aspects of the war' in S.B. Spies and Peter Warwick (eds), *The South African War*, p. 83.

The battle of Ladysmith will come off in about two days. I think, and I may tell you many a poor bugger will kiss the ground before very long. Dear Sister you will have no bother in getting my money if I should be shot ... You will also get two and maybe three war medals which I will be entitled to for the hardship we have earned (sic) through on the Sunny Plains of S.A. Dear Sister you may think little very little of war medals, but it is quite the opposite with me. I would value them as I value my very life. You may understand that a soldier's wealth is honour. No soldier can wear a greater honour than a war medal...

In his final line he wrote: 'Trust me a couple of boers will bite the dust before me if I get half the chance and then I shall be content'.<sup>149</sup>

On the morning of the battle, Captain H.F.N Jourdain of the 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers described the final preparations in his diary and the march to battle:

Got up at 2.30 am and packed wagons at 2.45 am. Got breakfast of tea and dry biscuit at 3am. Fell in 3.40. Marched on the Brigade parade at 4.5. Marched off B'gde parade at 420 down towards the Tugela River. While we were marching in Mass of Quarter Columns, the Brigadier (Hart) in front, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers, and the Border Regt, and lastly the 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers.<sup>150</sup>

The men carried with them only their haversacks, water bottles, a rifle and 150 rounds of ammunition. As the soldiers marched across the damp ground with little natural cover towards their position, few could foresee what was in store for them over the next few hours. As Sergeant Brennan of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers related in an interview three months following the battle to the *Kildare Observer*: 'We went marching on, scarce knowing what our destiny might be.'<sup>151</sup> Conversely, as the column advanced towards Ladysmith days previously, one soldier was 'expecting to have a great battle at Colenso.'<sup>152</sup> The naval guns prepared the ground by beginning a bombardment of the hills. The hills appeared deserted from a British perspective, as the Boers did not respond to the artillery fire and continued to remain concealed from the advancing British. However, Captain Romer believed that 'many foes might be watching the advancing khaki-clad troops'.<sup>153</sup> The Boers remained hidden, awaiting the impending infantry assault.

The Boers understood the value of surprise and the benefits of remaining hidden until the pivotal moment. They had waited in their positions for several days, ordered not to return any fire during the two day bombardment. Following the Boer victory at Magersfontein (11

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<sup>149</sup> Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Thomas O' Neill, 8 Dec., 1899 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119).

<sup>150</sup> Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum book of the Boer War* (London, 1999), p. 47.

<sup>151</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 24 Mar. 1900.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>153</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 34.

December), General Cronje advised General Botha to order his men to remain in their trenches, as it was now apparent that the high explosive shell lyddite was ineffective and relatively harmless if men remained sheltered. Botha had decided to defend the main crossing points across the Tugela with some 4,500 commandoes and Johannesburg police across a front of six and half miles. Due to the topography of the region, the Boer position was defensively formidable amid the kopjes, which naturally instilled confidence in the civilian army. Not only were the Boers defensively secured in a line of trenches and concealed from British observations, the men were crack shots armed with modern rifles, and five artillery pieces. Their artillery consisted of a 120mm Krupp howitzer, a 75 mm Krupp field gun, 37mm Maxim- Nordenfeldt ‘Pom-Pom’ and two 75 mm Creusot field guns.<sup>154</sup> Their firearms also added to their effective defence. The Mauser Rifle, M1893-6 was a magazine fed rifle with a clip loading mechanism that could discharge five bullets rapidly. The cartridge also offered an undoubted advantage over the British; the Mauser discharged a bullet with smokeless gun powder offering near invisibility from the advancing British brigades. Following the battle of Colenso, several accounts would emerge from Irish soldiers fighting an ‘invisible’ enemy. The Boers also had the motivation to fight; they believed that British aggression and interference inhibited their livelihoods, and their traditions. Indeed, in the words of a soldier of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers: ‘They are a tough lot, and will fight to the last for their independence’.<sup>155</sup>

As the Irish brigade continued their march, Hart noted, with great annoyance that the local guide was adamant that the only crossing point was at the loop – Hart had been ordered to cross a drift that he marked as point ‘A’ on the map below.<sup>156</sup> In retrospect, Hart noted that ‘this was serious news ... I must go on or go back. But I had no authority to go back’. Hart was adamant to follow Buller’s orders and attempt to force the passage across the river despite the substantial confusion in reconnaissance. Historian Thomas Pakenham claimed:

Now Hart knew enough about war to know that there are few more dangerous places to send men on a battlefield than into a salient-the open end of a loop. To march into a well-defended salient is like putting your head into a noose<sup>157</sup>

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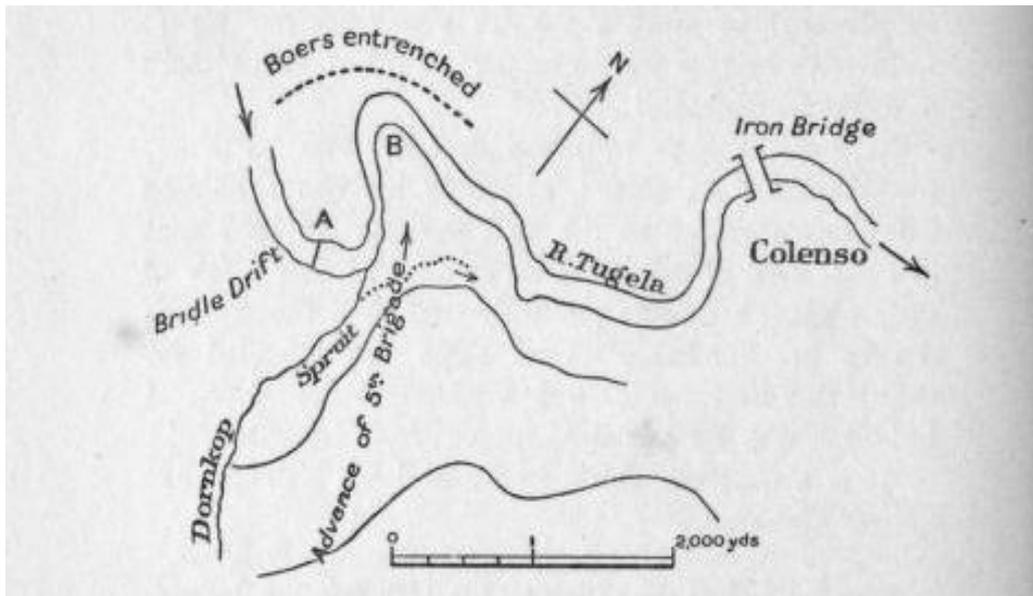
<sup>154</sup> C.J. Barnard, ‘General Botha at the battle of Colenso 15 December 1899’ in *Military History Journal*, i (1970), np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol017cb.html> (11 Nov. 2013).

<sup>155</sup> *Nenagh News*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>156</sup> Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot*, p. 296.

<sup>157</sup> Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 227.

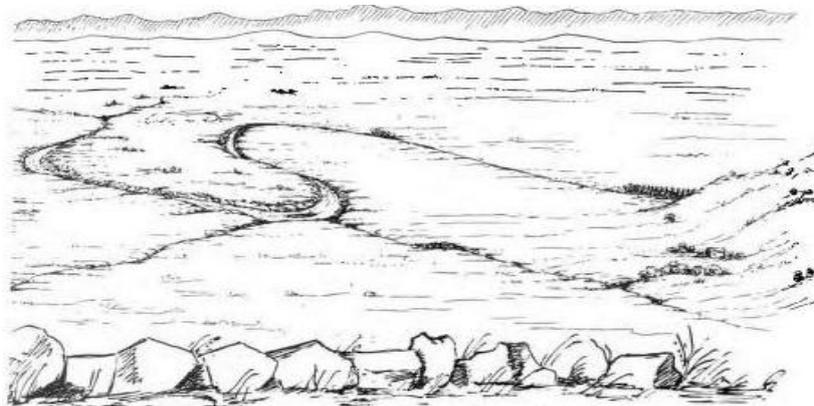
**Fig. 34: Map detailing the advance of the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Brigade at Colenso**



Source, B.M. Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot* (London, 1912), p. 296.

Hart ordered the entire brigade of over four thousand men into the loop that was only a thousand yards wide. The hills surrounding the loop were defended by two artillery pieces, and four commando units entrenched – the Zoutpansberg, Ermelo, Swaziland, and Middleburg.<sup>158</sup> The Irish Brigade's fate was sealed.

**Fig. 35: General Hart's flank attack from the Boer point of view.**



From a sketch by Colonel H. Tempest Hicks. Source, Source, C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (London, 1908), p. 34.

As the Irish Brigade entered the loop, they immediately sustained effective fire; Private Richard Wilson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Connaught Rangers, related to his brother that 'Our brigade was taken

<sup>158</sup> For detailed maps of the engagement see pages xvi and xvii and also, Knight, *Colenso 1899: The Boer War in Natal*, pp 46-47.

completely by surprise'.<sup>159</sup> Private M Dwyer, D Company Connaught Rangers noted that as the men entered the loop in a dense formation, the 'mistake' of the deployment, was not recognised 'until the Boers dropped a shell'.<sup>160</sup> Such declarations evidently portray the Irish Brigade as tactically unprepared for the advance, and a total failure of British reconnaissance in providing suitable information on the positions of the Boers, their defensive entrenchments, and their numbers. Private Lally 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers felt the 'Boer were firing the same as a field day at home'.<sup>161</sup> Captain Jourdain described the incessant fire from the enemy, as they moved behind in support of the Dublin Fusiliers, before they advanced onto the river bank with the Inniskillings on their left. He remembered the 'fire at this point became very heavy, & man after man fell down'.<sup>162</sup> A soldier lamented the first shell that burst into his company; 'thirty poor fellows fell never to rise in this world, some with the heads off, some with the hands off, others cut in two'.<sup>163</sup> As D Company of the Connaught Rangers approached under Captain Jourdain, Private Michael Cahill was killed instantly; his death was lamented by his captain, who believed that he lost a 'fine soldier and one of the best shots in the Company'.<sup>164</sup> From the eyewitness accounts, it is evident that the battle was a harrowing experience for the Irish Brigade, as Private Lally 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers put it, 'the same as pigs going to the slaughter yard'.<sup>165</sup> Private Patrick Reilly, Royal Irish Fusiliers noted 'our men fell like apples off a tree',<sup>166</sup> whilst Private Philip Quinn, Royal Irish Fusiliers likened the heavy casualties as 'our men fell like chaff before the wind'.<sup>167</sup> Humorously Private Michael McLoughlin, 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers, who lost his left hand in the battle, wrote, 'it was a very nice breakfast we got, plenty of powder and ball flying – and buzzing all round us'.<sup>168</sup>

Those examples highlight the ferocious battle conditions, but also revealed the inadequate tactics and formation of the brigade that necessitated such straightforward targets. A soldier described the congestion of troops as a reason for the high casualty rate:

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<sup>159</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 10 Mar. 1900.

<sup>160</sup> *Northern Echo*, 30 Jan. 1900.

<sup>161</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 17 Feb. 1900.

<sup>162</sup> Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum book of the Boer War* (London, 1999), p. 47.

<sup>163</sup> *Irish News* 20 Jan. 1900. Quoted in Owens 'Dear mother-It's a terrible life': Irish soldiers' letters from the Boer War 1899-1900' in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 181.

<sup>164</sup> Jourdain, *Natal memories 1899-1900*, p. 8.

<sup>165</sup> *Anglo-Celt.*, 27 Feb. 1900.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 Feb. 1900.

<sup>168</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 31 Jan. 1900.

The attack was made in such a way that we were overcrowded in the ranks and the consequence was the Boer artillery had full play on us ... The fire we came under was simply terrifying; almost every second man of ours was dropped.<sup>169</sup>

Moreover Captain Cecil Francis Romer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, described his battalions overcrowding as the artillery and rifle fire cut into the Irish infantry:

Another shrapnel burst over the line and then the enemy's musketry blazed forth, finding an excellent target in the massed brigade ... The battalion was dangerously crowded together, for it had been advancing as if drilling on the barrack square, although Colonel Cooper had tried to open out to double company interval, a proceeding which the General had promptly counter-ordered ... The men rushed forward after their officers, and their signal lay down in the long grass, whence fire was opened at the invisible foe.<sup>170</sup>

The dense columns advance wavered under the pressure and the Irish brigade was ultimately pinned down. The men held their ground but it was evident that confusion and lack of cohesion was hampering any positive reaction to the situation. Dangerously, their officers continued to rally the men and encouraged them to break from cover and head for the bank. Some men summoned the courage and rush forward in small groups; the scene was appropriately described by General Hart:

I could see officers here and there urging on the advance; and all this was so far successful that a slow advance was made. Here and there men with better nerves pushed on. There was no panic, and once when I said to a lot of men who were deaf to my commands to advance – 'If I give you the lead, if your General gives you a lead – will you come on?' they answered quite cheerily with their brogues 'We will sir', and they jumped and forward they went.<sup>171</sup>

Although Jack Hendry, 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers, claimed that the Borderers and the Connaught Rangers refused to advance in the face of Boer fire; 'I am ashamed to say that not a single man of them moved, although the General threatened to shoot them'.<sup>172</sup> That opinion can be measured as harsh considering that the majority of the battalions had relatively little experience in any form of battle, their training did not counteract the conditions, and the 'baptism of fire' in conjunction with the noise of hundreds of smokeless rounds constantly firing into their packed position would ultimately add to fear and confusion. Hart himself relayed to Buller that he considered his soldiers 'inexperienced' and noted that the reluctance of his brigade to advance towards the river bank was due to it being their 'first experience of

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<sup>169</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>170</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 35.

<sup>171</sup> Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot*, p. 301.

<sup>172</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, pp 185-186.

fire'. He hoped that their performance would be much improved next time.<sup>173</sup> Conversely, Captain Jourdain was impressed by the bravery and discipline of his company, notwithstanding that none had any previous battle experience, bar one sergeant who had seen action at Tel-el-Kebir (1882) as a drummer boy.<sup>174</sup> This relative battlefield inexperience of the infantry was further compounded by the regulations imposed by infantry manuals. Soldiers were still being trained on tactics that were considered suitable for colonial warfare, focusing on close formations, discipline, volley fire and infantry assaults; such drills were impractical and generally ineffective against a well armed enemy, with long range fire power.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, historian Jeremy Black argued that it revealed 'a lack of emphasis on the use of cover and of understanding of the consequences of smokeless powder; and, more generally a lack of understanding of enhanced defensive firepower'.<sup>176</sup> At Colenso, due to the terrain, and the high rate of Boer fire, the Irish Brigade was unable to put their training into practice, thus resulting in being an ineffective and incapable strike force.

Nevertheless, what was certainly evident was the bravery of the officers in maintaining professionalism and coolness in a difficult situation. General Hart was one such officer; as Sergeant Brennan, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers, lay on the ground suffering from a piece of shell between his elbow joints, he remarked that Hart 'seemed to bear a charmed life, and he poured out his words of encouragement heedless of the danger in which he was placed'.<sup>177</sup> Despite some soldiers having scant confidence in Hart's tactical abilities, many were impressed by his physical and morale courage. Jourdain noted that the men 'were fascinated by the gallant bearing and bravery' of Hart<sup>178</sup> - such performances earned him the nickname 'No-Bobs'.

At this juncture, a fourteen year old bugler of the Dublin Fusiliers, named John Dunn, ordered an advance without prior instruction.<sup>179</sup> The sound of the bugle galvanised sections of the brigade and with renewed optimism and confidence, they managed to force their way

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<sup>173</sup> Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot*, pp 303-304.

<sup>174</sup> Jourdain, *Natal memories 1899-1900*, p. 24.

<sup>175</sup> E.M. Spiers, *The late Victorian army 1868-1902* (Manchester, 1999), p. 251.

<sup>176</sup> Jeremy Black, *War in the nineteenth century 1800 -1914* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 149.

<sup>177</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 24 Mar. 1900.

<sup>178</sup> Jourdain, *Ranging memories*, p. 100.

<sup>179</sup> 'Instead of the hiding he deserved' wrote historian Byron Farwell, the boy soldier became a hero in the United Kingdom. He was reportedly the first to be hit, having been shot in the right arm and neck, losing his bugle and was then carried away to an ambulance. The account gripped the public's imagination, the teenager becoming a national hero, appearing in many newspapers with drawings and photographs; songs written about him; his face appearing on medals, plates, buttons, jigsaws, cigarettes and figurines; even horses were being renamed after him. The most impressive result of his bravery was a meeting with Queen Victoria at Osborne House in which she presented him with a bugle that was silver plated. Byron Farwell, *The great Boer War* (Hertfordshire, 1976), p. 131.

towards the river bank. Private M Dwyer, 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers wrote ‘When we reached about 300 yards from them everyman thought at last we will get at them with the bayonet.’<sup>180</sup> However it became immediately clear as the men plunged into the river, that their optimism was misplaced. The soldiers mistakenly judged the river to be at knee deep and fordable, with Sergeant George Murray, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers remembering ‘we had to hold our rifles over heads, ploughing through muddy water, which was half-red with blood.’<sup>181</sup> In preparation for the attack, the Boers had dammed the river causing sections of water to rise by a few feet; in addition, their position was aided by barbed wire deployed along the river bed. The brigade’s failed crossing of the ford was told by Private M Dwyer, Connaught Rangers:

We thought we would pay back our chums, but we came to a river. This was the crowning horror. I saw a staff officer, who shouted, ‘In with you, Irishmen; swim the river’. Mad with anger and excitement we rushed into the river. It was a death trap. There was wire netting under the water, and those of us who got out were very few, and we are wondering yet how we did get out and when I tell you we never saw the men we were fighting...<sup>182</sup>

It is obvious throughout the eyewitness accounts that the Irish Brigade was exasperated in never seeing their enemy. The undeniable and outstanding change in the nature of warfare was considered by a war correspondent; he remembered the days when ‘the enemy could be seen, the smoke could be seen, and rifle had to be reloaded with every shot’. ‘Nowadays’ he lamented ‘all is changed’ – ‘Nothing is seen, no man, no smoke.’<sup>183</sup> For the entire brigade it was a new experience, for which history offered no comfort; the battle of Omdurman, fourteen months previously, and the battle of Ulundi (1879) demonstrated that those ‘conventional’ colonial set-piece battles were evidently defunct. Training had not prepared the men for an enemy who chose to play to their strengths by remaining ‘invisible’ and defensive. Such technology increased the soldiers’ tactical power on the defensive, with an effective ability to remain in advantageous positions, concealing their position from reconnaissance.<sup>184</sup> From the evidence illustrated below, it appears, quite understandably that encountering such an enemy was an incredibly frustrating and disconcerting experience for the professional soldier. General Buller, in his report to Lord Lansdowne admitted that his men had suffered heavily, and told of his dispirited men ‘because they have not seen a dead

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<sup>180</sup> *Northern Echo*, 30 Jan. 1900.

<sup>181</sup> Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900*, p. 187.

<sup>182</sup> *Northern Echo*, 30 Mar. 1900.

<sup>183</sup> *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 23 Jan. 1900.

<sup>184</sup> Spiers, *The late Victorian Army, 1868-1902*, p. 241.

Boer'.<sup>185</sup> The difficulties were best summed up by Lance Corporal Doake, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers:

You must know that although we were out for I may say 10 hours, we did not see a single boer as they kept well behind the rocks + it was very hard on us to be there firing + not knowing whether we were doing any harm or not.<sup>186</sup>

This is reinforced continually throughout memoirs and eyewitness accounts. On 28 December 1899, a soldier along the Mooi River wrote a letter to his wife describing his experiences at Colenso and noting the vast limitations of fighting a concealed foe. He wrote 'They are very difficult to get at. You see nothing but hills in front of you, and the bullets coming over your head...'<sup>187</sup> Major-General Hart described 'there was no smoke and not a sign of the enemy himself'.<sup>188</sup> Private L.J Bryant of the Inniskilling Fusiliers remembered 'we could not see any of them ... whilst they were practically safe in their trenches, we had no cover at all...'<sup>189</sup> 'I only saw three Boers' remembered Captain Jourdain.<sup>190</sup> In criticism, Private T. Corcoran of the Connaught Rangers wrote that 'We had a general in charge who led us into the mouth of an enemy without ever seeing them.'<sup>191</sup>

**Fig. 36: The battle of Colenso – The Dublin Fusiliers attempt to ford the Tugela.**



Source, Louis Cheswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p. 192.

<sup>185</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 624.

<sup>186</sup> Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Hamilton Doake, 21 Jan., 1900 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119). See pages 265-267 for extracts of Doake's letter.

<sup>187</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>188</sup> Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot*, p. 300.

<sup>189</sup> Cassidy, *The Inniskilling diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa*, p. 37.

<sup>190</sup> Jourdain, *Natal memories 1899-1900*, p. 9.

<sup>191</sup> *Western People*, 20 Jan. 1900. Quoted in Owens 'Dear mother-It's a terrible life': Irish soldiers' letters from the Boer War 1899-1900' in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 181.

Buller watched the unfolding disaster through his telescope from Naval Gun Hill (Buller's HQ). He ordered Lyttelton's 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade to support Hart's withdrawal by providing covering fire in open order, whilst the 63<sup>rd</sup> and 64<sup>th</sup> Field Batteries kept shelling the kopjes in support. As he gave the orders he said, 'Hart has got into a devil of a mess down there. Get him out of it as best you can'.<sup>192</sup> Hart received the order to retire by Colonel F.W Stopford, from Dublin and Buller's Military Secretary. The men understandably attempted to double back, but the brigadier drew his sword, stretched his arms and ordered them to halt until the men at the rear caught up. The order to retire was in the words of one private the reason that many got hit; in a letter to his wife Private Fitzpatrick details the confusion and horror experienced during the withdrawal:

Poor Toole of two-mile house, was shot three times in the back and the last words he said were: 'Oh! Lord we are riddled with bullets!' All the companies were confused and all were mixed up. By my side was poor Flynn, I mean Sgt. Flynn next door to you at home. He got riddled in the back of the head and I had only time to say 'Good bye my poor fellow'. He said to me when he fell ... 'Fitz, tell her and all at home that I am gone'. Colour-Sgt. M'Gee got a terrible death ... his whole stomach was torn clean away by a shell ... also Capt. Bacon and Sgt. Callan.<sup>193</sup>

In a letter home, Sergeant A.J. Windrum, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, believed the withdrawal was a necessity following the failed breach of the defences:

Our fellows had nothing else to do but retire, and by George! Didn't they suffer then? Some men got as far as five or six bullets in them; one fellow actually strolled into camp in the evening with three bullets in his leg ... we got out of range at last, about 12 noon, after being in action seven hours, and I wasn't sorry either...<sup>194</sup>

As the men were ordered to withdraw many soldiers were still unable to move due to exhaustion, wounds, for fear of being shot or failing to hear the order. In one such case, yards from Boer trenches, 'C' Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers under the command of Captain Ford Hutchinson, failed to retreat from their position due to extent of the wounded; the company remained concealed until Boers surrounded their position and compelled them to surrender.<sup>195</sup>

Across the entire front of the Tugela the British attack had grounded to a halt. Colonel Long's 14<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> Field Batteries had deployed their pieces just one thousand yards from

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<sup>192</sup> Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 212.

<sup>193</sup> *Leinster Leader*, 27 Jan. 1900. Quoted in Owens 'Dear mother-It's a terrible life': Irish soldiers' letters from the Boer War 1899-1900' in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 183.

<sup>194</sup> *Northern Whig*, 29 Jan. 1900; quoted in Spiers (ed.) *Letters from Ladysmith: eyewitness accounts from the South African War*, pp 57-58.

<sup>195</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 378.

the Boer positions, with a complete disregard of further support from infantry and the six twelve pounders naval guns. With unreliable maps, poor reconnaissance, and no support, hundreds of Boer rifles directed fire on their position. Lance Corporal Doake, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers, attached to Major Barton's 6<sup>th</sup> Fusilier Brigade witnessed the carnage:

It was hard to see the horses + men getting killed and wounded, one battery of artillery which were not 50 yards from me + it was hard to see the horses getting knocked over by the shells from the enemy...<sup>196</sup>

Several courageous attempts were made by officers and men to limber up the guns, and carry them off to safety; three Victoria Crosses were awarded to the volunteers in these attempts—two Irishmen and the son of Lord Roberts. Corporal George Nurse, 66<sup>th</sup> Battery of Enniskillen, County Fermanagh and Captain Hamilton Lyster Reed, 7<sup>th</sup> Battery from Dublin, son Sir Andrew Reed, Inspector-General of the R.I.C., were awarded the medal for their role in trying to save the guns. Lieutenant Frederick Roberts, 1<sup>st</sup> King's Royal Rifles, of 'Irish stock', was mortally wounded in the dangerous operation, and was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.<sup>197</sup> On all fronts, the attack had been checked within an hour; at 1820 hours, General Buller communicated a telegram to the Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne, detailing a 'serious reverse'. Notwithstanding the failure of Hart's operation, Buller heralded his 'great gallantry' but feared the losses were heavy for the brigade. He reported also that Long's batteries suffered severe losses which included the loss of ten artillery guns, abandoned on the battlefield.<sup>198</sup> Five hours later, Buller again telegraphed Lord Lansdowne, in which historian Pakenham believes the emotions of the battle finally got the better of him; Buller considered that his forces were incapable of relieving Ladysmith and judged 'letting' the town go. That message, and the one that encouraged White to fire off all his ammunition, were ill advised, and all faith was lost in the ability of Buller to resume an effective independent command. Lansdowne urged Buller to devise another attempt to break the Boer defences, as the British government judged the abandonment of Ladysmith as a 'national disaster of greatest magnitude'.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Hamilton Doake, 21 Jan., 1900 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119). An Ipswich driver attached to the 14<sup>th</sup> Battery, lamented his battery destruction: 'was blown to pieces, lost all its guns...all that remains of them are a few horses and about thirty men. The scenes on the battlefield are awful to tell'. *The Ipswich Journal*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>197</sup> Full medal citations are listed on pages 245-246. See also Richard Doherty and David Truesdale, *Irish winners of the Victoria Cross* (Dublin, 2000).

<sup>198</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 624.

<sup>199</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 624; Pakenham, *The Boer War*, pp 238- 239.

In the words of Sir William Thompson, ‘for nearly fifty years Great Britain had not met a white faced foe and the weapons of war had entirely been revolutionised ... thus we entered upon the war in South Africa without any comprehensive idea of the surgical results...’<sup>200</sup> The battle illustrated the disastrous effect that modern warfare had on the soldier. Rapid artillery and rifle fire directed into packs of infantry resulted in grave wounds and death. One soldier wrote to his wife describing the extent of the wounds suffered at Colenso:

It was a terrible affair ... It was something pitiful to see the men getting carried away-some with bullet wounds in their legs hopping about, and others with their limbs blown clean off ... The trains were running all night long taking poor fellows away to the hospital, many of them dying before they reached it. On coming away from the battlefield I saw poor Jem Flynn lying dead on the field, also Pat Deevey and Jerry Dunne...<sup>201</sup>

The British casualties at Colenso including dead, wounded and prisoners were 1139.<sup>202</sup> Over five hundred casualties were attached to Hart’s brigade with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers accounting for 216 of that number.<sup>203</sup> Some of the wounded of the Irish brigade were brought to the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade Field Hospital under the command of Major G.H. Young, R.A.M.C. The hospital admitted twenty four officers and 285 of other ranks with bullet wounds. The following table illustrates the character of the wounds caused by bullets:

**Table C) The character of wounds sustained by the 5th Irish Brigade at Colenso**

Head	19
Face	7
Neck	3
Back and spine	20
Upper extremity	76
Lower extremity	118
Other wounds	6

In Major Young’s hospital only eight men were injured by shells and the majority of wounds were considered without exception caused by the Mauser bullet.<sup>204</sup> With regards injuries after the battles of Colenso, Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, the Irish hospital treated just eighty-seven

<sup>200</sup> Sir William Thompson, ‘Surgical lessons from South Africa’ in *The Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, cxii (1901), p 83.

<sup>201</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>202</sup> Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, i, p. 470.

<sup>203</sup> Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii, p. 456.

<sup>204</sup> Colonel T.J. Gallwey, ‘The Battle of Colenso’ in *British Medical Journal*, i (1900), p. 161.

wounds caused by artillery shells of a total 1,140.<sup>205</sup> ‘Had the Boer fuses been as good as their guns and their gunners’ noted Conan Doyle, ‘our losses – especially in the early part of the war – have been much more severe’;<sup>206</sup> this is confirmed by Private Wilson, Connaught Rangers.<sup>207</sup> Despite the unprecedented casualty list at Colenso, Sergeant Brennan of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers refuted any claim that the Boer’s marksmanship was effective; in an interview with the *Kildare Observer*: ‘The Boers are absolutely no good. Had their shooting been all that it was said to be, there would be none of us left to tell the tale that morning.’<sup>208</sup>

Dr Frederick Treves, Consulting Surgeon with the British forces, commended the attitude of the British soldiers as they lay waiting for treatment remained ‘plucky, patient and, uncomplaining’.<sup>209</sup> As hundreds of men waited to board the train to Chieveley from their respective field hospitals, Dr Treves gave a vivid description of the wounded and ill men which he commented was a ‘depressing sight’.<sup>210</sup> One of the individuals that were among the wounded was Private Thomas McCarthy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, from King’s Avenue, Ballybough Road, Dublin. During the engagement, he was struck in the head by a fragment of a shell or bullet which possibly ricocheted. According to the *Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, ‘a great number (of bullets) strike the ground, or a stone, and become much more formidable in their effects’.<sup>211</sup> In a rare medical report of an Irish wounded soldier, the surgeon notes the extent of injury sustained by Private Thomas McCarthy. The individual was brought by ambulance train to Maritzburg following the battle; Dr Treves and Sir William Stokes<sup>212</sup> both took an interest in the soldier’s case:

Depressed fracture of skull Summit anterior. Had paralysis of right arm, one or two days after admission. Convulsive twitchings set in in(sic) face, became unconscious. I was immediately sent for, and at once Trephined. I found the inner table set from the outer, and fractured to about four times the extent of the outer table. Had to make a

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<sup>205</sup> M.S. Stone, ‘The Victorian Army: Health, hospitals and social conditions as encountered by British troops during the South African War, 1899-1902’ (PhD thesis, University of London, 1992), p. 240.

<sup>206</sup> Doyle, *The great Boer War*, p. 521.

<sup>207</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 10 Mar. 1900.

<sup>208</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 24 Mar. 1900.

<sup>209</sup> Sir Frederick Treves, ‘The war in South Africa –the battle of Tugela (Colenso) in *British Medical Journal*, i (27 January, 1900), p. 221.

<sup>210</sup> Sir Frederick Treves, *The tale of a field hospital* (London, 1900), pp 29-30.

<sup>211</sup> Sir William Thompson, ‘Surgical Lessons from South Africa’ in *The Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, cxii (1901), p. 85.

<sup>212</sup> Sir William Stokes (1839-1900) was born in Dublin, and a graduate of Trinity College Dublin. He had a successful career in medicine, being president of Pathological Society of the Irish Medical Association and made honouree president of successive International Medical Congress. He was knighted in 1886, and was appointed surgeon in ordinary to the queen in Ireland. Upon the outbreak of war, he went to Natal as consulting surgeon to the British Forces. In August 1900, he died of typhoid fever at Pietermaritzburg. Helen Andrews, ‘Sir William Stokes’, *Dictionary of Irish biography*: online [www.dib.cambridge.org](http://www.dib.cambridge.org). (26 May 2013). ‘Ireland loses one of her most brilliant and gifted sons; and Dublin, his native city, one of her most genial, patriotic, and universally respected citizens’. *Irish Times*, 25 Aug. 1900.

second trephine hole to get inner table out. There were also a couple of splinters embedded in brain matter. There was a large amount of clotted blood ... He had a severe attack of enteric fever which was very prevalent at that time He was invalided home ... The wound was caused either by a piece of shell or a ricochet bullet. The edges were jagged.<sup>213</sup>

The soldier survived his wounds but he would be later admitted into the Richmond Asylum, at Grangegorman, Dublin for psychiatric treatment. At the Royal Commission on South African Hospitals, the court heard that Private Farrell, 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers, was shot in the left arm, in the spine, and twice in the foot during the battle; the bullet that hit his spine left him paralysed in both limbs. The private spent over three months in Maritzburg Hospital, 'being very well treated' and having no complaints to make.<sup>214</sup> During the Royal Visit of Dublin in April 1900, Princess Henry of Battenberg, daughter of Queen Victoria, visited Saint Vincent's Hospital located beside Saint Stephen's Green. Reported in the *Irish Times*:

In St. Patrick's surgical ward, in charge of Surgeon M'Ardle, a young man named Alfred Carroll Browne, who belongs to one of the Irish Regiments, and who was severely wounded on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December at Colenso, lay in bed. The Princess heard with marked attention the character of the wound by which the young Irish soldier was put hors de combat. The bullet entered his leg just below the knee and took a somewhat extraordinary course, passing between the bones into the flesh just above the ankle.<sup>215</sup>

The accounts of survivors reveal the battlefield environment of modern warfare, and the extent of the injuries illustrate that it was apparent that military technology superseded British contemporary tactics. *The Times History* critically noted that 'Colenso was a striking demonstration of the power of modern weapons to punish those who refused to recognize or pay heed to the new conditions of war'.<sup>216</sup> Considering this was the first engagement for the majority of the brigade, the battle certainly would demonstrate the reality of future warfare; following the engagement soldiers of the Irish Brigade began recall their experience; Private Lally 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers remembered in a letter to his sister the horrors of that day:

It grieved me to see to see all my brother soldiers shot dead. The moans of the poor fellows shouting for their wives and children! There was never such a war.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> The Richmond Hospital Case Notes, 1900 (G.C.M., Private Thomas McCarthy). See image of the wound on page 273.

<sup>214</sup> *Royal Commission on South African Hospitals. Report of the Royal Commission appointed to consider and report on the care and treatment of the sick and wounded during the South African campaign* [CD. 453], H.C. xxix, 56.

<sup>215</sup> *Irish Times*, 19 Apr. 1900.

<sup>216</sup> Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii, p. 458.

<sup>217</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 27 Jan. 1900.

Considering Private Lally's statement above, it can be argued that some Irish soldiers' understood the impact of modern weaponry and that the experience was relatively new, in the context of warfare and British military history. An intuitive Private Wilson, 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers, considered that the battle 'would be remembered for a long time in the annals of British war history'.<sup>218</sup> However following their experience at Colenso, it remains unclear whether they were aware of the tactical and significant technological changes occurring on the battlefield. It was evident to some veteran soldiers that the death toll and difficulties of the campaign surpassed previous experiences on campaign; one soldier commented that 'I thought the "Nile Campaign" bad, but this is a far sight worse';<sup>219</sup> whilst Father Lewis Matthews, chaplain of the Royal Irish Fusiliers stated: 'My Soudan experiences were mere child's play in comparison'.<sup>220</sup> Soldiers understood the difficulties of fighting an 'invisible' enemy, adhering to smokeless technology, whilst officers and men of the Irish Brigade believed that the tactics deployed by their officers were defunct and ineffective.

Amongst the rank and file, soldiers' letters and reports of the battle withheld any criticism of their commander-in-chief; instead upon reflection, many soldiers blamed Fitzroy Hart. General Hart, like most Victorian generals, was unable to adjust to new methods of warfare and had very conventional views that were unsuited against the Boers. In analysis, historian Pemberton remarked: 'This dashing Irishman might have stepped straight out of the Crimea for all his apparent ignorance of what had been achieved in gunnery and small arms over the past fifty years'.<sup>221</sup> While Buller took most of the criticism after the battle, he was still a part of the British Army doctrine that was not accustomed to this new type of warfare, and he was surrounded by conventional staff. Nevertheless, as several historians, including Edward M. Spiers have noted, Buller maintained the respect of his troops despite the extent of difficulties during the Tugela campaign.<sup>222</sup> However, in the opinion of men of the Irish brigade, the same could not be said for Hart; a Royal Inniskilling Fusilier blamed Major-General Hart for 'another Majuba'(see page 16); the soldier wrote a letter to his mother in Belfast dated three days following the battle:

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 10 Mar. 1900.

<sup>219</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 3 Jan. 1900.

<sup>220</sup> E.M. Spiers, *The Victorian soldier in Africa* (Manchester, 2004), p. 165.

<sup>221</sup> W. B. Pemberton, *Battles of the Boer War* (London, 1964), p. 128.

<sup>222</sup> Spiers, *The Victorian soldier in Africa*, p. 164.

The General commanding the Irish Brigade will get into some hot water for the blunder he made; but maybe they will hide it and not show him up, though he deserve to be exposed, for he might have got the Irish Brigade cut up.<sup>223</sup>

A private attached to the Irish brigade evaluated the reasons for their defeat; ‘We had a bad general in command of us, Fitzrophant [sic], which was the cause of so many lives being lost. I am not talking to you of what I have heard but what I have seen’.<sup>224</sup> Private Patrick Farrelly, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers echoed the same opinion – ‘We had a lot killed and wounded last Friday, all by the wrong command of our General.’<sup>225</sup> ‘Rumour of Hart going’, simply wrote Captain A.C. Jeffcoat, Inniskilling Fusilier, ‘Hope its true.’<sup>226</sup> With the following account the sense of discontent amongst officers, rank and file is conveyed; in a letter to his brother, Private M. Dwyer, D Company Connaught Rangers detailed the advance forward in a mass of quarter columns, ‘which was very close’:

...This way we marched along until our scouts came in with the news that the Boers were entrenched in front. I don’t think the general believed them, for instead of opening us out, as in the rule laid down in every military book that ever was printed, he closed us up until we were a solid mass, thus making a target for artillery...<sup>227</sup>

In private, Buller reprimanded Hart for his actions, to his ‘surprise’; Hart attempted to defend the role he played during the battle, but in his opinion, Buller’s replies and arguments were considered ‘inconsequent and illogical and wild’. A few days later the pair met again, and Buller appeared to have calmed down and was reported to say ‘I am not going to say anything more about it.’<sup>228</sup>

Little evidence suggests that the Irish soldiers were aware of the changing face of the battlefield, yet their criticism of tactics and the difficulties of the battle expressed through their letters, state that they were not entirely ignorant of the importance of technological advancements. However had the Irish soldiers not been hampered by the terrain, there was an expectation and a reliance on the cold steel and ‘shock’ tactics, more suited against less-armed adversaries; ‘The Boers are not good shots at all’, reinforced one soldier, ‘They are good fighters while in a trench, but cowardly if cornered.’<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> *Irish News*, 19 Jan. 1900. Quoted in Owens ‘Dear mother-It’s a terrible life’: Irish soldiers’ letters from the Boer War 1899-1900’ in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 180.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>225</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>226</sup> Cassidy (ed.), *The Inniskilling diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa*, p. 41.

<sup>227</sup> *Northern Echo*, 30 Jan. 1900.

<sup>228</sup> Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot*, pp 303-306.

<sup>229</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 10 Mar. 1900.

Interestingly a soldier attached to the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, suggested that officers now began to show respect to their adversaries, by making themselves less distinguishable: ‘It is surprising how humble war leaves officers. In this case they march in the ranks, carry their rifles, accoutrements and ammunition, so that you can hardly tell them from the rest of the men.’<sup>230</sup> As the rank was often an acquired special target by an enemy, the method of blending in with the troops was reintroduced during the Great War, in an effort to reduce casualties.

On 16 December the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade buried their dead following an armistice secured by Buller. At one plot, the *Manchester Guardian* war correspondent John Black Atkins recorded the appearance of one grave of a soldier attached to the Royal Dublin Fusiliers:

“A Company, R.D.F.,” was picked out in flint stones on the sides of the mud; in the grasp of a clamp made of twisted tin was a scrap of paper on which some Irish soldier had written in pencil, with the tenderness of the Roman Catholic, “Pray for the souls of our dead comrades”, and at the head of the grave perhaps the same hand stuck in the earth a picture, torn from a book, of the Madonna and Child.<sup>231</sup>

From this short description of a grave plot, it is evident that religion and faith played some role during this war. Throughout letters and correspondence, Irish soldiers placed their trust in God for their survival and victory at the front; following the battle of Colenso, Private David Braden, Royal Irish Fusiliers, thanked ‘God for all His goodness and mercy to us all’, whilst also stating ‘we will beat them (Boers) with God’s help’.<sup>232</sup> An army surgeon of the 1<sup>st</sup> Manchester Regiment wrote home to his mother in County Cork, three days after the battle of Elandslaagte, detailing the stark reality of modern warfare; within the letter, he expressed thanks to God for sparing his life: ‘God alone extended his Mercy to me, and I prayed to Him for it’.<sup>233</sup> A soldier named ‘Bill’ from the Royal Dublin Fusiliers wrote home to his parents, stressing comfort with his religious items in his possession:

...hoping that God will watch over me. I have the sacred heart that Aunt Bridget sent me, and I am carrying my father’s prayer book in my breast pocket throughout it all, also the one that aunt sent me, so I ought to be well guarded with God’s help.<sup>234</sup>

Whether these soldiers were practising their religion or not, arguably their faith in God helped improve the morale of the troops, increasing their ability to endure the difficulties of life on campaign; in turn, there is also a sense that soldier’s prayer books and religious

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 31 Mar. 1900.

<sup>231</sup> Atkins, *The relief of Ladysmith*, p. 128.

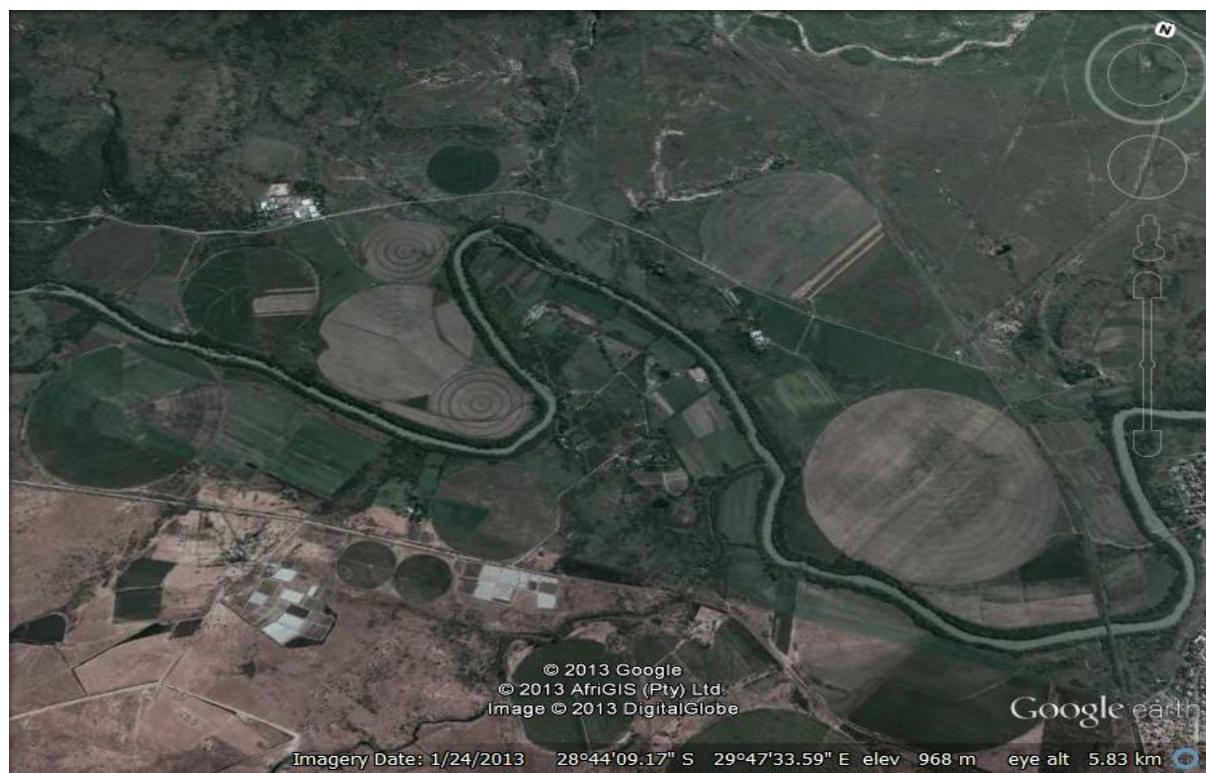
<sup>232</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>233</sup> *Skibberean Eagle*, 2 Dec. 1899.

<sup>234</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Dec. 1899.

medals provided a psychological influence in helping soldiers improve their combat effectiveness. It also appears in some circumstances that soldiers were relatively content in accepting whatever outcome they might face on the battlefield; John Connor (alias Francis McConnell) attached to the Cape Garrison Artillery, stated in a letter that he was ‘prepared to meet him above’.<sup>235</sup> In a philosophical approach, Irishman, Private Thomas Kenney, 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Brigade, stated that ‘it is only the fate of a soldier, we will all have to go sooner or later and the battlefield is an honourable death’.<sup>236</sup>

**Fig. 37: Satellite image of the Tugela River. The ‘loop’ that the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Brigade entered is clearly visible in the centre**



Source, *Google Earth*. (<https://maps.google.com/>) (24 Jan. 2013).

### **Concluding remarks**

The first two months of the conflict presented inherent difficulties for the British army and the numerous Irish battalions and cavalry units that were present. From several examples illustrated throughout this chapter, the British army were tactically unprepared for this war. British military doctrine which encouraged the offensive, depending on the morale and

<sup>235</sup> Informal Will of Bombardier John Conner (alias Francis McConnell), 3 Jan., 1901 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119).

<sup>236</sup> Informal Will of Private Thomas Keeney, nd. (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119).

professionalism of the British soldier, became evidently ineffective – such tactics were more suited to fighting during the Crimean War, over forty years previously. Of course, prior to the South African War there were numerous examples from wars across Europe and the first Anglo-Boer War, that increasingly demonstrated the revolution of firepower and the importance of communications, which would have an ultimate impact on battle tactics and operations. However, with an impressive success record in Africa, the British command entered the South African War with natural confidence, with a belief that the war would be over by Christmas. The British completely underestimated the fighting capabilities of their adversary. The Boers excelled in exploiting the British weaknesses by adhering to the changing developments of the battlefield, and the advancement of technology. From the first battle, it was evident that the British struggled to combat the Boers; the citizen army understood the importance of cover and the defensive, by constructing entrenchments that provided concealment from reconnaissance and protection from artillery and rifle fire. In addition, their defensive measures were further enhanced with utilising smokeless technology. Such conditions and tactics would bear some relevance to the front line battlefields of the Western Front during the Great War.

Within this period of the war, the Irish soldier experienced the harrowing conditions of modern warfare, with many soldiers engaging in their first ever action. Their accounts – some of which are detailed here for the first time – illustrate that the Irish soldier endured difficult conditions during these months. The detail expressed in their letters and personal accounts range from: the futility and ineffectiveness of their tactics, whilst combating an ‘invisible’ enemy; their relationship with God in battle; the emotional struggle of losing friends and comrades in unprecedented numbers; all of which was further compounded with adverse weather conditions. The accounts also reveal the fortitude of the Irish soldier, with an interesting ability – despite the reversals – to remain positive, and to maintain their focus on the larger strategic goal. It confirms that the soldiers remained a strong, cohesive group, with encouraging morale. Their bravery and pluck was dramatically illustrated throughout the Irish and British press, and it was encouraging for Irish loyalists to read about the important contribution that was being made by Irish battalions and officers. Their participation was followed intensely by the Irish press and public, lauding the fortitude of the assault at Talana, to the local despair upon hearing the news of Nicholson’s Nek and Colenso. Regardless of the outcome, the Irish public were given a real sense of their struggle and sacrifice, encouraged by press reports and the publication of letters from the front. This interest and reaction to the affairs of the Irish battalions, translated into the desire to form contingents of the Imperial

Yeomanry and financially support war charities. With regards to the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry, the prevailing sentiment that emerged from the sacrifice of Irish troops is reflected in the reasoning behind the recruitment of Maurice Fitzgibbon into the 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company:

Men who had been at school or college with us had already fallen, or might be included in tomorrow's list of casualties. Why not let us go and do our best to retrieve their situation, or, if that was not to be, let us go down with them?<sup>237</sup>

The period of relative British superiority in Africa during the Victorian era was eradicated, when news reached British shores of the three successive reverses during Black Week; the poor beginning of the campaign was further compounded by embarrassing surrenders, and the isolation and besieging of Kimberley (14 October 1899 - 15 February 1900), Mafeking (13 October 1899 – 17 May 1900), and Ladysmith (2 November 1899 – 28 February 1900). This was profoundly felt across Great Britain and Ireland, as given the imperial strength of the British Empire, the public were naturally accustomed to victories – the ‘long peace’ which began following the British victory at Waterloo (1815), was shattered by a ‘rabble of undisciplined farmers’. The first two months demonstrated the misplaced faith and overemphasis in the superiority and professionalism of the British soldier; moreover it revealed the magnitude of arrogance and ignorance that was evidently present within the command structure, with a failure to learn from past experiences with the Boers, and placing an unshakable conviction in the frontal assault – such deficiencies cost the British highly. As remarked by military historian Robert M. Citino, ‘Black Week’ demonstrated the futility of simplistic frontal assaults; the lack of reconnaissance and poor, incorrect maps; and the Boer ability to fire, enhanced greatly by the ‘awesome wonder weapon’ – the Mauser.<sup>238</sup> In summary, contemporary historian Louis Creswicke excellently described the naivety of the British authorities at the outset of the conflict:

Not a hint of doubt as to the success of our arms and the effectiveness of our war apparatus was entertained ... Those who knew ventured to suggest that in South Africa the same cast – iron principles that existed in European warfare would be valueless, and the lessons of Ingogo and Majuba in '81 might be repeated in '99 in all their dire and dismal reality. But these pessimists were scoffed at.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Maurice Fitzgibbon, *Arms under arms - an university man in khaki* (London, 1901), p. 3.

<sup>238</sup> Citino, *Quest for decisive victory: from stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899 – 1940*, p. 42.

<sup>239</sup> Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, iii, p 2. Sections of this argument are quoted in Kenny, ‘The arrival of firepower on the late nineteenth century battlefield and its implications for conventional formations and tactics, taking the early engagements of the Boer War (1899-1902) as a case study’, p. 7.

In the opinion of Norman Dixon, throughout the formal phase of the conflict, several examples of military incompetence revealed that there was an ‘inability to profit from past experience’.<sup>240</sup>

Although initially the response was distress and shock, the British effort would now receive greater levels of support from the majority of the British public and press and this level of patriotism would quickly translate to the formation of the First Contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry, the City Imperial Volunteers (C.I.V.), and the embodiment of the militia. At the turn of the century, there was renewed hope that the British Empire would prevail in their imperial mission, aided by the introduction of newly appointed Lord Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty’s Forces in South Africa, and Lord Kitchener, ‘the Hero of Khartoum’, as his Chief of Staff. The Irish public’s interest continued unabated, as Buller began a new series of assaults to break the cordon that surrounded the town of Ladysmith.

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<sup>240</sup> Dixon, *On the psychology of military incompetence*, p. 67.

# Chapter Two: Irish soldiers' experiences in South Africa (January – March 1900)

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## The relief column

Throughout Christmas and the New Year, the strategic situation remained the same in the theatre, with Buller's column remaining relatively inactive, and the siege of Ladysmith entering its third month. For the next few weeks, the Irish Brigade was subjected to monotonous fatigues and duties inside and outside the camp at Frere. Christmas Day provided a break from the routine, with the brigade playing football, drinking beer, and some extra rations were added to the menu.<sup>1</sup> A soldier from Naas attached to the Royal Dublin Fusiliers wrote home to his parents explaining 'We had a pleasant Xmas'.<sup>2</sup> Lance Corporal Hamilton Doake recalled 'we carried out our sports right under the Boers noses + never got disturbed. We had horse-races, Tugs-of-war, + every other sport'.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, in Ireland and Great Britain, thousands of civilians were actively seeking recruitment in the First Contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry, whilst the press and the population discussed the strategic situation, the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry, and the appointment of Lord Roberts, as Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's Forces in South Africa, and Lord Kitchener, as Chief of Staff. As mentioned in the introduction to the previous chapter, this section will comprise several engagements in the Natal theatre that witnessed participation by Irish battalions, including the siege of Ladysmith. The chapter will continue with the same theme, illustrating the Irish experience throughout this period of the conflict, and their participation in the context of technological advancement on the battlefield.

With the arrival of Sir Charles Warren's 5<sup>th</sup> Division, which comprised the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Brigades, Buller now had an impressive thirty thousand men on which to call. As it now became apparent that there would be another attempt to break through the Boer defences, soldiers now increasingly turned their attention, once again, to the relief of Ladysmith; in the words of a soldier of the Irish Brigade:

The enemy have taken up the strongest position in South Africa. It has a frontage of three miles. We can signal into Ladysmith with our search-light ... We are opposed by

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Cassidy (ed.), *The Inniskilling diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa* (Barnsley, 2001), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Hamilton Doake, 21 Jan., 1900 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119).

29,000 Boers between us and Ladysmith but we hope to give a good account of ourselves when the final struggle begins.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, contemplating the next British assault, Sergeant Walter Appleyard, of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was less optimistic, believing that the ‘campaign is likely to last much longer than was at first supposed’;<sup>5</sup> an understandable statement, following the experience of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade along the Tugela River. In tandem, Private James Nolan, Royal Irish Fusiliers, expected that they would not reach Ladysmith ‘for another while’, with the Boers defending ‘a very great position’; he believed that victory would come with ‘a terrible loss of life’.<sup>6</sup>

It was now decided to force a way towards Ladysmith via a different route by moving in on General Botha’s right flank instead of the earlier attempt of breaching their defences at Colenso (see page xviii for map of final advance to Ladysmith and key locations). Major Hildyard’s and Hart’s Brigades were placed under the control of the Second Division commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Francis Clery. It was proposed that the British columns would undertake a march towards Potgieters Drift and Trichardt’s Drift, a fifteen and eighteen mile march respectively. In order to protect the line of defence and their right flank, General Botha reacted to British movement by preparing a series of defensive measures to deter the advance along the hills overlooking Potgieters and Trichardt’s Drift. Over a number of days, Buller attempted to consolidate their position across the river, by making a series of coordinated attacks on Boer positions, in an attempt to outflank and threaten the Boer rear. The advance was an unmitigated failure largely due to equally poor reconnaissance and decision making; the series of attacks from 17 January to 24 January ended with the British disaster at Spion Kop where 1, 733 were recorded as killed, wounded or missing.<sup>7</sup> The week was described in a letter from General Hart:

...having been for seven days and seven nights continually under fire, no tents, and the men without overcoats or blankets...The net result is that we have once more to chronicle a complete defeat ... I fought on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and took a strong hill successfully from the Boers at a cost of 365 officers and men. I advanced next day, and took a further position from them at a cost of only 37; and then I wanted to go on – all my men did too ... but my hands were tied ... I was sent repeatedly positive orders not to advance without orders on any account, but simply to hold my ground. I did so.<sup>8</sup>

The attack on 20 January, just left of Three Tree Hill on the Tugela Heights was the most active role the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade played in the short operation; following orders the brigade

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<sup>4</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 27 Jan. 1900.

<sup>5</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 30 Jan. 1900; quoted in Edward Spiers (ed.), *Letters from Ladysmith: eyewitness accounts from the South African War* (Barnsley, 2010), pp 72-73.

<sup>6</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 10 Feb. 1900.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Frederick Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii (London, 1906), p. 596.

<sup>8</sup> B.M. Hart-Synnot (ed.), *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot* (London, 1912), pp 310-311.

remained largely passive but their sheltered position was still the target of Boer fire, and casualties were sustained. Following Spion Kop, the British army retreated south of the Tugela, much to the relief of Captain Romer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers and the Irish brigade who were greatly fatigued, hungry and soaked to the skin.<sup>9</sup> The relief army again attempted to smash the Boer line with an attack on the hill of Vaal Krantz between 5-7 February, however, the assault was repulsed once more and the army returned to where they had started two months before with a further 333 casualties.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the hardships throughout the Tugela campaign that culminated in the defeats at Spion Kop and Val Krantz, and the recent loss of his brother at Ladysmith, Lord Basil Blackwood of Dufferin and Ava remained optimistic and determined; in a letter from Frere Camp to his mother he states:

This war has been a terrible one and one longs for the end but everyone is determined to persevere to the end. There can be no doubt as to the result but it is hard to make the sacrifices that are necessary ... At present we have had only hope deferred and here we are back again opposite Colenso in the position we occupied two months ago ... Meanwhile one prays that Ladysmith can hold it's own.<sup>11</sup>

The relief column once again found itself back at Frere, bringing an end to two months of failed operations along the Tugela Heights. Following the retirement of the British forces, Irish Catholic Lieutenant John Nicholas Whyte of the Lancashire Regiment listened attentively, as Buller told his men, in an optimistic fashion, that the recent operations had 'enabled him to find the key to Ladysmith';<sup>12</sup> an Irish soldier considered General Buller was 'very confident of success'.<sup>13</sup> Buller's charisma and faith in the outcome of the Tugela operations was important for the soldiers' morale; with the extensive failed assaults since Colenso, the British army had to contend with further setbacks, harsh weather conditions, and poor rations. A soldier of the Irish Brigade complained about the hot weather throughout the day, and the freezing temperatures at night; he also stated that more men were dying from disease than a bullet.<sup>14</sup> Despite the difficult conditions, it appears that the Irish Brigade's fighting spirit did not falter; even though, '14,000' stood between the relief column and the relief of Ladysmith, Private Hugh M'Govern, Royal Irish Fusiliers, was adamant they would

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<sup>9</sup> C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (London, 1908), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, i, p. 598.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Lord Basil, Frere Camp, Natal, 12 February (P.R.O.N.I., the Dufferin Papers, D1231/G/5/92, PRONI).

<sup>12</sup> Letters from Major John Nicholas Whyte to his mother and sister, 1 February, 1900 (P.R.O.N.I., Whyte Papers, D. 2918/7/B.19).

<sup>13</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 10 Mar. 1900.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Mar. 1900.

break through their defences.<sup>15</sup> It is a testament to the morale and character of the troops that the ultimate goal of relief for Ladysmith remained in their minds, many of them understanding that more lives would be lost. The final breakthrough, as historian Howard Bailes explains, was a series of cautious assaults on Boer positions; each position would have to be secured before the next attack was mounted.<sup>16</sup> Attacks would be made at Cingolo, Monte Cristo, Hlangwane, Inniskilling Hill and Pieter's Hill; the last two of these battles mentioned will be discussed due to the presence of Irish regiments and the significance of these engagements.

### **The battle of Inniskilling Hill (23-24 February 1900)**

The attack on Inniskilling Hill (or Hart's Hill) would be entrusted to Hart's Irish Brigade with reinforcements from the Imperial Light Infantry who had replaced the Border Regiment which was now stationed at Chieveley. Similar to the attack on Colenso, the British artillery prepared the ground by bombarding the hills, as the Boers remained concealed in prepared elevated positions. On 23 February 1900 at 4.p.m. Hart's Brigade began their steep ascent of the hill as the sun began to set. Lieutenant D.G. Auchinleck, 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers, wrote in his diary, that the battle, was the 'most eventful and fateful day of the war so far for the Inniskillings'.<sup>17</sup> As the Inniskilling cleared the crest of the hill, the Boers opened a terrific fire from the front and from the flanks in the adjacent hills that cut into the advancing regiment. The advance grounded to a halt as the Inniskilling Fusiliers faced the Boer trenches, some 300 yards away on the far side of the plateau. Once the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the Connaught Rangers reached the advanced line of the Inniskilling men, the order was given to charge the Boer defence. As the light began to fade, the men rose to their feet, and screaming at the enemy with bayonets fixed, charged across the plateau. Lieutenant Auchinleck remembered the heavy fire 'sweeping the whole ridge' as they advanced:

Then the Regt. Charged and men, and officers fell in dozens; after going some way the Regt. rallied and charged again and this time got to within 50 yards of the enemy's trenches. Here the fire was awful coming from four different directions and it is marvellous how the men faced it.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the failing light, the brigade was sustaining effective fire, causing havoc in the ranks; Captain Jourdain remembered the 'pandemonium' as officers and men fell under the Boer

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<sup>15</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 10 Feb. 1900.

<sup>16</sup> Howard Bailes, 'Military aspects of the war' in S.B. Spies and Peter Warwick (ed.), *The South African War: the Anglo-Boer 1899-1902* (Essex, 1980), p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> Cassidy (ed.), *The Inniskilling diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa*, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

firepower alongside the dead and wounded of the previous charge.<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel T.M.G. Thackeray and Major Sanders fell with their battalion. Captain Romer recalled the ‘murderous fire’ of the Boers:

In the gathering darkness the Boer trenches quivered with the rifle-flashes, and the bullets struck out sparks as they hit the rocks. At such a short range the enemy’s marksmen could hardly miss, and the line of charging infantry was almost mowed down. The assault was checked, and the attackers flung themselves to the ground and sought what little cover there was.<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, the attack ran out of momentum, and the majority of the survivors of the failed charge managed to return to the crest of the hill which offered some protection. Other soldiers of the brigade were committed too deep across the plateau and many others who were injured, were unable to fall back; the survivors on ‘no man’s land’ were subjected to a long night of misery. A surviving member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers wrote ‘it was terrible to hear the moans of the dying at night on the hill’.<sup>21</sup> Captain Jourdain of the Connaught Rangers confirmed the suffering experienced by the Irish Brigade throughout the night:

The wounded men in front of the plateau were left to their fate, and many a man got wounded even as much as 6 times during the night. There was a major and a subaltern and two men of the 27<sup>th</sup> in front of me who were badly wounded but we were powerless to give them water, or to take them away, so badly were they wounded. The shrieks of the wounded during the night were awful...<sup>22</sup>

On 24 February, as the men prepared sangars and waited for further events, the order was given to retire; the men withdrew from their positions badly beaten, exhausted and desperate for some water. Private R.H. Gavgan, attached to the Rifle Brigade recorded that the Irish Brigade retired with ‘fearful losses’.<sup>23</sup> General Buller managed to obtain an armistice for a few hours in order to allow time for the stretcher bearers to remove the wounded. The casualties suffered attacking the hill were about 450, with the Inniskilling Fusiliers losing seventy-two percent of their officers and twenty-seven per cent of their men. The morning after the battle, Private Bryant present at his regiment’s Muster Roll Call, noted that sixty nine men were dead and 175 wounded. Of the seventy-two per cent casualties rating for the officers of the regiment, three were killed including their commander Lieutenant-Colonel

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<sup>19</sup> H.F.N Jourdain, *Natal memories 1899-1900* (London, 1948), p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> *Fermanagh Times*, 26 Apr. 1900; quoted in Spiers (ed.), *Letters from Ladysmith: eyewitness accounts from the South African War*, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1979), p. 358.

<sup>23</sup> Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum book of the Boer War* (London, 1999), p. 122.

Thomas Thackeray, Major Francis Sanders and Lieutenant Walter Stuart from Omagh, County Tyrone. The interment was a sorrowful occasion, as a soldier of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers remembered:

We started making a big long grave just beside the railway and the stretcher bearers went forward to bring in the dead. Such sights, they were in all sorts of positions, poor fellows. The Enniskillens lost the most. I counted 45 poor fellows all laid in a row; their Colonel, the second in Command, and a Lieutenant, 3 officers and 45 men. There were our own second in Command Lieutenant Colonel C.G.H. Sitwell (Royal Dublin Fusiliers), Captain Maitland of the Gordons attached to us, and ten men of ours. I did not count the Connaught Rangers as I was getting sick of looking at them and, to make it more dismal still, it was raining heavy.<sup>24</sup>

All of the Inniskilling regiment's ranks were commemorated by a twenty-seven foot marble obelisk which was erected by their comrades. The inscription was as follows:

Near this spot were killed or mortally wounded on Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>, 1900, Lieut. - Col. T.M.G. Thackeray, commanding, Major F.A. Sanders, 2<sup>nd</sup>-in-command, Lieut. W.O. Stuart, and 65 N.C.O. and men of the 27<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings whilst advancing to the relief of Ladysmith'.<sup>25</sup>

The battle was typical of the other engagements the British army were involved in the previous three months. Hart's tactics were predictable and consequently incurred heavy losses. It was evident that bravery, training, motivation, discipline, professionalism and stubbornness could only take a soldier so far into a battle. The battle was characteristic of British failures in this war; poor reconnaissance; inadequate understanding of the South African topography; and an overreliance on outdated tactics more suited to the Crimean War. The British failed on many occasions in these aspects. A concentrated force in full frontal attacks against a highly motivated and entrenched enemy with magazine rifles was suicidal and as a result, many lives were lost. The battle was summed up appropriately by American War Correspondent Richard Harding Davis:

The attack was one of those frontal attacks, which in this war, against the new weapons, have added so much to the lists of killed and wounded and to the prestige of the men, while it has, in an inverse ratio, hurt the prestige of the men by whom the attack was ordered.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Leinster Leader*, 7 Apr. 1900. Quoted in Gary Owens 'Dear mother-It's a terrible life': Irish soldiers' letters from the Boer War 1899-1900' in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 184.

<sup>25</sup> M.G. Dooner, *The 'Last Post': a roll of all officers (naval, military or colonial) who gave their lives for their queen, king and country, in the South African War* (London, 1903), p. 378.

<sup>26</sup> R.H. Davis, *Notes of a war correspondent* (New York, 1910), p. 151.

### **The battle of Pieter's Hill (27 February 1900)**

Notwithstanding the heavy losses to the British forces, Buller remained confident. On 26 February, General White received a signal from the relief force, stating 'I hope to be with you to-morrow night'.<sup>27</sup> The following day, Lieutenant Auchinleck recorded in his diary, 'MAJUBA DAY (emphasis in original).The greatest day of the war'.<sup>28</sup> On the nineteenth anniversary of the Boer victory over British forces at Majuba Hill, the British finally enacted revenge; following a twelve day siege of a Boer laager at Paaderberg, General Cronje surrendered his force of over four thousand men. It was also the day that the Natal Relief Force broke through the lines of Boer defence and paved the way open to lift the siege of Ladysmith. In conjunction with attacks on Hart's Hill and Railway Hill, General Barton's 6<sup>th</sup> Fusilier Brigade launched an attack on Pieter's Hill; Barton's assault would be supported by creeping barrage – an innovative British artillery tactic.<sup>29</sup> The Brigade consisted only of the Scots and Irish Fusiliers, with support from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. The initial assault was a success, with the greater part of the hill captured – the Boers, however, still remained at the north of the hill, in a dangerous position, directing fire below. General Barton, anxious to finish off the Boer threat, ordered three companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Irish Fusiliers to attack the final Boer position under cover fire from the Dublin Fusiliers. The attack was described by Private John Larkin, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers:

As we were going up the hill the roar of the bullets was terrible; when we got to the top we got into the trench where there were hundreds of Boers. There were some of them dead. We bayoneted some of them and some got away.<sup>30</sup>

J. Connolly, 'H' Company, of the aforementioned battalion wrote to his friend in Cavan, describing his experiences as he faced the Boer:

We were walking over them. Any Boer who wasn't killed was hoked through any time we got the chance, but we were not allowed to do it. It was all the day we got the chance at them, so we pulled up for lost time. We got them shifted out of the rocks at last. I think we can play with them now - we have them on level ground.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Carver, *The National Army Museum book of the Boer War*, p. 123.

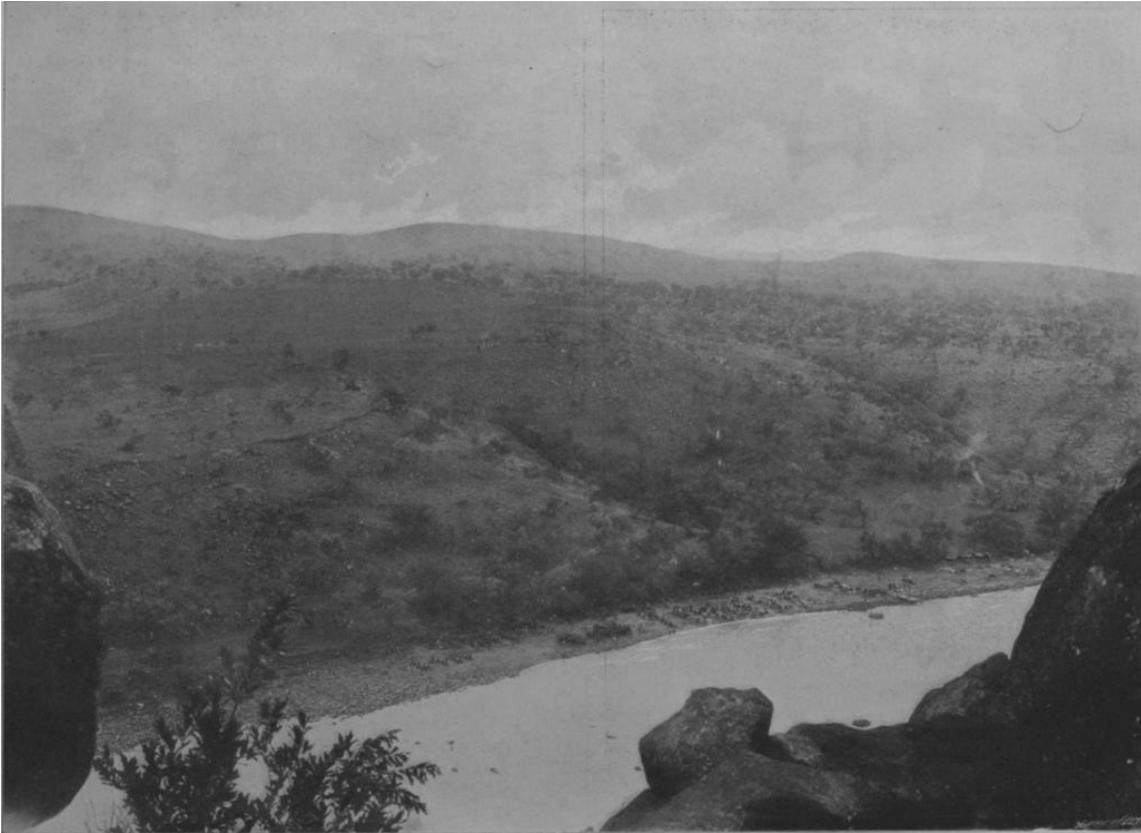
<sup>28</sup> Cassidy (ed.), *The Inniskilling diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa*, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Knight, *Colenso 1899: The Boer War in Natal* (Oxford, 1995), p. 82.

<sup>30</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 21 Apr. 1900.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

**Fig. 38: ‘The final advance to Ladysmith’ – Hart’s infantry bivouacking on the banks of the Tugela before the battle of Pieter’s Hill.**



*Source, Illustrated London News, 7 Apr. 1900.*

The last great battle of the Tugela Operations had ended in victory for the British, thus breaking Boer resistance in the theatre. The final engagements demonstrated, in some respects, that the British were finally responding and altering their tactics to the environment; there was now a greater understanding and cooperation between artillery and the infantry offensive, with the artillery delivering a barrage of shells on a pre-determined target, before an infantry advance – prior to the battle of Pieter’s Hill, around seventy-six guns supported the infantry’s assault.<sup>32</sup> The coordinated attack between infantry and artillery was a tactic that was used continuously throughout the Great War by the British army. However, despite the importance of the final breakthrough, it demonstrated that in order to achieve tactical and strategic aims in the context of a modern battlefield, more casualties would undoubtedly occur. That day, five hundred casualties were sustained; the 6<sup>th</sup> Fusilier Brigade suffered 230 casualties, with the Irish Fusiliers suffering around one hundred.<sup>33</sup> Of the one hundred

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<sup>32</sup> Spencer Jones, ‘The influence of the Boer War (1899-1902) on the tactical development of the regular British Army 1902-1914’ (Phd., thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2009), p. 128.

<sup>33</sup> L.S Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, iii (London, 1905), p. 542.

casualties sustained by the Irish regiment, one soldier distinguished himself above others in the charge; in a report to the Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne, General Buller wished to bring attention to the case of distinguished conduct of a soldier in the Irish Fusiliers:

6039 Lance Corporal (Thomas) O'Neill, 27<sup>th</sup> February (killed). – Conspicuous gallantry in attack on Pieter's Hill. His body was found by the side of a dead Boer, transfixed by his bayonet, he himself having been shot dead.<sup>34</sup>

The final push towards breaking the Boer lines of defence cost the Irish heavily; the table below illustrated the percentage of casualties:<sup>35</sup>

**Table D) Return of Irish battalion casualties sustained at the battle of Pieter's Hill**

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Officers</b>	<b>Non-commissioned officers and men</b>
1st Inniskilling Fusiliers	77.20%	24.14%
1st Connaught Rangers	26.92%	15.85%
2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	38.84%	14.27%
2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers	32.14%	9.69%

**Fig. 39: 'After the fight': burying the dead following the battle of Inniskilling Hill**



**Source, C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (London, 1908), p. 65.**

<sup>34</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvii, 53. On 8 December 1899, Lance Corporal O'Neill wrote a letter to his sister from Estcourt Camp; 'I write to you is it to let you know I have left my money to you, and I want you to share with Mary Francis if anything should happen to me...you will have no bother in getting my money if I should be shot but I hope I wont...you will also get...maybe three war medals which I will be entitled to for the hardship we have come through on the Sunny Plains of SA'. Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Thomas O' Neill, 8 Dec., 1899 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119).

<sup>35</sup> Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii, p. 600.

The final operations amongst the Tugela Heights cost Buller's forces heavy losses; between the 14 February and 27 February, the British suffered 2,259 casualties, with 307 killed.<sup>36</sup> Such figures reveal the extent of sacrifice experienced by the Irish battalions during the final stages of the Tugela campaign, sustaining an unprecedented casualty toll – moreover, the intense combat witnessed during these operations illustrated the environment of a modern battlefield. In addition, the war had a drastic impact on the lives of families across the British Empire, and the high death rates were acutely felt in Ireland. When news reached the House of Commons of the final breakthrough of the Boer defences and the relief of Ladysmith, Irish Nationalist T.M. Healy, M.P. for Louth North, sympathised with the bereaved families in Ireland, having lost their loved – ones, and more than likely, their core breadwinner; he lamented, that the 'wearing of black' is noticeable on the streets of Dublin; in Drumcondra and Cook Street, he stated that there were forty eight war widows from the present war.<sup>37</sup> Another instance of the impact of the war on families was expressed in a letter from an officer, addressed to a grieving mother; Captain Edward W. Shewell, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers expressed his 'deepest regret' at the loss of her son during the battle of Pieter's Hill. He noted his gallantry and his death were lamented by the regiment, his officers and the Colonel wished to express 'how sorry he is to have lost a man who reflected so much credit on his regiment'. Considering the sorrow of the grieving mother, he wrote that his death was instantaneous and he received a full service burial of the Church.<sup>38</sup>

### **Siege of Ladysmith (2 November 1899 – 28 February 1900)**

**Fig. 40: The town of Ladysmith**



Source, Louis Cheswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, ii (London, 1900), p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> J.P. Wisser, *The Second Boer War, 1899-1900* (Kansas City, 1901), p. 116.

<sup>37</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 5 Mar., 1900, lxxx, col. 83.

<sup>38</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 14 Apr. 1900.

‘Monday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1899, is not a date which can be looked back with satisfaction by any Briton’ wrote Arthur Conan Doyle, following the failed British offensive that resulted in the debacle at Nicholson’s Nek – it consequently began the siege of Ladysmith. It became known as ‘Mournful Monday’ by the British press, and ‘Little Majuba’ by the Boer victors. On 1 November 1899, the ‘unhappy’ news caused much excitement in Dublin, with the *Irish Times* holding General White ‘alone responsible’. However, the newspaper defended the valour of the Irish Fusiliers, stating that even Irish soldiers ‘cannot do the impossible’.<sup>39</sup> One of the continued debates surrounding the siege of Ladysmith was whether it would have made strategic sense to withdraw from Ladysmith at this point and hold a defensive line along the Tugela.<sup>40</sup> Yet for General White, a withdrawal was deemed a military and political impossibility, noting the strategic importance of the town and the grave political situations that would occur. He believed that a withdrawal south of the Tugela would mean the abandonment of the English population in Ladysmith, the loss of precious stores and munitions that would greatly improve the war effort for the Boers, and overall damage to the morale of his men. Considering the mobility of the Boers, their greater numbers and the long line of defence needed to deter a Boer attack, a resistance was deemed untenable beyond Ladysmith. As regards this question, several of his subordinates defended his actions at the Royal Commission, deeming a withdrawal impractical and dangerous. Lieutenant-General Ian Hamilton believed that a defence was largely unsound along the Tugela, while Ladysmith offered some stability with a centre, houses and provisions.<sup>41</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Hunter himself believed it was imperative to hold Ladysmith at all costs due to the vast amount of stores and war materials, and the detrimental effect the capitulation would have had on the political situation in South Africa.<sup>42</sup> He would also gain partial support from Lord Roberts; the commander-in-chief telegraphed the Secretary of State for War, who deemed White’s actions were correct under the circumstances. However, regardless of the political situation, Roberts did suggest that White should have secured a position across the Tugela, which he believed would have presented ‘fewer difficulties’. Despite the delay in operations in the Cape Colony and the high casualties suffered throughout the relief, Roberts

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<sup>39</sup> *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1899.

<sup>40</sup> F.R. Van Hartesveldt, *The Boer War: historiography and annotated bibliography* (Wesport, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 103.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 134 and 137.

believed that White's position overall protected the Natal Colony from further Boer harassment and invasion.<sup>43</sup>

White, himself, was thus satisfied by the outcome of the siege, explaining to the Royal Commission that the stubborn defence of the town saved the colony:

The holding of Ladysmith, therefore saved Natal. My task was thus fulfilled. If I could keep the Boers round Ladysmith, and thus preserve the integrity of Natal as a province ... I had every confidence that after that interval the greater resources of the British Empire would be put forth to help our forces. I cannot justly be held responsible for the losses incurred in the relief.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the gravity of losses sustained by the relief force and the delay in offensive operations in the Cape Colony, White's actions in defending Ladysmith tied down significant proportions of Boer forces that could have been used effectively elsewhere. It is understandable in hindsight to comprehend White's choice of remaining within the sanctuary of the town following the debacle of Nicholson's Nek. Perhaps the answer to White's relative inactivity is best illustrated by the following segment from a letter to his wife.

I think after this venture the men will lose confidence in me, and that I ought to be superseded. It is hard luck, but I have no right to complain. I have had had a very difficult time of it. I don't think I can go on soldiering.<sup>45</sup>

On 30 October, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers and a Natal Field Battery were despatched by train to protect the railway bridge across the river at Colenso under the command of Major-General C.D. Cooper: only the battalion transport, 'G' Company under the command of Lieutenant Renny remained behind. White sent out these troops to try give 'confidence' to the governor and people of Pietermaritzburg and to satisfy the requests from Lord Wolsely to 'take care of Colenso Bridge'.<sup>46</sup> He telegraphed Buller of this decision, as the best way of protecting the colony.<sup>47</sup> However, their prepared camp south-west of Colenso was considered inadequate by Cooper, believing his section was indefensible against superior Boer numbers and artillery. Following discussion with his senior officers, Cooper decided that with Ladysmith cordoned, and with only small forces protecting Colenso and Estcourt, it was best practice to merge their forces with the British at the latter. Therefore Major-General Cooper despatched his battalion to Estcourt and began organising its defence with the Imperial Light

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<sup>43</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvi, 12-13.

<sup>44</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 148.

<sup>45</sup> Mortimer Durand, *The life of Field-Marshal Sir George White, V.C.*, ii (London, 1915), p. 97.

<sup>46</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 153.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

Horse, Natal Mounted Rifles and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Border Regiment. Prior to the arrival of the Army Corps to Natal, the period between 3 November and 26 November was deemed a time of ‘great anxiety and hard work’ at Estcourt.<sup>48</sup> The difficulties in Natal were further compounded by the infamous ill-fated armoured train ‘disaster’ whilst on reconnaissance towards Chieveley. On 15 November, under the command of Captain Haldane, 2<sup>nd</sup> Gordon Highlanders, attached to the Dublins, and with ‘A’ Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers, the Durban Light Infantry, with a young war correspondent, Winston Spencer Churchill, left Estcourt on an armoured train.<sup>49</sup> The Boers successfully ambushed the train and following incessant rifle and artillery fire, the British were finally subdued, with the capture of Haldane and Churchill and seventy soldiers; casualties were reportedly five dead and forty five injured.<sup>50</sup> ‘A’ Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers suffered three deaths, three or four wounded and forty-two captured as POWs; Private Kavanagh was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his bravery in the action.<sup>51</sup> It was an isolated incident but it captured the imagination of the British public, with the incarceration and celebrated escape of Churchill.<sup>52</sup>

Prior to the cut in communications, Buller had requested that French and his staff be sent out to the Cape. As the Boers closed in around the town, General French, alongside Major Haig and several servants and horses, managed to leave Ladysmith aboard the last train; under a hail of bullets, they managed to escape.<sup>53</sup> The railway to the south and the telegram was cut and the Boers began to occupy vantage points in which to place their artillery and defences. In the words of White, ‘Ladysmith was thus isolated from the world outside it, and from this date (2 November 1899) the siege may be held to have commenced’.<sup>54</sup>

The total number of forces available for the defence of the town numbered thirteen thousand, which included regular infantry, mounted troops, artillery and the local town guard. The 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers, two companies of the Royal Irish Fusiliers and ‘G’ Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers which consisted of two officers, three NCOs and fifty one men

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<sup>48</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> See W.S. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (London, 1900), pp 76-97.

<sup>50</sup> Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii, p. 308.

<sup>51</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Haldane also managed to escape from Boer captivity and is described in his account, Aylmer Haldane, *How we escaped from Pretoria* (London, 1901).

<sup>53</sup> Desmond Bowen and Jean Bowen, *Heroic option: the Irish in the British army* (Barnsley, 2005), p. 166.

<sup>54</sup> *Royal Commission on South African Hospitals. Report of the Royal Commission appointed to consider and report upon the care and treatment of the sick and wounded during the South African campaign*, [CD 453], H.C. xxix, 16.

partook in the protracted siege; the town was also inhabited by several thousand civilians. The perimeter of the town was about fifteen miles, split into four sections, defended by a series of field works and entrenchments rapidly constructed with a portion of artillery allocated to each sector. For the next four months, Boer forces under General Joubert continually bombarded the town with two 6 inch Creusot Long Toms, with a ninety six pound shell, four 4.7 howitzers and sixteen smaller artillery pieces.<sup>55</sup>

Over the next weeks, the British consolidated their position, with the Boers maintaining artillery and long range fire. The shell fire would become an ‘esteemed friend’ in the words of Private Corporal O’ Rourke, Royal Irish Fusiliers.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, on 12 November, an Irish deserter from the Boers managed to make his way into the town; from him, General White learned the numbers of the surrounding forces.<sup>57</sup> He claimed he was ‘fed up with the business’.<sup>58</sup> On 19 November, the Boers released six privates of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, having previously being wounded and captured during the armoured train ambush.<sup>59</sup> The following day, a ‘cheering message’ was sent from Ladysmith – ‘all is well and cheerful ... and we look forward confidently to the ultimate result’.<sup>60</sup> Several attempts were made on Boer positions throughout the days leading to Colenso, with attacks on Gun Hill, Limit Hill and Surprise Hill. Attention though was now directed to the relief of their position by General Buller’s column and there was an air of expectation; Private Francis Brunt, Royal Irish Fusiliers, declared ‘we are all looking out for Sir Redvers Buller and the soldiers from home’.<sup>61</sup>

On 10 December, Buller received a message from White, stating that his forces would march from Ladysmith and support the attack along the Tugela; White expressed in the Royal Commission that he was determined to ride out and help.<sup>62</sup> Three days later White received a message from searchlights shone at the clouds, that Buller expected an attack at Colenso on 17 December. On 14 December, White issued orders for the flying column and the defence of Ladysmith in their absence; despite the grave reservations made upon the

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<sup>55</sup> W.T. Willcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers) from the foundations as Wynne’s Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day* (London, 1908), p. 229.

<sup>56</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 10 Mar. 1900. Interestingly the *Irish Times* calculated statistically that for every 335 shells fired at the town one man would be killed; at a cost of between £6,000 and £7,000, with each shell costing £17 10s. *Irish Times*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>57</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvii, 18.

<sup>58</sup> H.W. Nevinson, *Ladysmith: the diary of a siege* (London, 1900), pp 91-92.

<sup>59</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvii, 18.

<sup>60</sup> *Irish Times*, 30 Nov. 1899.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 Dec. 1899.

<sup>62</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 151.

character and decisions made by White, it is apparent that he was prepared to offer his support to the relief. On 15 December heavy firing was heard from the direction at Colenso, south of Ladysmith; journalist Henry Nevinson awaited in anticipation ‘of our deliverance from this grotesque situation’.<sup>63</sup> ‘The hopes of the garrison were at their highest’ wrote Captain Walter Temple Wilcox, 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancers, with Buller’s guns ‘thundering at the Tugela Heights’.<sup>64</sup> Yet, with no communication received from Buller, White’s flying column remained at Ladysmith. The following day, White received the infamous ‘No. 88 Cipher, 16<sup>th</sup> December’ which dispelled all hope of rescue:

I tried Colenso yesterday, but failed. The enemy is too strong for my force, except with siege operations, which will take one full month to prepare. Can you last so long? If not, how many days can you give to take up defensive positions, after which I suggest your firing away with as much ammunition as you can, and making the best terms you can.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the gravity of the situation and the initial thoughts that the message may have been faked by Boers, White appeared calm and collective in his response; the failure was naturally met with disappointment at Ladysmith, but White was adamant that both soldiers and civilians remained cheerful in the expectation of relief:

I can make food last for much longer than a month, and I will not think of making terms till I am forced to. You may have hit enemy harder than you think ... Things may look brighter. The loss of 12,000 men would be a heavy blow to England. We must not yet think of it.<sup>66</sup>

The confidence and determination illustrated by White here, was a marked contrast to the individual who appeared desolate and emotional following the debacle of Nicholson’s Nek. The Antrim man was adamant that the British garrison would remain at its post until their position was unsustainable with White reflecting the spirit and defiant nature of Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Winsloe during the ninety five day siege of Potchefstroom during the First Anglo Boer War.

The Boers continued to engage the forces at Ladysmith, with continued bombardment resulting in several wounded and fatalities reported: on 22 December one shell injured five officers and a sergeant - major of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers.<sup>67</sup> At the close of the year, White’s ‘chief

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<sup>63</sup> Nevinson, *Ladysmith: the diary of a siege*, p. 172.

<sup>64</sup> Willcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers) from the foundations as Wynne’s Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day*, p. 241.

<sup>65</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 161.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvii, 22.

anxiety' was with the increased numbers of patients suffering from dysentery and enteric fever, with 452 of the former and 376 of the latter on 31 December 1899.<sup>68</sup> On the first day of January, the Boers rang in the New Year by unleashing a salvo that destroyed four houses in the town; in one of the houses a 'valued servant' of the Royal Irish Rifles got hit by a fragment of shell through his back and stomach as he prepared breakfast for an officer in the kitchen.<sup>69</sup>

The siege was described as war without 'glamour' and it was evident to war correspondent Donald Macdonald that many soldiers 'wanted to go out and wipe this half-civilian horde from the face of the earth'.<sup>70</sup> An officer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers wrote in his diary that the men were 'jolly and anxious for a smack at the Boers'.<sup>71</sup> An opportunity for the soldiers to break from the monotony and the feeling of uselessness and to enact revenge was imminent in the Boer attack on Wagon Hill, on 6 January 1900. As the siege was entering its third month, it was apparent to the Boers that action was needed to end the cordon, which would essentially free up thousands of men to other decisive theatres. In order to compel the British to surrender, General Joubert held a *Krijgsraad* (a war council) on 5 January, which resulted in an ambitious attack along the Platrand Ridge, running south-west of Ladysmith. The ridges were known to the British as Caesar's Camp and Wagon Hill, which commanded impressive strategic positions for the defence of the town. The five mile plateau had been defended tactically, with sangars, pits and emplacements for the artillery, in areas where an assault was likely to occur; the section was under the control of Colonel Ian Hamilton. With darkness on their side, the Boers crept silently up the hill, preparing a concentrated attack on British positions, somewhat reminiscent of the attack on Majuba in 1881. The British defences were taken entirely by surprise, and what followed was some seventeen hours of intense fighting; the chaotic nature of the fight is aptly described by an unnamed soldier from Cavan:

You should of seen some of our killed at Waggon (sic) Hill, January 6<sup>th</sup>, that would make an angel swear vengeance on the Boers. I never thought that day, I should live to write to, or hear from you again. We were in the thick of the fight that afternoon, and what between shells, bullets, and the awful thunderstorm, it was a place to be remembered.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Nevinson, *Ladysmith: the diary of a siege*, p. 206.

<sup>70</sup> Donald Macdonald, *How we kept the flag flying: the story and siege of Ladysmith* (London, 1900), p. 149.

<sup>71</sup> Wilcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers from the foundation as Wynne's Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day*, p. 244.

<sup>72</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 12 May 1900.

However British defiance and the mobility of the cavalry in protecting areas of weakness from collapse edged the defenders to victory. The cavalry, in the words of General White, ‘saved Ladysmith’ at Wagon Hill, and it was proof of the necessity of having a mobile force to reinforce a threatened point;<sup>73</sup> although, Buller previously believed that the cavalry regiments stationed at Ladysmith should not have been permitted to remain, as their function as cavalry became defunct.<sup>74</sup> Incidentally, four casualties were reported for the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancers, with 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant William Henry Tucker Hill killed, and Private Andrews dying of wounds sustained.<sup>75</sup> The British suffered 424 casualties, with fourteen officers and 135 NCOs and men killed.<sup>76</sup> The burials were the ‘saddest part of our work’ wrote a soldier from Cavan; thankfully, ‘they tried no more attacks on us after that, preferring to try and starve us out. Thank goodness they failed both ways.’<sup>77</sup> The victory was profoundly felt in Ireland, with the reported death of Lieutenant Archibald James Leofric Temple Blackwood, son of Lord Dufferin. It appears he received a commission with the volunteer unit of the Imperial Light Horse, and thus was present at the siege of Ladysmith. He was mortally wounded at Wagon Hill, whilst acting as galloper to General Sir Ian Hamilton. He was deemed the ‘cheeriest’ of soldiers, considered a sporting and romantic individual in the circles of London society;<sup>78</sup> echoing that sentiment an Irish sergeant felt ‘You’d never take him for a lord, he seems quite a nice gentleman.’<sup>79</sup> The news of his death was expressed with sadness in the national press; the *Irish Times* reported that Ireland expressed ‘greatest regret’ and ‘deepest sympathy’ with the family, at their recent loss.<sup>80</sup> On a side note, a Victoria Cross was won by an Irishman during the engagement; Lieutenant James Edward Ignatius Masterson, 1<sup>st</sup> Devonshire Regiment, formerly Royal Irish Fusiliers, was awarded for conspicuous bravery during the engagement.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 152.

<sup>74</sup> Ron Lock, *Hill of squandered valour: the battle for Spion Kop, 1900* (Newbury, 2011), p. 81.

<sup>75</sup> Willcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers) from the foundations as Wynne’s Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day*, p. 253.

<sup>76</sup> Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii, p. 570.

<sup>77</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 12 May 1900.

<sup>78</sup> Louis Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, iii (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 127.

<sup>79</sup> Nevinson, *Ladysmith: the diary of a siege*, pp 215-216.

<sup>80</sup> *Irish Times*, 13 Jan. 1900. On 25 October 1900, a memorial window was unveiled for the officer in Bangor parish church. It is a stained glass window, with an armed Christian knight, representation the late earl. It was dedicated to a man ‘who nobly died in the service of his country’. *Ibid.*, 26 Oct. 1900. A memorial now stands at the spot where the Earl of Ava was mortally wounded, erected by the men who were with him during the siege.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Doherty and David Truesdale, *Irish winners of the Victoria Cross* (Dublin, 2000), pp 95-96. Journalist Nevinson wrote ‘he comes of an Irish fighting stock, and his great-grandfather captured the French Eagle at Barossa in the Peninsular War’. Nevinson, *Ladysmith: the diary of a siege*, p. 218. For a full description of Lieutenant Masterson’s actions that led to receiving the Victoria Cross, see page 245.

The protracted cordon and attritional warfare, which clearly placed emphasis on the defensive, was a different experience for the British soldier, who inherently relied on the offensive. ‘To soldiers who had endured campaigning such as this’, wrote historian Howard Bailes, ‘the early trench warfare in Flanders was not an entirely novel experience.’<sup>82</sup> In retrospect, it can be argued that the siege of Ladysmith had some relevance for trench warfare fourteen years later in Western Europe. As stated previously, the perimeter of Ladysmith was divided into four sections, holding the heights that surrounded the town; such positions were fortified, but a continuous line of fortification never materialised. The most effective position of defence was prepared by Colonel W.B. Knox, at section A; this was unsurprising given the fact that Knox was present during the siege of Plevna, during the Russo-Turkish War (1877). From his own experiences, Knox clearly understood the effectiveness of preparing an effective and strong defence, which could potentially deter an enemy from breaking their resistance over a long period. Through his ‘vigorous direction’ the section was heavily defended by a continuous stone fortification.<sup>83</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Hunter, veteran of the siege, commended ‘the very fine way’ in which his defence was entrenched in a section dominated by imposing hills and Boer long-range guns; Colonel Knox’s defence, considered ‘impregnable’, consisted of ‘enormous stone traverses capable of resisting any shell fire’.<sup>84</sup> The picture below is an image of the trench fortification commanded by Colonel Knox; the photograph illustrates a scene that could easily be acceptable for the trench environment of the Great War:

**Fig. 41: ‘In the trenches, Ladysmith’**



**Source Colonel M. Jacson, *The record of a regiment of the line: A regimental history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Devonshire Regiment during the Boer War 1899 – 1902* (London, 1908), p. 36.**

<sup>82</sup> Howard Bailes, ‘Military aspects of the war’ in S.B. Spies and Peter Warwick (eds), *The South African War: the Anglo-Boer 1899-1902* (Essex, 1980), p. 88.

<sup>83</sup> Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, iii, p. 151.

<sup>84</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 136.

Interestingly Archibald Hunter told the Royal Commission ‘I think we learnt practically nothing from the siege of Ladysmith that could not have been learnt out of a text-book. We learnt the very same lessons that were taught by the siege of Plevna.’<sup>85</sup> Although the fortifications never reached the same level of sophistication witnessed during Plevna, or the siege of Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), it nevertheless, demonstrated a further example of the usefulness in such defensive measures, providing concealment, and protection from artillery and rifle fire; therefore, during the siege of Ladysmith, the British forces held an impressive defensive advantage over their opponents.

‘During the period from 6<sup>th</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> March’, wrote General White, ‘our struggle became one against disease and starvation even more than the enemy. Our worst foes in this respect were enteric fever and dysentery...’<sup>86</sup> The siege became increasingly difficult for the British garrison to sustain, continuously hampered by disease and poor rations - it was an entirely new environment and aspect of warfare. It increasingly became a coordinated effort to aid the sick and wounded with members of the RAMC, the Army Nursing Sisters, the hospital staff and ladies from the town continually offering medical support; this became increasingly difficult as the staff were heavily outnumbered by the patients in Intombi Hospital and food was becoming scarce. In order to hold out for the relief, White took the decision to begin the slaughter of horses, much to the despair of the cavalrymen: ‘The cavalry are being turned into Infantry’ wrote an officer in his diary, ‘We cannot feed our men, we cannot feed our horses, so the horses must suffer to feed the men ... It gives one to think about, being one of a brigade of British Cavalry suddenly turned into Infantry and ordered to eat their own horses.’<sup>87</sup> Under the direction of Brevet-Colonel Ward, two factories were established with the object of adding essential rations to the food supply; the first factory made different extracts from horse meat, called ‘Chervil’. The meat was turned into meat soup; a condensed form of ‘Chervil’ for the sick and wounded; a jelly similar to calf-foot jelly; ‘Chervil Paste’ made of boiled meat and jelly issued as rations; and finally ‘neats-foot oil’ which was used for the lubrication for heavy Naval Ordnance. In the second factory, horse flesh was created into ‘excellent’ sausages, issued at quarter pound per head.<sup>88</sup> Considered an officer of the ‘highest administrative ability’<sup>89</sup>, White believed that Colonel

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>86</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvii, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Willcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers from the foundations as Wynne’s Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day*, p. 256.

<sup>88</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvii, 26.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 7.

Ward was ‘the best supply officer since Moses’.<sup>90</sup> From these procedures, it is evident that White was doing his utmost in prolonging the siege, fearing the worst if twelve thousand soldiers capitulated.

The following paragraphs highlight certain aspects of the siege that emphasise the hardship and hunger from an Irish perspective. In the following eyewitness account, a County Cavan man at Ladysmith described the rationing, the extent of the hunger and the measures that men were involved in doing to obtain meat:

I daresay you have seen in the papers that we ate our horses during the siege. You may not believe it, but it is a positive fact, and we were glad enough to have them to eat ... Some of them I can assure you, were anything but tender to eat, sometimes would come trotting over to you, if you called it. Our allowance of food for a good part of the siege was, a pint of weak tea with very little sugar, no milk of course, two biscuits and a half, and ounces of Mealie Meal. We got about a pound of meat, but as it was horse you could not eat half of it. That was our daily ration. The biscuits are about half the size of a sheet of paper and about a quarter thick. You can scarcely credit, but mule flesh was nice and tender, with a sweet taste. I shall never forget one day, I saw a mule shot, I was on him like a hawk, and had his tongue, and a couple of good steaks off him, almost before he was done kicking. The thing we felt the most, was the want of tobacco, you could not buy any ... We used to smoke the leaves of a kind of shrub like a geranium, that grew in the rocks. Dried sunflower leaves and peach leaves were looked upon as the finest smoking mixture.<sup>91</sup>

Dated 8 February, Corporal O’Rourke, C Company Royal Irish Fusiliers detailed the continued strain of siege warfare:

We are just beginning to feel it a bit rough here now, our food has been cut down considerably, and we are compelled to eat horse flesh ... but the majority of the troops prefer the horse flesh to that of the oxen, for the latter were in very poor condition and in addition they had they had all been diseased ... However, this is not the worst misfortune to which we are subjected, that of the weather being far more severe, just imagine, that since the 23<sup>rd</sup> September last, we have not had a bed to stretch ourselves upon...and since the 13<sup>th</sup> of October we have been lying at night fully equipped: not for one night during this time have we been allowed to undress ourselves ... we had to sleep with 150 rounds of ammunition on our stomachs...<sup>92</sup>

Having sprained his ankle, and consequently missing the capture of his company at Nicholson’s Nek, Private John Prior, Royal Irish Fusiliers remained at Ladysmith during the siege; in his letter to his parents, he described the incessant bombardment, being not ‘sure of your life a minute’, and the perilous situation with regards food; ‘we are nearly starved. I saw

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<sup>90</sup> Kenneth Griffith, *Thank God we kept the flag flying: the siege and relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900* (London, 1974), p. 286.

<sup>91</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 12 May 1900.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Mar. 1900.

£4 offered for a loaf and it would not be sold at that. We had to live on horse flesh and Indian meal'.<sup>93</sup> In a diary entry from a 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancer officer, he details his meagre diet:

For dinner to-day we had chervil and the haunch of a mule. No doubt one could manage it if the meat and soup were good instead of being tainted by the hot weather and the plague of flies. My diet generally runs to one egg every other day, a mess of violet powder discovered in a chemist's shop made with the help of some grease into a blanc-mange, which makes one smell like a girl's school, and what ration biscuits I can get hold of.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the food shortages, the sickness, and general monotony, an officer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Lancers was proud of how his men were behaving in such arduous conditions: 'People are cheerful considering everything ... Our men are splendid, one never hears a growl, they are starved, they live in tents which are worse than useless...'<sup>95</sup>

In order to understand the scale of hunger that was experienced in the town, the *British Medical Journal* published information on the food value in their rations; with their minimal daily rations of meat, biscuit, meal, sugar, tea and condiments, it was estimated that the calorie intake was 1,527. Dr James C. Dunlop of Edinburgh, placed this diet in context; 'The comparison between Ladysmith rations with prison and poor house diets shows them to be of far less food value than the food of a prisoner, and of even less food value than the food of our underfed paupers.' He concluded 'one can only express surprise at our gallant soldiers being able to continue such a struggle...'<sup>96</sup> In addition to the poor rationing, bad water, intolerable heat and rain, and cramped conditions led to the spread of dysentery and typhoid and an increase in the town fatalities. Although the situation was increasingly difficult for the medical staff and civilians to manage, the conditions never reached the magnitude previously witnessed during the siege of Plevna; one officer, present at that siege, described the town as a 'savage abomination', as thousands of soldiers of the Ottoman army succumbed to various illnesses, compounded by malnutrition and pitiable sanitation.<sup>97</sup> Had General Buller failed in the relief of the besieged town, it appears evident that the town would have ultimately succumbed to disease and starvation, and resulted in Ladysmith's surrender.

On 28 February Buller received a message from White of further reduced rations, with a daily supplement of half pound of breadstuff, so the camp could last a further three

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 21 May 1900.

<sup>94</sup> Willcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers) from the foundations as Wynne's Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day*, p. 257.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p 244.

<sup>96</sup> J.C. Dunlop, 'Food rationing in Ladysmith', in *British Medical Journal*, i (1900), pp 667-668.

<sup>97</sup> For a personal account of the siege see W.V. Herbert, *The defence of Plevna 1877* (London, 1895).

weeks.<sup>98</sup> With conditions deteriorating, Ladysmith awaited news of the recent British attacks along the Tugela Heights and by that evening it was apparent that the British had pushed their way clear through the hills; ‘By the God of war it’s the relief column’ wrote an overwhelmed officer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancer. Lieutenant L.F. Renny, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers was elated by the ‘joyful tidings of General Buller’s victory at Pieter’s Hill ... our wild excitement may be left to the imagination. I’m sure we all put on about seven pounds of our lost weight at the mere thought of our being at last relieved’. After 118 days, the siege had finally lifted. The reaction is naturally understandable given the extent of the conditions, and the general monotony of the siege. As it became increasingly evident that the Boers would not commit a large enough force to storm the town and compel it to surrender, the British would have to contend with diseases, hunger, boredom and mental fatigue. During the final days of the siege Lieutenant L.F. Renny recorded that the dwindling rations of ‘one biscuit, one pound of horseflesh, two teaspoonfuls of sugar, and a pinch of tea is not much to keep the body and soul together’.<sup>99</sup> As the situation became gradually precarious, with disease and hunger plaguing the besieged force, some soldiers would not contemplate a retreat, as their suffering would have amounted to nothing. The following extract from Corporal O’Rourke, illustrates that the British soldier remained duty-bound, whilst understanding the significance of their stubborn resistance to the war effort:

It is true we could carry out our own relief to-morrow or any day, that is if the General chose only to give the word, but what would be the result? The Dutch would be in possession of Ladysmith before we were two hours left the place then where was the use of our starving here still...<sup>100</sup>

The evening that the siege had ended, two squadrons of the relief column (Imperial Light Horse and Carabineers) rode into town led by Major Hubert Gough, an Irishman from County Waterford, son of General Sir Charles Gough VC., - the siege had ended. For four months the British garrison had awaited relief; the toil of disease, the meagre rations, the constant shelling, and the longing expectation for reinforcements and respite, stretched the nerves of the defenders and left them weary and weak. Upon arrival at the town, Buller told the Royal

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<sup>98</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 182.

<sup>99</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, pp 81-82.

<sup>100</sup> *Anglo Celt*, 31 Mar. 1900.

Commission that he was ‘shocked’ by the frail appearance of the men.<sup>101</sup> The appearance of the defenders is emotively described by Dr Treves:

The men themselves were piteous to see. They were thin and hollow-eyed, and had about them an air of utter lassitude and weariness. Some were greatly emaciated, nearly all very pale, nearly all were silent. They had exhausted every topic of conversation, it would seem, and were too feeble to discuss even their relief.<sup>102</sup>

Throughout the siege 10,688 were admitted into Intombi Hospital Camp or ‘Camp Funk’, as described by war correspondent, George Lynch<sup>103</sup>, with 600 deaths from all causes; dysentery and enteric fever representing 17.3 per cent and 16.5 per cent respectively,<sup>104</sup> between 2 November 1899 and 25 April 1900, thirty eight men from the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers died from disease at Ladysmith.<sup>105</sup>

On 28 February, George White addressed the soldiers and civilians of Ladysmith in a ‘voice trembling with emotion’<sup>106</sup>; a scene which the *Irish Times* believed would live long in the memory for those present:

People of Ladysmith, I thank you and all for your heroic and patient manner in which you have assisted me during the siege of Ladysmith. From the bottom of my heart I thank you. It hurts me terribly when I was compelled to cut down the rations, but thank God, we kept our flag flying.<sup>107</sup>

On 3 March, the relieving army marched into the town with the Dublin Fusiliers leading the infantry and artillery brigades as ‘special recognition of their devoted bravery’. Captain Romer of the Dublins, noted that it was an ‘honour that nobody grudged them’, due to the heavy casualties that they suffered.<sup>108</sup> In colourful language Churchill recorded that ‘Many of the soldiers, remembering their emerald isle, had fastened sprigs of green to their helmets, and all marched with a swing that was wonderful to watch’.<sup>109</sup> An anonymous soldier attached to the relief column, wrote home to his mother in Naas, that the garrison cheered

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<sup>101</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 183.

<sup>102</sup> Sir Frederick Treves, *The tale of a field hospital* (London, 1900), p. 98.

<sup>103</sup> Born in 1868 in Cork and educated at the Catholic University, Dublin, George Lynch was a war correspondent for the *Illustrated London News* during the South African War and the siege of Ladysmith. His experiences as a war correspondent are recorded in his work, George Lynch, *Impressions of a war correspondent* (London, 1903). Daniel Mulhall, ‘Men at war: nineteenth-century Irish war correspondents from the Crimea to China’ in *History Ireland*, xv (2007) online version. <http://www.historyireland.com/> (14 July 2013).

<sup>104</sup> Maurice, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, ii, p. 655.

<sup>105</sup> Willcox, *The historical records of the Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers from the foundations as Wynne’s Dragoons (in 1689) to the present day*, pp 262-263.

<sup>106</sup> H.H.S Pearse, *Four months besieged: the story of Ladysmith* (London, 1900), p. 241.

<sup>107</sup> *Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 1900.

<sup>108</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 75.

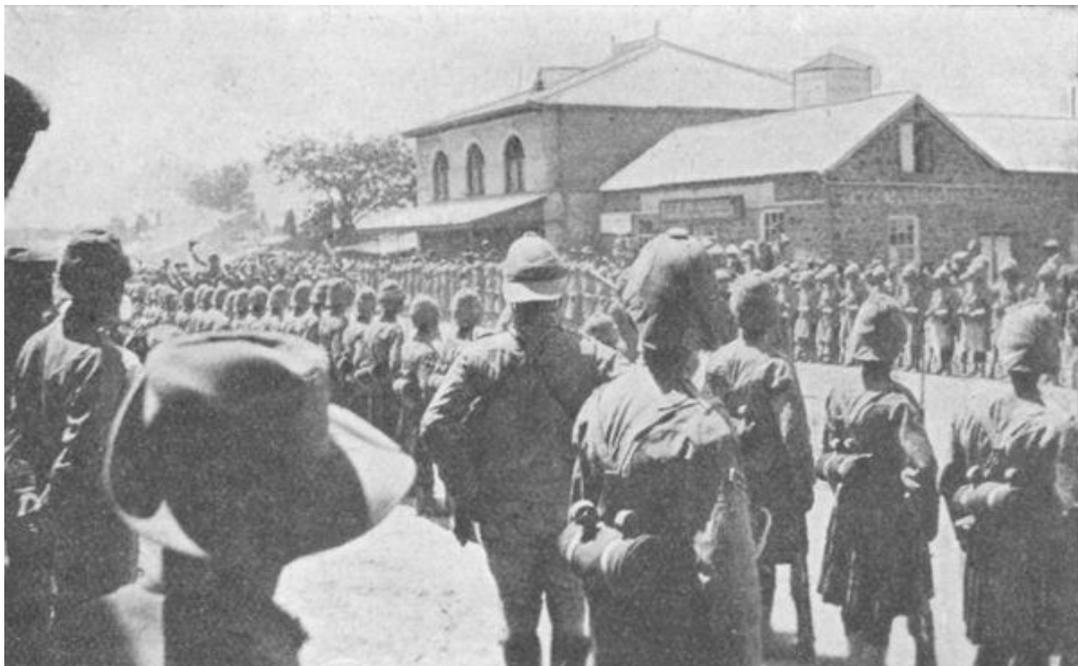
<sup>109</sup> W.S. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (London, 1900), p. 470.

widely, as they ‘were greatly rejoiced to see us and no wonder as they were nearly done up’.<sup>110</sup> Upon his arrival, Sergeant William Browne, 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers noted ‘Ladysmith is not much of a place. It is very small and all shattered. I think the people in it were on their last hopes’.<sup>111</sup> Recorded in his diary, Drummer Barton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Irish Fusiliers noticed the besieged troops ‘looked very poor’ as they welcomed in the relief force; although they ‘were clean and tidy in comparison with us’.<sup>112</sup> The sense of relief throughout the town was yet tinged with the doubt that Buller would ever have broken through the Boer defences. In a letter to his father, Private Head, 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers, expressed such sentiments:

We are pleased, I can assure you, to be relieved ... Our rations began to get very scarce, and we were getting pretty low and thin ... We could hear Buller’s big guns in the distance, and then we were delighted, but we heard them too often, and began to think we would not be relieved. But it came at last, and then we could not be held for joy.

The private expected a month’s rest, and then to be fully equipped to reengage the Boers – ‘I hope to have another rub at them for keeping us here for so long’.<sup>113</sup>

**Fig. 42: 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers marching into Ladysmith, 3 March 1900.**



<sup>110</sup> *Leinster Leader*, 7 Apr. 1900. Quoted in Owens ‘Dear mother-It’s a terrible life’: Irish soldiers’ letters from the Boer War 1899-1900’ in *Irish Sword*, xxi (1998), p. 184.

<sup>111</sup> *Fermanagh Times*, 19 Apr. 1900; quoted in Spiers (ed.), *Letters from Ladysmith: eyewitness accounts from the South African War*, p. 147.

<sup>112</sup> Marcus Cunliffe, *The Royal Irish Fusiliers 1753-1950* (London, 1952), p. 260.

<sup>113</sup> *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, 7 Apr. 1900.



Source, C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (London, 1908), pp 72 and 74.

The relief was met with widespread jubilation across the United Kingdom and the Empire; the *Belfast News-Letter* reported euphoria in Belfast, with citizens taking to the streets, waving flags, building bonfires and several bands paraded the street.<sup>114</sup> At the annual demonstration of the Dublin Battalion of the Boy's Brigade at the Metropolitan Hall, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin, 1,156 officers and teenagers celebrated the news and feted Sir George White; the 'religious' brigade 'thanked God for the preservation of their soldiers in South Africa' and they believed that it was in answer to their prayers that Ladysmith was relieved.<sup>115</sup> According to the *Freeman's Journal* there was another element to the celebration where fifty Trinity College students broke into Dublin Mansion House, stealing the civic flag and assaulting civilians and police; three were captured and fined £2.<sup>116</sup>

Sections of the Irish public revered George White and personally strove to welcome home the 'noble' defender of Ladysmith. White was previously invalided home with fever and sickness, and due to the extent of weariness experienced throughout the last months, he was incapable of taking command of a division. Several banquets were held in his honour upon his arrival at Larne, Belfast City, Carrickfergus, Ballymena, and Broughshabane the village beside his ancestral home at Whitehall. Upon arrival he was welcomed by the

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<sup>114</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 Mar. 1900.

<sup>115</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 Mar. 1900.

<sup>116</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 2 Mar. 1900.

construction of an arch with an inscription, 'Welcome, Our Hero. Home.'<sup>117</sup> George White was also granted the freedom of Belfast, which had support from Nationalist members of the council. Alderman McCormick, an Independent, spoke about the apprehension of Belfast citizens and the valour of Irish men and White during the siege of Ladysmith, an example of the 'Irish genius' that builds the Empire:

...so long as there was an Irishman at the head of affairs, surrounded by Irish soldiers, there was little likelihood of the flag of England being pulled down.<sup>118</sup>

This quotation illustrates the important contribution made by Irish soldiers in building and maintaining the Empire during the nineteenth century. It supports the idea of Irish professionalism, of duty and loyalty to the crown, and the impressive martial prowess, in protecting Britain's overseas territories. Moreover it reveals the close relationship that once existed, and importantly states that Ireland aided and abetted overseas expansion at the detriment of natives and settlers.

In Ireland, a remarkable one hundred thousand people gathered at Ormeau Park, Belfast for the ceremony, to catch a glimpse of their brethren, the 'hero of Ladysmith', the man they had read so much about in the press. It was a testament of the interest Belfast citizens had in the war, and the incredible 'celebrity' status that White held.<sup>119</sup> White was genuinely astonished at the reception he received, stating 'There is an enthusiasm for the integrity of the Empire that I never expected to see even in this part of Ireland'.<sup>120</sup> In spite of his 'hero' status, White was never trusted again by Roberts to hold any responsible position;<sup>121</sup> he remained in service with the British army becoming Governor of Gibraltar (1900-1904), promoted to Field Marshal in 1903, and was Governor of Chelsea Hospital from 1905 until his death in 1912. In his tenure as Governor of Gibraltar he entertained Kaiser Wilhelm, who greeted White as 'the defender of Ladysmith'.<sup>122</sup>

In recognition of the part the Irish Brigade played in the Tugela operations, several businesses and institutions offered support and compliments; with the Cardiff Exchange expressing 'Congratulations on the Magnificent Conduct of the Irish troops'.<sup>123</sup> Individual soldiers of the Irish battalions were cited for distinguished bravery during the Tugela

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<sup>117</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 June 1900.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 May 1900.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 June 1900.

<sup>120</sup> Durand, *The life of Field-Marshal Sir George White, V.C.*, ii, p. 223.

<sup>121</sup> Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 370.

<sup>122</sup> Durand, *The life of Field-Marshal Sir George White, V.C.*, ii, p. 247.

<sup>123</sup> Cassidy (ed.), *The Inniskilling diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa*, p. 74.

campaign; thirteen soldiers were mentioned in a report from General Buller to the Secretary of State for War.<sup>124</sup> Queen Victoria was to give further recognition to both the Irish troops and people of Ireland with two army orders and a royal visit to the country. The first of the orders was the introduction of the shamrock to be worn by Irish troops on Saint Patrick's Day, following her 'deep concern of the heavy losses sustained by my brave Irish soldiers'.<sup>125</sup> Despite the controversy prompted by the introduction of the shamrock amongst many Irish Nationalists,<sup>126</sup> the *Irish Times* writer 'Murty' reacted favourably to the army order stating that Her Majesty 'has given a new glory to the National triple leaf'.<sup>127</sup> Leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), John Redmond, an Irish Nationalist and Home Ruler noted in Parliament that 'Irish people will receive with gratification' the news that Irish soldiers will wear the shamrock in the National holiday, 'as recognition of the valour of their race'.<sup>128</sup> Most importantly for the war effort, Irish soldiers reacted positively to this gesture. The effects on morale were apparent to Olive Leslie, a nurse at Van Alen Field Hospital and aunt of Sir Shane Leslie of County Mongahan, who stated, that 'No one wants to fight now except for the Irish who say they want to thank the Queen for the shamrock! Bless them!'<sup>129</sup> On 17 March 1900, Rudyard Kipling sent the following 'impromptu lines' by telegraph for the inaugural issue of a newspaper, 'for the special edification of the troops'; it was entitled, 'The wearing of the green':

Oh, Terence, dear, and did you hear  
 The news that's going round?  
 The shamrock's Erin's badge by law  
 Whenever her sons are found.  
 From Bloemfontein to Ballybank –  
 'Tis ordered by the Queen!  
 We've won our right in open fight –

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<sup>124</sup> The full list can be found on pages 248 and 249.

<sup>125</sup> 'Her Majesty, the Queen, is pleased to order that in future, upon St Patrick's Day, all ranks of her Irish regiment shall wear, as a distinction, a sprig of shamrock in their head dress to commemorate the gallantry of her Irish soldiers during the recent battles in South Africa'. Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, pp 264-265; *Irish Times*, 8 Mar. 1900.

<sup>126</sup> Many Irish Nationalists and members of the Irish Transvaal Committee viewed its introduction as a means in which to encourage further army recruitment in Ireland. Their suspicions were reinforced by recent incidents that involved British soldiers wearing the shamrock, prior to the order; in 1898, William Redmond was ejected from the House of Parliament for voicing his opinions on Seaman Gunner Pilkington's fourteen day imprisonment and demotion for wearing a shamrock on St Patrick's Day. A year previously, one soldier committed suicide after being dismissed from the British army for wearing a shamrock, amongst other offences. See J.H. Murphy, *Abject loyalty: Nationalism and monarchy in Ireland during the reign of Queen Victoria* (2001), p. 278 and *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 4 Apr., 1898, lvi, col. 24.

<sup>127</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 Mar. 1900.

<sup>128</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 8 Mar. 1900, lxxx, col. 403.

<sup>129</sup> The Boer War family letters, 1899-1901 (N.L.I., Shane Leslie Papers, MS. 22,903).

## The wearing of the green<sup>130</sup>

The second order was for the creation of a new Foot Guard Regiment known as the Irish Guards. In the recruitment poster it stated that ‘Her Majesty the Queen having deemed it desirable to commemorate the bravery shown by the Irish Regiments in the recent operations, has been graciously pleased to command that an Irish Regiment of Foot Guards be formed. The regiment will be called the Irish Guards’.<sup>131</sup> The formation of the Irish Guards was a proud moment for Irish loyalists, as it recognised Ireland’s contribution to the war in South Africa and their strong military tradition in the British army.<sup>132</sup> On 16 March 1900, Irish colonists in South Africa met in Cape Town to discuss and express delight in the news, and passed several resolutions to Sir Alfred Milner and Her Majesty. The shamrock demonstrated, in the words of Dr Farrelly:

A recognition of the national sentiment, a recognition of the Irish as a constituent force, and not a disruptive element of the Empire ... it certainly marked an event which could only have one result, and that was to lead Irishmen to understand not merely their national, but their Imperial responsibility.

Moreover, the individual concluded that the formation of the Irish Guards was a ‘fitting recognition of the valour of their countrymen in the field, and the skill of Irish generals’. The Queen replied to the message thanking the Irishmen in Cape Town for their ‘loyal message’. She was also confident that the courage and allegiance shown by Irishmen would be shared ‘by their brethren in the colony’.<sup>133</sup> In cities across Ireland, celebrations with reportedly large sections of the population, regardless of religion or politics, held dinners, marches and banquets in Belfast, Cork, Derry, Dublin, Limerick and various other towns.<sup>134</sup> In London, a large proportion of the population reportedly wore the Irish emblem in celebration of Irish valour and the London Mansion House and many businesses flew a green flag; celebrations were also held in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Sydney, Toronto and Montreal.<sup>135</sup> Saint Patrick’s Day was celebrated with more fervour than in recent years, which further aided the impending visit by Queen Victoria in April. The Royal visit, as historian Helen Rappaport states, was a

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<sup>130</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 Mar. 1900 and *Glasgow Herald*, 19 Mar. 1900

<sup>131</sup> Recruiting poster on the formation for the Irish Guards, 1900 (N.A.M., 11961-11-216); *The Times*, 6 Apr. 1900.

<sup>132</sup> In 2005 the Irish Guards were honoured by the town of Ladysmith by presenting the regiment with the freedom of the town. A memorial was also unveiled at the forecourt of the Siege Museum Ladysmith which commemorated the eight Irish regiments that served in the war. The South African Military History Society, ‘Irish Guards Honoured’ in *Military History Journal*, xiii (2005), np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol133ig.html> (13 Oct. 2013).

<sup>133</sup> M.J. Farrelly, *The settlement after the war in South Africa* (London, 1900), pp 309-313.

<sup>134</sup> See *Daily News*, 19 Mar., 1900; *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 Mar., 1900; *Irish Times*, 19 Mar. 1900.

<sup>135</sup> *Daily News*, 19 Mar. 1900; *The Times*, 19 Mar. 1900 and *Glasgow Herald*, 19 Mar. 1900.

reaction to the conduct of the Irish troops,<sup>136</sup> and while the visit was an undoubted success, many Irish Nationalists remained deeply cynical, viewing the Queen's first visit in thirty seven years as a means by which to encourage recruitment into the British army.<sup>137</sup> To quote one historian, Queen Victoria's visit 'demonstrated the importance of Irish soldiers in the imperial project'.<sup>138</sup>

All these gestures were viewed by Irish loyalists as a tribute to the bravery of Irish soldiers; the *Kildare Observer* believed that it illustrated that the Empire was proud of the manner of Irish participation in the war.<sup>139</sup> *The Times* of London wrote:

The Irish regiments, faithful alike to their Queen and to the long-established and often - confirmed traditions of their valour and their loyalty, have done more to promote the Imperial interest of Ireland than could have been accomplished by legislators in a generation and have gilded everything Irish in a halo of romance which is not likely soon to disappear.<sup>140</sup>

Continuously throughout the war the British press expressed gratitude and admiration for the fighting qualities of the Irish soldier. The *Derby Mercury* rejoiced for the gallantry and courage of 'those splendid Irishmen' during the relief of Ladysmith, whilst noting 'their capacity to fight, in memorable contradiction to the traitorous babble' of Irish Nationalist politicians.<sup>141</sup> In the House of Commons, M.P. John Redmond for Waterford noted that 'brave and devoted press correspondents' continued to send accounts to Ireland that 'paid generous tributes to the gallantry' of Irish regiments.<sup>142</sup> Such performances, the press maintained, gave Ireland a stronger and more respected place in the Empire, trusted with the defence of British territory. In an article written by the *London Daily Mail*, published in the *New Zealand Tablet*, the newspaper wished to note the exceptional performances of each Irish regiment in defending the Empire and wished to mention that Lord Roberts, Lord Kitchener, General French, General White and General Kelly-Kenny were all members of the 'Irish race':

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<sup>136</sup> Helen Rappaport, *Queen Victoria: a biographical companion* (California, 2003), p. 207.

<sup>137</sup> See D.P. McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003), pp 66-71; Murphy, *Abject loyalty: nationalism and the monarchy during the reign of Queen Victoria*, pp 276-289.

<sup>138</sup> Christine Kinealy, 'Politics in Ireland' in Chris Williams (ed.), *A companion to nineteenth century Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. 487.

<sup>139</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 24 Mar. 1900.

<sup>140</sup> *The Times*, 17 Mar. 1900. Murphy, *Abject loyalty: nationalism and the monarchy during the reign of Queen Victoria*, p. 277.

<sup>141</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 7 Mar. 1900.

<sup>142</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 7 Feb., 1900, lxxviii, col. 834.

The colony (Natal) is providing (sic) itself a precious jewel in the British crown, and Irishmen are guarding it with all the magnificent self sacrifice and valour which are proud traditions of the race.<sup>143</sup>

Lieutenant Burne attached to the Naval Brigade believed that the Irish soldier behaved ‘splendidly’ throughout the operations and could only wish that ‘the Irish nation is not more like the Irish soldier’.<sup>144</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

This chapter highlighted a period within the South African War that fully captured the attention and imagination of the Irish public. The awareness of Irish involvement in the war was unparalleled during the first six months of the conflict, with widespread pride and concern at the extent of Irish participation and casualties. The Irish public reacted favourably to the battle honours and the Queen’s gestures that were bestowed on the Irish citizens and troops. The involvement of the Irish in the British regiments in the South African War arguably galvanised Irish support for the British Empire and this translated to the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry units in Ireland, Irish war charities and the construction of war memorials across Ireland’s landscape. As this chapter has demonstrated, this reaction was understandable; the war was presented to the public as a conflict about preserving the British Empire, and Ireland was clearly involved in this powerful rhetoric. Accounts of Irish bravery and courage emerged continuously in the British and Irish press and this was confirmed during the battles of Talana, Elandsplaagte, Colenso, Inniskilling Hill and Pieter’s Hill: all victories that propelled the Irish infantry and cavalry into the headlines.

Indeed, this was supported by a deluge of letters published in the press from soldiers in Irish regiments that detailed life on campaign and offered a unique eyewitness account of modern battlefields. The letters contained in the chapter provided an entirely different dimension to understanding the Irish perspective and experience in Natal. Through the lens of Irish soldiers, the chapter offered an understanding of the immense difficulties on campaign against a well-armed enemy; it demonstrated the physical effects of warfare, with many eyewitnesses describing the extent of wounds and deaths of their comrades; in parts the letters portrayed the effect the war was having on communities in Ireland, with soldiers listing locals that had been killed or injured; it also revealed an interesting paradox in Irish history, with Irish men fighting on both sides. These letters, together with countless official War Office’s press releases and war correspondent accounts, further cemented Irish interest

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<sup>143</sup> *New Zealand Tablet*, 22 Mar. 1900

<sup>144</sup> C.R.N Burns, *With the Naval Brigade in Natal (1899-1900): journal of active service* (London, 1902), p. 55.

in her regiments, and their welfare which manifested into war charities and the Imperial Yeomanry.

In addition, these two chapters, heavily illustrated through Irish accounts, have provided a context to modern warfare at the turn of the century, and foreshadowed, in many respects, the war on the Western Front. As previously stated, the war provided unparalleled difficulties for the British army, which rendered the offensive a futile tactic, against a highly motivated and well-armed adversary; examples provided through several battles, revealed that the defensive had superiority over the offensive. Battles, such as Colenso and Inniskilling Hill, demonstrated the over-reliance on close ordered assaults, which placed emphasis on its psychological factor. Accounts throughout the last two chapters reveal, that Irish soldiers were exasperated for failing on several occasions to see a Boer; smokeless technology and the implementation of entrenchments, which guaranteed relative ‘invisibility’, became the focus of many letters sent home to Ireland. Although individuals recognised the importance of entrenchments, and the primacy of firepower, certain schools of thought remained advocates of the morale impact of the offensive and the *arme blanche* of the British cavalry; the resounding cavalry charge - against a demoralised and retreating Boer - at Elandslaagte, still convinced officers, like French and Haig, of its importance and utility in the British army. The British cavalry would enjoy relative success in the Middle East during the Great War, but it became defunct on the Western Front – a battle environment that emphasised static and attritional warfare. The siege of Ladysmith also had relevance for the Great War, with the construction of fortified placements and entrenchments, the attritional aspects of the siege, the spread of disease, compounded by poor sanitation, and its longevity. Although the struggle descended into a British war of counterinsurgency – providing ‘a source of inspiration’ for future guerrilla wars<sup>145</sup> – the formal, and ‘conventional’ set-piece battles witnessed throughout the conflict, reflected the primacy of firepower and the increasing ineffectiveness of the offensive, against a well-armed opponent; such transformations on the battlefield, and the consequential changes of army reform, elevated the South African War to the status of a relevant precursor to the Great War. Two days after the battle of Colenso, in a letter to the editor of *The Times*, one individual understood that it was ‘time for our commanders to acknowledge that they have worshipped a false god, and that, with the weapons of to-day, the attack, whether frontal or flanking ... is impossible ... against a

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<sup>145</sup> R.E. O’ Mahony, “‘Hunting the Boer’: counterinsurgency experiences and lessons of the Boer War’ (M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2011), p. viii.

prepared position.’<sup>146</sup> However, as demonstrated continuously throughout the Great War, some lessons of the previous conflict failed to be considered by the War Office and several British generals; as remarked by historian Pemberton: ‘The generals, drawn largely from the cavalry (French, Haig, Mahon, Gough) which had played so prominent a part in the later stages of the Boer War, continued to think in terms of the veld fighting despite the proliferation of the machine gun.’<sup>147</sup>

As regards the perceptions of Irish soldiers to the changing face of warfare, little evidence exists. In the case of the attack on Colenso, several individuals expressed dismay at the reckless deployment of the brigade by General Hart, which resulted in high casualties; nevertheless, Irish soldiers remained adamant, placing emphasis on the offensive and the cold steel, whilst concurrently, belittling the cowardly tactics of the Boers remaining concealed in their trenches. The ability for the Irish battalions to remain positive throughout the first six months of the campaign was reflective of their fighting spirit, their courage, pluck, and tenacity. The morale was maintained by their training, which cemented group cohesion and solidarity, discipline, their comradeship, the inspirational actions of their officers, *esprit de corps*, and their faith – these elements fused an effective fighting force. Although Hart’s brigade struggled under harrowing circumstances at Colenso, the value of their training and morale, allowed them to maintain a difficult position, without wavering and retreating, until ordered; their courage was exemplified by their audacious attempt to ford the river. The fighting spirit was further demonstrated with the reluctance of the 1<sup>st</sup> Irish Fusiliers to surrender at Nicholson’s Nek, despite their difficulties, and the charges at Talana, Inniskilling Hill, and Pieter’s Hill, through a fusillade of fire.

When researching for this chapter, the lack of modern research on Irish participation during the war was apparent. This chapter and this research as a whole, highlights Ireland’s impressive participation in the British Empire and military – a fact that is not often appreciated. The services and the extent of Irish participation and experiences in the South African War are revealed in contemporary histories, newspaper accounts and letters from soldiers. The first two chapters represent a small yet significant portion of Irish participation in the war; in order to comprehend the breadth and depth of contribution, that is, the true scale of involvement, one would need to research the entire conflict. There are many possibilities for further research in this area, some of which are discussed in the thesis conclusion.

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<sup>146</sup> *The Times*, 17 Dec. 1899.

<sup>147</sup> W.B. Pemberton, *Battles of the Boer War* (London, 1964), p. 200.

Overall the war highlighted the advent of modern warfare, and the ineffectiveness of the British army in failing to realise the primacy of firepower, and the senselessness of a frontal assault, against a well-armed defender. Despite the military professionalism of the British army, their credibility for being such an effective fighting force was massively undermined by the Boers. The British military had enjoyed unprecedented successes throughout the nineteenth century; the Ashanti, the Zulu, the Matabele, the Maori, and the Arab tribesmen of the Sudan all succumbed to the power of modern technology and military might. However, this consequently had an impact as the British military placed infallible belief in their professionalism, weapons, tactics and formations. Incredibly the British military were entirely ignorant of the devastating effect of modern firepower: moreover British ignorance and naivety was further revealed, with a failure to remember the tactical prowess of the Boer that was so prevalent during the First Boer War. The British army's experiences throughout the nineteenth century became largely irrelevant during the first engagements with the Boers, as generals and officers maintained 'colonial' tactics that were hardly appropriate for later battlefields.

# Chapter Three: The ‘Irish’ Imperial Yeomanry and the battle of Lindley (27 May – 31 May 1900)

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In 1903 Irishman Adjutant-General Sir Thomas Kelly-Kenny gave evidence at an inquiry on the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry:

Those that I would call the men who went out through patriotism in the end of 1899 and beginning of 1900; but as to the other lots of Yeomanry, and also the other lots of Colonials, for I do not think there is very much difference, I think we had to buy them, and rather dearly, too. With the first lot it was not a question of buying, and they came with a rush of patriotism, but after that it was a question of buying.<sup>1</sup>

The main focus of this chapter, are the individuals that Sir Kelly-Kenny believed enlisted out of patriotism. These men, who were sworn into the First Contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry, brought about an interesting development in Irish military history; they seemingly enrolled out of duty and loyalty to the Empire. As previous studies in Irish military history tend to focus on men serving in regular Irish units for a variety of different and complex reasons, it is of importance to offer an alternative view on Irish recruitment into the British army. It is often portrayed throughout Irish history that the thousands of Irishmen that enrolled into the British military and navy were impoverished individuals, with little or no prospects for the future; furthermore, they are often depicted as men who wished to escape from the desolate conditions of rural and urban Ireland, or from bad marriages or creditors. Certainly, economic motivation, the enticement of a steady wage, and regular meals, were important factors for enlistment. It is also suggested that the love of adventure and the strong military prowess that existed, were important factors for enlistment.<sup>2</sup> However, as mentioned, this study will focus on other factors that have largely escaped the attention of Irish historians – the idea that Irish soldiers enlisted into the Imperial Yeomanry through a staunch belief in the ideology of the British Empire and the Crown. While this research is very much a case study into the Irish units of the Imperial Yeomanry, it will offer broader points with regard to

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. 1xi, 72.

<sup>2</sup> Different reasons discussed throughout T.P. Dooley, *Irishmen or English soldiers? The times and world of a southern Catholic Irish man (1876-1916) enlisting in the British army during the First World War* (Liverpool, 1995); E.M. Spiers, 'Army organisation and society in the nineteenth century' in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996); T.E. Jordan, 'Queen Victoria's Irish soldiers: Quality of life and social origin of the thin "green line"' in *Social Indicators Research*, lxxxviii (2002), pp 73-88.

the formation of the First Contingent, the Irish military tradition and Ireland's contribution during the South African War.

Discussing the reasons why Irishmen joined the Imperial Yeomanry during the South African War is difficult, as very few modern histories contain information on the involvement of the Irish in the Imperial Yeomanry, let alone the South African War. As remarked by historian David Murphy, there is 'essentially no literature on the history of the Irish Imperial Yeomanry units' in the South African War.<sup>3</sup> As a result of a limited amount of information connected with Irish troopers, there is the problem of over reliance on existing sources and a lack of varied information. Much of the knowledge regarding Irish recruitment has surfaced from modern research on British yeomanry battalions, highlighting the main issues with enlistment.<sup>4</sup> In order to overcome these difficulties, the press, as a source, is vital to understanding the reasons behind recruitment, the political climate and the public attitude to the creation of Imperial Yeomanry units in Ireland. In order to evaluate Kelly-Kenny's observations, this chapter has been split into a number of components. Firstly, the impact of Black Week will be discussed in a bid to understand Irish reaction to the British defeats and the environment in which recruitment began in earnest. Secondly, the embodiment and mobilisation of troops will be investigated in order to offer the reader an understanding into the creation of each unit. Thirdly, the study will include the first examination of the 'Irish' Imperial Yeomanry. The main component of research for this chapter is the 535 men from six 'Irish' Imperial Yeomanry units within the First Contingent compiled from attestation papers in The National Archives, London. These papers reveal age, previous employment, nationality/residency, marital status, religion and military experience, all of which are vital elements in comprehending the establishment of each company. In addition to understanding the recruitment of these men, the research will also compare enlistment in units from England and Scotland. This will essentially allow for a wider understanding of recruitment patterns across the United Kingdom. Against the backdrop of this further questions emerge: who were these men and the reasons for enlistment? Was Kelly-Kenny's assertion correct, or did other economic motivations influence recruitment? Was patriotism such an important factor for

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<sup>3</sup> David Murphy, *The Irish Brigades, 1685-2006: a gazetteer of Irish military service, past and present* (Dublin, 2007), p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> See S.M. Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Oklahoma, 2007); E.W. McFarland, 'Empire-enlarging genius': Scottish Imperial Yeomanry volunteers in the Boer War', in *War in History*, xiii (2006), pp 299-328; Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British working class: Working-class attitudes and reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902* (London, 1972); Will Bennet, *Absent-Minded Beggars: yeomanry and volunteers in the Boer War* (Barnsley, 1999).

mobilisation? Did the press have a part to play in the recruitment, and have a particular view or understanding regarding the recruit's role in the yeomanry?

Finally, the chapter will explore through an examination of eye-witness accounts, diaries, and modern research the only significant military engagement that the Irish units in the First Contingent experienced - the battle of Lindley (27 June 1900 – 31 May 1900). The battle will act as a case study into the military effectiveness of 'Irish' volunteer units and the Imperial Yeomanry as an entire entity. The purpose that the Imperial Yeomanry served will be discussed on with the question of whether relatively untrained men acted as a burden on the British High Command. It is intended that the study will offer an understanding of Ireland's wider participation in the fight for Empire, and the mutual respect that existed in those turbulent years.

### **'Black Week'**

On 10 December 1899, Lieutenant-General Sir William Gatacre's forces were held back at Stormberg in the north of the Cape Colony, suffering over seven hundred casualties. The following day, British forces withdrew from the battle of Magersfontein with over one thousand dead and wounded under the command of Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen. The week ended with the British suffering a humbling 'reverse' at Colenso under the Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's Forces in South Africa, General Sir Redvers Buller. There was disbelief throughout the United Kingdom and the Empire that the British Army could be out manoeuvred and repulsed three times in one week. Arthur Conan Doyle expressed that the period was 'the blackest one known during our generation'.<sup>5</sup> The British had suffered defeats throughout the century, with exceptional examples at Isandlwana (1879), Maiwand (1880) and Majuba Hill (1881), yet to the public these were considered small reversals on an otherwise dominant conquest for empire.<sup>6</sup>

During Christmas of 1899, the impact of the defeats, especially Colenso, was apparent in Ireland. The Irish 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, under Major-General Fitzroy Hart comprising the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers (3 companies), the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers had led a frontal attack on Boer positions. Along the Tugela River, the Irish regiments suffered heavy losses. The national press recognised the

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<sup>5</sup> A.C. Doyle, *The great Boer War* (London, 1900), p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to British military conquest throughout the nineteenth century under Queen Victoria's rule see, Byron Farwell, *Queen Victoria's little wars* (Devon, 1973). The book contains a comprehensive list of each of the engagements the British army were involved throughout the century. The British Empire was involved in constant fighting throughout the monarch's reign numbering 230 conflicts.

extent of Irish casualties by declaring a day of ‘humiliation and prayer’.<sup>7</sup> Maurice Fitzgibbon recalled the atmosphere in Ireland when the press began publishing details of the engagement:

At home in our houses, and abroad in our streets, communion was avoided, and the usual amenities of life omitted; how could the ordinary topics of conversation be entered upon at the breakfast-table, while upon it lay that paper with its double-leaded war type and its lengthy lists of casualties?<sup>8</sup>

For the Irish that were associated or supported the soldiers in South Africa, their despair quickly turned into fervour and resilience. In contrast Irish Nationalists demonstrated widespread elation towards the British defeats.<sup>9</sup> Letters began to appear in the press from enthusiastic Irishmen willing to offer their services to the British army. The content of these letters offered military service as a token of Irish loyalty for the preservation and welfare of the empire. One individual claimed that the Irish would be worthy of recruitment for South Africa regardless of appropriate military training.<sup>10</sup> The emerging resolve was echoed in the

**Fig. 43: 9608 Trooper Maurice Fitzgibbon, 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Imperial Yeomanry**



Source, Maurice Fitzgibbon, *Arts under arms – an university man in khaki* (London, 1901), frontpiece.

<sup>7</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 Dec. 1899.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Fitzgibbon, *Arts under arms - an university man in Khaki* (London, 1901), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> For examples see *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Dec. 1899; 19 Dec. 1899; 23 Dec., 1899.

<sup>10</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 Dec. 1899.

The emerging resolve was echoed in the words of Colonel F Luttman-Johnson of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Leinster Regiment stating that there was a ‘dogged determination to carry through the war at all costs’.<sup>11</sup> Across the United Kingdom that sentiment became the driving force for recruitment throughout the early stages of embodiment for the Imperial Yeomanry.<sup>12</sup> It was suggested by contemporary historian Amery that ‘the nation was in a mood to respond to every demand that might be made upon it’.<sup>13</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Irish Times*, a ‘Loyalist’ believed that Ireland should demonstrate their allegiance to the Empire by enrolling alongside their ‘brothers’ from the colonies. The individual asked:

Is Ireland with its numerous loyalist population to stand idly by with its hands folded while others are taking part in the glorious fight for freedom and progress? ... Are there no Irishmen at home to emulate their deeds of valour and follow that grand old chief, Lord Roberts, their countrymen, to the seat of war?<sup>14</sup>

In Ireland, this level of interest and interaction was unsurprising. Throughout this period, Irish society was immersed in the idea of British imperialist culture and engaged effectively with matters concerning the Empire and the war. In Irish newspapers, matters concerning imperial policy, the war and military issues were discussed freely and hotly debated. As Paula Krebs suggested, newspapers were extremely effective during the South African War, with influencing public opinion; the increase in literacy across the United Kingdom, and the introduction of the half-penny papers, allowed for a greater public interaction with the war.<sup>15</sup> During the first months of the war, the press, Irish War charities, Music Hall ballads, literature and Irish military involvement, helped maintain a public interest; effective propaganda increased the likelihood of a positive Irish reaction, following the events of Black Week. Patriotism, loyalty, and duty became coined expressions when attempting to explain Ireland’s contribution to the Empire. Notwithstanding the eagerness and interest expressed by the Irish public, there could be no active participation with the armed forces without prior approval from the British government and the War Office. During this period, there was no volunteering in Ireland as the numerous volunteer acts introduced by the British government

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<sup>11</sup> Colonel F. Luttman-Johnson, *Records of services of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. The Prince of Wales’s Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) in the South African War, 1900, 1901, 1902* (London, 1913), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> For press examples see *London Daily News*, 19 Dec. 1899. *The Times*, 23 Dec. 1899; 25 Dec. 1899; 28 Dec. 1899.

<sup>13</sup> L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history of the war in South Africa, 1899-1902*, iii (London, 1905), p. 7. The historian also noted with some disappointment that despite the intensity of national emotion, only 100,000 volunteers stepped forward out of a possible forty million. He placed this down to British public being unwarlike in recent generations. Amery (ed.), *The Times history of the war in South Africa, 1899-1902*, iii, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 Dec. 1899. For more examples on Irishmen declaring interest in joining a volunteer corp see *Ibid.*, 27 Dec. 1899.

<sup>15</sup> P.M. Krebs, *Gender, race and the writing of Empire: public discourse and Boer War* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 4.

excluded Ireland. To one commentator this was due to the fact that Irishmen were not trusted with possession of firearms in the country.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly this was not an isolated opinion; in 1897, in a letter to Lord Lansdowne regarding the mobilisation of three Army Corps in the case of war, Lord Garnet Wolseley stated that it would be wise ‘that we bring the Irish militia to England to draw the teeth of possible rebellion’.<sup>17</sup> As the following paragraphs illustrate, ‘Black Week’ was to mark a drastic change in policy for the British government and War Office. The public would rally to the next phase of the war with trepidation, attempting to rectify previous mistakes and ‘Avenge Majuba’.

### **Mobilisation and public reaction**

Black Week exposed the failures of the army and the War Office; it highlighted the British commanders’ lack of imagination and innovation; it demonstrated that British tactics were outdated and obsolete in the face of modern warfare. The Boers exploited British inadequacy with smokeless accurate fire, trenches, camouflage, good leadership and a mobile mounted force that knew the terrain. Historian Meriwether noted that the war uncovered the failures of the War Office and the British government, showing their inability to mobilise an army to fight a major war. Order had to be restored for national pride and to quell any public mistrust. On 19 December, the War Office issued a statement allowing for the raising of volunteer units for service in South Africa; this would deflect attention away from their shortcomings by embarking on a series of active measures, by enlisting volunteers and requesting the service of colonial units.<sup>18</sup> The *Belfast News-Letter* was encouraged by this initiative and hoped that the people of Great Britain would be given their chance to serve the Empire.<sup>19</sup>

It profited the War Office to allow the public to be carried away by this new wave of enthusiasm and to feel part of the occasion: to do service for their Queen and country. The War Office statement contained information regarding: the change in leadership; the mobilisation of the seventh division; the embodiment of nine militia battalions; the strong force of volunteers selected from yeomanry regiments; and establishment of colonial mounted troops. It was, the *Belfast News-Letter* believed, ‘the first movement on the part of the authorities which is likely to bear fruit’.<sup>20</sup> In the spirit of jingoism, the press revelled in

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<sup>16</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 Dec. 1899.

<sup>17</sup> *Report of His Majesty’s commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. 1xi, 245.

<sup>18</sup> J.L. Meriwether, ‘Procrastination or pragmatism? British defence policy, War Office administration, and the South African War, 1898 - 1903’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter, 2001), p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 18 Dec. 1899.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

the fact that the British were superior in arms, horses, money and men. The superior fighting qualities of the British man were reinforced by the *Belfast News-Letter*; the writer declared that the volunteers 'would be successful in nine cases out of ten with their superior discipline'.<sup>21</sup> Encouragingly for the War Office and the government, the public were determined, animated and demonstrated unwavering support for the introduction of the new mounted force. It was a time of national redemption and this was reinforced with the news that Lord Roberts VC of Kandahar, Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's Forces in Ireland was to replace General Buller as commander of the British forces in South Africa;<sup>22</sup> he was to be assisted by Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, the newly appointed Chief of Staff.<sup>23</sup> Buller's position was deemed untenable following his failure to relieve the town of Ladysmith and his fate was sealed when he encouraged the British garrison to surrender their position.<sup>24</sup>

The newly embodied mounted infantry would solve the shortage in manpower and the obvious need for an effective mobile force in South Africa. In a letter from The Right Hon. A. J. Balfour First Lord of the Treasury to Lord Haddington, the purpose of mounted infantry was explained. It would effectively counteract the Boer's 'ease and rapidity of their movements' preventing them from attaining a position of great strength.<sup>25</sup> It would add an essential component to the static and vulnerable British army. In the *Irish Times* it was noted that, 'a fightin' force of this sort is what may be called takin' a leaf out of the book of the Boers ... 'tis a move in a right direction'.<sup>26</sup> Amidst the enthusiasm and patriotism that was witnessed across the press and the recruitment depots, there was a clear belief in the fighting ability of Britain's citizens and volunteers. The Boer's tactics of utilising trenches and effectively deploying a mobile force was an irregular approach to warfare and considered distasteful by the British public. The public and the press believed they understood the main

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>22</sup> Lord Roberts had previously written a letter to Lord Lansdowne expressing his criticism of General Buller's actions in South Africa, unhappy with his pessimistic attitude, lack of confidence and the fact he never held an independent command before. Roberts offered his services in place as supreme commander. He believed that 'a series reverse would endanger the Empire'. Lord Carver, *The National Museum book of the Boer War* (London, 1999), p. 51.

<sup>23</sup> The news was met with delight from the Irish national press at the appointment of their fellow countrymen. The *Irish Times* expressed their best wishes and remained optimistic in the general's future endeavours in South Africa. *Irish Times*, 25 Dec. 1899. Also the appointment of General Kitchener was met with 'utmost satisfaction' by officers, soldiers and all classes of the public. *Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1899. On appointment, Kitchener paid tribute to the Irish soldiers in South Africa; 'Reports which indicate that disloyalty exists among the Irish regiments are absolutely untrue. In the hour of danger my countrymen have ever been the first to lay down their lives for their Queen and country'. *Ibid.*, 22 Dec. 1899.

<sup>24</sup> In a despairing mood, Buller heliographed General White, commander at Ladysmith, to 'burn your ciphers, destroy your guns, fire away your ammunition, and make the best terms possible with the general of the besieging force'. Considered a failure by many, for such an act, his position became indefensible.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 Dec., 1899 and *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Dec. 1899.

<sup>26</sup> *Irish Times*, 30 Dec. 1899.

tactical issues that were plaguing the British army; a mounted force was needed and it would prove to be a vital factor for overall British victory. As the *Belfast-News Letter* asserted, the introduction of irregular tactics would be adopted by the mounted infantry to remove the threat of the Boer.<sup>27</sup> However to suggest that these men would prove an able adversary to the Boers was naive with no regard to the ability of the volunteer or the Boer. Despite their sense of patriotism, duty and adventure, the yeomen were inadequately trained compared to the Boers and the press and members of the public were premature in their perceptions of the yeomanry's superior fighting ability. In the words of Conan Doyle, the Boers were 'the most formidable antagonists who ever crossed the path of Imperial Britain'; trained for seven generations in constant warfare.<sup>28</sup>

On 26 December, the War Office issued a 'Call to Arms' throughout Ireland's national press. The notice requested the formation of an Imperial Mounted Force which was to be recruited from the Yeomanry, Volunteers and civilians.<sup>29</sup> For the southern Irish companies of the Imperial Yeomanry, enrolment would occur at Newbridge Barracks and a small recruitment office in Grafton Street, Dublin. In the north, enlistment would take place at Victoria Barracks, Belfast under the direction of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Regimental District. Maurice Fitzgibbon remembered the moment the call was issued for the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry. When boarding a train from Dublin to Kilkenny, for a few days' shooting, he opened the *Irish Times* and before the train embarked he had decided to enrol in the Imperial Yeomanry.<sup>30</sup> This remarkably quick decision by Fitzgibbon was not an isolated incident; rather it was an episode that was repeated across the United Kingdom where tens of thousands of men began to line up outside the recruitment depots.<sup>31</sup>

### **Irish Companies**

Throughout the course of the war, 1,393 officers and 34,127 N.C.O.s and men served with the Imperial Yeomanry in South Africa.<sup>32</sup> All of these men helped establish dozens of Imperial Yeomanry units' throughout the United Kingdom, leading to the formation of three

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<sup>27</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 Jan. 1900.

<sup>28</sup> A.C. Doyle, *The great Boer War* (London, 1900), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Dublin Daily Express* and *The Irish Times*, 26 Dec. 1899. The notice also carried the terms and conditions of their service including applications; period of enlistment; pay; age and standard of men; medical examination and enlistment and further general instruction relating to the formation of the companies, horses and equipment.

<sup>30</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arms under arms - an university man in Khaki*, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> The accounts of men rushing to join the Imperial Yeomanry, was reminiscent of the reaction of young Irishmen recruiting for the British army following the outbreak of the Crimean War. See David Murphy, *Ireland and the Crimean War* (Dublin, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. 1xi, 70.

contingents. The First Contingent that was raised during the New Year 1900 was the first to be dispatched for service.<sup>33</sup> The contingent had 550 officers and 10,731 men in service, dispersed into twenty battalions containing four companies each.<sup>34</sup> It included the 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company; the 46<sup>th</sup> Belfast Company; the 54<sup>th</sup> Belfast Company and the 47<sup>th</sup> Duke of Cambridge's Own which consisted of 'English and Irish men about town'.<sup>35</sup> The companies were formed into the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion. In addition, the 60<sup>th</sup> Belfast Company and 61<sup>st</sup> Dublin Company were attached to the First Contingent, forming half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion serving with the Rhodesia Field Force.<sup>36</sup> In the words of historian Pakenham, the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion 'was the social and political show-piece of the new volunteer army'.<sup>37</sup> There was confidence in the ability of Irish volunteers, as expressed in the press. The *Irish Times* was optimistic in anticipating 'a few hundred good shots' that would rival the English and Scottish companies.<sup>38</sup>

The Irish companies serving in the First Contingent were considered 'special' units by the War Office as they were Independent Corps with no affiliation to any yeomanry brigade. The desire of hundreds of volunteers in Ireland to enrol themselves in Her Majesty's service was acknowledged and appreciated by the British government with A.J. Balfour noting their 'patriotic loyalty'.<sup>39</sup> Despite the token of a 'special' unit, the Independent Corps were still under the charge of the Imperial Yeomanry Committee, with the same conditions of enlistment and other provisions. No unit could be formed without the express permission from the committee. Officers' names had to be submitted to the committee and upon appointment, they were expected to train and pass recruits through the riding and shooting tests stipulated by army regulations.<sup>40</sup> The Imperial Yeomanry Committee had made it a general rule that no officer could be accepted into the unit without previous military training from the regular army or auxiliary forces.<sup>41</sup> The War Office requested that: each recruit be

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<sup>33</sup> Overall thirteen Irish companies joined the Imperial Yeomanry numbering over two thousand men.

<sup>34</sup> Steve Watt, 'The Imperial Yeomanry-Part One' in *Military History Journal*, xiii (2006), np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol136sw.html> (11 June 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1979), p. 436.

<sup>36</sup> See S.H. Gilbert, *Rhodesia and after: being the story of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Imperial Yeomanry in South Africa* (London, 1901).

<sup>37</sup> The battalion included a company of Master of Fox Hounds including the Earl of Longford and Viscount Ennismore. The two northern companies which consisted primarily of Ulster Protestant unionists had in their service the Earl of Leitrim Captain Power and James Craig, the future Northern Irish Prime Minister. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 436.

<sup>38</sup> *Irish Times*, 27 Dec. 1899 and *Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>39</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 5 Feb., 1900, lxxviii, col. 564.

<sup>40</sup> *Report of the Deputy Adjutant-General of the force regarding its home organisation, inspection of the constitution of its base and advanced depots and distribution of stores in South Africa and proposals for future organisation*, [CD 803], H.C. lvi.619, 168.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

between the ages of twenty and thirty-five; that each recruit be of height of 5 ft. 3 in. and upwards; that all men be medically assessed before enrolment. The company would include 115 men of both rank and file with their arms and ammunition provided by the Government, while offering a capitation grant to the men for clothing, horse equipment and stable necessities.

Throughout January 1900, recruitment began in earnest for the Imperial Yeomanry. It was reported in the press that high numbers of men presented themselves at the recruiting office at Victoria Barracks, Belfast<sup>42</sup> but many were turned away due to lack of horsemanship, as this was considered the 'principal qualification'. Men who were 'desirous of joining the branch' were advised to learn horse riding immediately.<sup>43</sup> It was recorded that many men had previous employment working as clerks, huntsmen, professionals, artisans and sons of clergymen. Recruitment for the 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company was under the supervision of the appointed superintendent of recruiting, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Longford, Captain Thomas Pakenham. Similar to the scenes witnessed across the United Kingdom, the recruitment offices were full of applicants. In a matter of days, the company was formed under the captaincy and command of Captain Thomas Pakenham of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Life Guards and Master of the Westmeath Hounds. The company was also under the command of Captain Stannus, Lieutenant Blackburne and Lieutenant Richard G Viscount Ennismore previously of the 1<sup>st</sup> Life Guards.

The enthusiasm across Great Britain and Ireland with regards participating in the South African War is illustrated by author and historian Arthur Conan Doyle; he wrote: 'to see those long queues ... of young men who waited their turn with desperate anxiety as if ... Boer bullets were all that life was worth the holding'.<sup>44</sup> When news was received for the formation of the City Imperial Volunteers (C.I.V.), Robert Erskine Childers (1870-1922), a clerk in the House of Commons and future member of Sinn Féin, who had returned home to Ireland on Christmas holidays, remembered 'the hurried run over from Ireland, the application of service, as a driver, the week of suspense, the joy of success, the brilliant scene of enthusiasm before the Lord Mayor'.<sup>45</sup> Corporal P.T. Ross of the 69<sup>th</sup> Sussex Company,

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<sup>42</sup> According to the report given by Colonel Graves, Commanding 83<sup>rd</sup> Regimental District, Belfast, he explained that there were problems in obtaining officers due to there being no yeomanry battalion in Ireland. This caused great difficulties for a 'serious' amount of time in training the troops in shooting and riding. *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>43</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 4 Jan. 1900. One individual with previous military experience who had seen service in Queen Victoria's army wrote to a newspaper requesting their readers to provide him a horse for an hour a day for three days so he would have the best opportunity to pass the horsemanship examination for inclusion in the Imperial Yeomanry. *Belfast News-Letter*, 3 Jan. 1899.

<sup>44</sup> A.C Doyle, *The great Boer War* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., London, 1900), p. 199.

<sup>45</sup> Erskine Childers, *In the ranks of the C.I.V* (London, 1900), p. 2. Following the South African War, Childers became an author of several influential works on cavalry warfare. Before the onset of the Great War, Childers

Imperial Yeomanry, recalled the ‘great outburst of patriotism, which like, a volcanic eruption, swept every obstacle before it, banishing Party rancour and class prejudice, thus welding the British race in one gigantic whole ready to do and die for the honour of the old Flag’.<sup>46</sup> Black Week was the catalyst for the rallying and enlistment of eleven thousand men into the First Contingent.

### **The profile of the forces**

The Imperial Yeomanry units raised in Ireland were composed of different elements of society, representing a diversity of backgrounds; nationality, previous employment, age and religion. The following paragraphs investigate the makeup of the ‘Irish’ Imperial Yeomanry and will discuss the formation of the forces, the background of the individuals and the motivations for enlistment. The data presented will also be compared and contrasted with research already completed on yeomanry units in Scotland and England in order to contribute to a more comprehensive picture of the yeomanry units in the United Kingdom as an entity.

Of the 535 men recruited into the five ‘Irish’ units of the First Contingent, thirty-one counties of Ireland were represented. As the figures below illustrate, Ulster was a substantial recruitment ground with fifty-three per cent of all attestations; this was hardly surprising due to the strong unionist and Protestant population in the North (see page 124, below, for population figures). The county of Antrim provided over twenty-four per cent of the country’s recruits. However, this figure is slightly biased as three of the companies were based in that province. In the south, at first glance, the recruitment levels for Leinster are generally impressive, representing one-fifth of the island’s drafts. Dublin was the most substantial with over twelve per cent noted in an area which was the centre of Irish pro-Boer strength and the heart of the British administration in Ireland. Yet if Dublin is removed from the equation, only ten per cent of the province is represented in the ranks of the yeomanry. Figures are low for the county of Kildare, despite it being the home of the Curragh Army Barracks: only seven men were recruited from the county. The provinces of Munster and

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turned his attention away from the threat of German invasion and British military doctrine, and began to focus on the Irish Home Rule question. In response to the ‘Larne gun-running’ of the Ulster Volunteer Force in April 1914, Childers helped organise the infamous ‘Howth gun-running’ in August 1914, to help arm the Irish Volunteers. Childers remained in Irish politics and was secretary-general of the Irish delegation during the Anglo-Irish Treaty, in 1921. However he was opposed to the final draft of the treaty, and joined forces with the anti-treaty forces under Eamon de Valera. On 24 November 1922, Childers was executed by firing-squad of the pro-Treaty government, for carrying a pistol in violation of the Public Safety Resolution (1922). M.A. Hopkinson, ‘Childers, (Robert) Erskine’ in Dictionary of Irish Biography (Cambridge, 2009) online (ed.), <http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/> (22 June 2014).

<sup>46</sup> P.T. Ross, *A yeoman's letters* (London, 1901), p. viii.

Connaught enlisted at a rate of just over nine per cent and just below six per cent respectively.

Within the enlistment that occurred in Ireland, forty-nine men noted addresses in Great Britain, India, Canada, the United States of America, Australia, Gibraltar and the Cape Colony. Their motivations for returning to Ireland in the first instance are not recorded nor are the reasons for joining Irish units. They may have had a previous association with the country and wished to enlist with friends; they may have been refused recruitment in Britain and so decided to enlist in an Irish company. However it was not uncommon for men to return home to the United Kingdom to enlist in the Imperial Yeomanry; contemporary historian Amery noted that ‘patriotic Englishmen hurried’ home from British Columbia, Chile, China and every corner of the world to serve their country’.<sup>47</sup>

**Table E) Registered County/Country of recruits in the 'Irish' units of the First Contingent**

<b>Registered County/Country</b>	<b>No. Of recruits</b>
Antrim	132
Down	68
Dublin	66
England	38
Cork	24
Armagh	22
Derry/Londonderry <sup>48</sup>	16
Tyrone	16
Mongahan	14
Tipperary	10
Westmeath	9
Sligo	8
Mayo	7
Roscommon	7
Leitrim	7
Kildare	7
Donegal	7
Fermanagh	6
Wicklow	6
Meath	6
Kerry	5
Kings County (Offaly)	5
Queens County (Laois)	5

<sup>47</sup> Amery (ed.), *The Times history of the war in South Africa, 1899-1902*, iii, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> The name of the county varied from each attestation form.

Unknown	5
Clare	4
Limerick	4
Kilkenny	4
Scotland	3
Cavan	3
Galway	3
Waterford	3
Longford	3
Louth	2
Carlow	2
India	3
Cape Colony	1
Canada	1
Australia	1
United States	1
Gibraltar	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>535</b>

### Age and marital status

Stephen Millar sampled the age groups of five units based in Nottingham, Wrexham, Bath, Leicester and Lanark that formed a section of the First Contingent. He revealed that the average age in the attestation forms were 24.8, 25.3, 23.5, 26.3 and 24.4, respectively.<sup>49</sup> The ‘Irish’ units revealed an average age of 25.1.<sup>50</sup> With regards to the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry, an age restriction was implemented by the War Office, with recruits technically only accepted between the ages of twenty and thirty-five. Millar notes that despite the constraint on age, both younger and older men managed to evade both the red tape of the War Office and the regulations of the medical inspector;<sup>51</sup> this fact does not explain whether the potential recruits lied about their age, or the officials turned a blind eye. Interestingly, four men in the Irish units were over thirty-five: the youngest of them, a grocer aged thirty seven, had no previous military experience; George Brown, 61<sup>st</sup> Dublin Company, aged forty-four from St Matthew’s Parish Dublin had twenty four years service in the British regular army; Waiter Alfred Lapham, aged forty-one, had seen twelve years service attached to the 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers; finally James William Bayliss of the 45<sup>th</sup> Company aged forty-eight, was a interesting case where age and health was completely discounted by his length of military

<sup>49</sup> Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain’s citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*, p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> War Office: Imperial Yeomanry, soldiers’ documents, South African War (T.N.A., WO 128/31,32,36,37).

<sup>51</sup> Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain’s citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*, p. 66.

service and his then present occupation - before enlistment he was a riding master with several years in the Dragoons and the 1<sup>st</sup> Life Guards; despite being medically unfit to remain in the regular army, he was still able to pass the medical examination set by the Imperial Yeomanry.<sup>52</sup> The soldier had notable experience in the Sudan, where he received the Khedive's Medal.<sup>53</sup> It may have been that these four men and others like them were accepted due to the lack of previous military experience in the units generally; it is reasonable to suggest that the company commander ignored the age restrictions in order to allow men with knowledge and familiarity with horses, drilling and shooting to pass into the ranks. There were also three counts of underage recruits at the age of seventeen, eighteen and nineteen attached to the 60<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> companies. Not surprisingly none had previous experience in the military, whilst the youngest had no previous employment. Of the men sampled in this study, fifty-six of 535 men had noted previous military experience with five members attached to Ireland's police forces. Trooper Fitzgibbon detailed that several troopers under the rank of sergeant had previous military experience in the North-West Rebellion in Canada (1885) and in the Matabele wars in South Africa, throughout the 1890s.<sup>54</sup> That only a little over ten per cent of the overall yeomanry units had any military experience was all too evident to the British parliament and the military when news reached British shores of the battle of Lindley (27 May – 31 May 1900).

From the evidence presented in the attestation forms, very few recruits were married; the War Office preferred to enrol unmarried men, or widowers without children.<sup>55</sup> Enlisting unmarried men or individuals without a family made financial sense – it removed the prospect of providing monetary support to the widow or orphans. Thirty six men had a spouse which represented fewer than seven per cent of this study's sample. In Scotland, the figure was less, with ninety-six percent of recruits unmarried.<sup>56</sup> With little responsibility at home, the war offered an exciting opportunity for adventure within the community of each company. With regards the men who were married, the vast majority had previous employment, suggesting that economic motivation was not a factor.

## **Religion**

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<sup>52</sup> A letter of his experiences prior to the battle of Lindley can be sourced at *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 5 May 1900.

<sup>53</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arms under arms: an university man in khaki*, p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 149.

<sup>56</sup> E.W. McFarland, 'Empire-enlarging genius': Scottish Imperial Yeomanry volunteers in the Boer War', in *War in History*, xiii, (2006) p. 308.

At the turn of the century, Ireland was multi-denominational. According to the 1901 Census, there were 3,310,028 Catholics, 579,385 Church of Ireland members, 443,494 Presbyterians, 61,255 Methodists, 3,769 Jews and 59,703 of other religious persuasions.<sup>57</sup> As the table below illustrates, the Imperial Yeomanry was also multi-denominational, showing no discrimination or intolerance. Following the threat from revolutionary France and the removal of a ban that prohibited Catholics serving in the regulars (1793), Irish Catholics became a prominent component of the British army. Despite the large numbers of Catholics in the country, they formed less than ten per cent of the five Irish units considered for this study. The majority of the Catholic volunteers were attached to the two southern companies, which is not surprising, considering that 2,610,976 Catholics lived in the three southern provinces – Leinster, Munster and Connaught. Studying the attestation forms, one captures a glimpse of the background of each individual. Viewing the previous occupations of each Catholic, eighty-eight per cent of them had employment such as clerks, factory inspector, medical students, bank officials, gentlemen and solicitors, members of the police force, engineers, state officials and grooms. As economic fulfilment was not a compelling force for recruitment for this group, their motivations for enlisting in predominantly Protestant units is of interest. It may have been a political choice as Catholic Home Rulers, like some Irish in the Great War, saw supporting and offering solidarity with the British Empire, as a method by which to obtain self-government. Furthermore, it may have been a political decision by Catholic Unionists, who were often ‘unimpressed by the case for Home Rule’.<sup>58</sup> This is an argument that appears quite frequently in the press throughout the war.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the Catholic response in the northern units is interesting, as according to the 1901 Census, there were 699,052 Catholics in Ulster, yet only nine were recruited into the northern units, whilst one recruit from Antrim volunteered for the 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company.<sup>60</sup> In Belfast itself, the centre of recruitment for the Imperial Yeomanry in the north, there were over thirty thousand males of the Catholic faith, many of who would be eligible for military service.<sup>61</sup> It is unclear why the Catholic response up north was so limited, whether it was due to politics, class and religion or the lack of military expertise amongst the Catholic population. Arguably, money and class may have had an impact on Catholic recruitment; at the turn of the century, Catholics in Belfast were ‘overrepresented in the ranks of the unskilled or semi-skilled

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<sup>57</sup> *Census of Ireland for the year 1901*, [CD 613], H.C. xc.179, 6.

<sup>58</sup> R.B. McDowell, *Crisis and decline: the fate of the southern Unionists* (Dublin, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> For examples see *Kildare Observer*, 18 Nov. 1899; *Dublin Daily Express*, 26 Oct. 1899; *Irish Times* 21 Sep. 1899; *Liverpool Mercury*, 17 Nov. 1899.

<sup>60</sup> *Census of Ireland for the year 1901*, [CD 613], H.C. xc.179, 6.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

workers, and servants'.<sup>62</sup> However of the ten Ulster Catholics that joined the First Contingent, they all had previous employment – Labourer, Inspector of factories, medical student, clerk, gentleman, dealer, groom, saddler, carpenter, and farrier (horseshoe maker). Furthermore, two of the recruits had previous military experience. Arguably, economic motivation was not a factor, and it can be considered that these recruits joined for the experience, adventure or as staunch Catholic Unionists serving the Empire with their fellow subjects throughout the United Kingdom. Although Catholic participation never reached the impressive recruitment figures that occurred in 1914, their level of involvement in the First Contingent was significant and worthy of note.

As previously mentioned, Ulster was an important recruitment ground with fifty-three per cent of all attestation into the 'Irish' units; twenty-four per cent of these gave an address in Antrim. In 1901, 880,105 Ulster citizens had a Protestant faith, with 346,539 people were located in Antrim.<sup>63</sup> Of the 132 volunteers from Antrim, ninety-two per cent were of a Protestant denomination, with fifty per cent of them Presbyterian. Irish unionists' active showing of support for the British Empire at this time is more easily explained by the strong bonds of religion, culture and politics that existed between Britain and Ireland which were arguably the main driving force behind their recruitment.

**Table F) The religious denominations of the 'Irish' yeomanry in the First Contingent**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Number</b>
Church of England	159
Presbyterian	135
Other Protestants <sup>64</sup>	169
Roman Catholics	51
Wesleyan	5
N/A	16

### **Reasons for enlistment**

The decision to volunteer was a serious undertaking and one that could not be taken lightly. The men were leaving the safety of their homes, their loved ones, and risking their lives against a formidable opponent. Reasons as to why these men enlisted vary from patriotism,

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: a history* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 339.

<sup>63</sup> *Census of Ireland for the year 1901*, [CD 613], H.C. xc.179, 6 and 7.

<sup>64</sup> The official forms did not include the religious denominations, under the title of 'Other Protestants'

devotion, military tradition, economic, social and family pressures, adventure or a means of escape. For Maurice Fitzgibbon it was out of loyalty and duty; he remembered:

‘It was a time when many of us felt that possibly we might be of use; but, useful or useless, we wanted to be up and doing something. Would we be let? ... Good luck, our chance came in its own good time’.<sup>65</sup>

The *Freeman's Journal* commented that Irish volunteers had enlisted for the ‘love of a free fight’ and despite the grave dangers that the men might encounter, the newspaper does partially assume that these men believed in the union and the British Empire.<sup>66</sup> In Corporal P.T. Ross’s recollection of his service in the 69<sup>th</sup> Sussex Company Imperial Yeomanry, he listed his forty reasons for volunteering after the turbulent period of Black Week with a heavy rationale, that Millar explained was ‘produced by both long-term societal influences and immediate events ... directly linked to his sense of patriotism, obligation, and duty to his country’.<sup>67</sup> Below is a sample of his reasons for enlistment:

2) Patriotism

8) I considered it was the right thing for an Englishman to do

9) Because I thought it was my duty;

13) Patriotic Fever!!!

14) I did it during the Patriotic Mania, 1899-1900

15) Sudden splash of patriotism upon visiting a Music Hall

34) Had always preached Patriotism and thought it was the time to put theory into practice<sup>68</sup>

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, despite the growing threat from Irish nationalism, Ireland was subjected to the culture of new imperialism and empire. As portrayed in the previous chapter, Ireland continued to interact with the ideals of the British Empire and the Irish military tradition. As Stephen Millar argues, powerful social forces shaped public attitude towards the ideals of patriotism and loyalty - literature, education, the music hall, sermons and political speeches helped promote British nationalism and superiority.<sup>69</sup> Richard Price noted that the January recruits in Britain, enlisted through ‘frenetic patriotism’, but overall disregarded that motive for the majority of the working class individuals that enlisted in the Second and Third Contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry.<sup>70</sup> The patriotic reaction foreshadowed the public response that was witnessed following the

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<sup>65</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arms under arms-an university man in Khaki*, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Jan. 1900.

<sup>67</sup> Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*, p. 74.

<sup>68</sup> Ross, *A yeoman's letters*, pp 180-182.

<sup>69</sup> Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*, pp 55-77.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British working class: Working-class attitudes and reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902* (London, 1972), p. 203.

outbreak of war in Europe and after the British defeat at Le Mons in August 1914 – the British public reacted with devotion and patriotism, exemplified by scenes of thousands of men outside the recruitment office. Considering the idea that economic motivation was not a push factor, it is important to view the attestation forms. Below is a table, which lists the fifteen most common

trades and professions of Imperial Yeoman, which enlisted in the five ‘Irish’ units of the First Contingent:

**Table G) Fifteen most common trades and professions of Imperial Yeomen in Ireland  
1900**

	No/535	%
Clerk	93	17%
Farmer	40	7%
Groom	31	6%
Building Trades	28	5%
Draper	24	4%
Engineer	23	4%
Gentleman	23	4%
Student	15	3%
Labourer	13	2%
Traveller	12	2%
Barrister/Solicitor	12	2%
Merchant	12	2%
Grocer	11	2%
Driver/tram conductor	10	2%
None	58	11%

The Royal Commission’s report into the war claimed that the ‘First Contingent consisted almost entirely of men superior to the classes ordinarily enlisted (in the regular army).<sup>71</sup> Regarding the Irish yeomanry, in some respects that assessment was correct. The majority of volunteers enlisted into the First Contingent were predominantly middle and upper class. That makes an interesting comparison with the traditional view of Irishmen enlisting into the regular army, the majority being of low income from a rural background; from 1790 to 1890 there was little difference between Irish recruits: agriculture labourers being the most common, followed by servants and a host of men without land or property.<sup>72</sup> The yeomanry, as Millar asserts, enjoyed recruitment from a wider variety of people than usually associated

<sup>71</sup> *Report of His Majesty’s commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. 1xi, 71.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Karsten, ‘Irish soldiers in the British Army, 1792-1922: Suborned or Subordinate’ in *Journal of Social History*, xvii, (1983), p. 37.

with the British army, offering a thorough representation of Britain as a whole.<sup>73</sup> This is supported by Ian Beckett who revealed in his research that volunteers of fifty three units were enrolled from 125 different occupations, with around forty per cent consisting of lower middle-class and artisans.<sup>74</sup> Subsequent contingents, as Richard Price suggests, enjoyed a wider recruitment from the working class of the United Kingdom.<sup>75</sup> In Ireland, the occupations listed above illustrate that recruitment for the First Contingent drew from diverse backgrounds. The men were predominantly white collar workers including clerks, travellers, grocers, students, barrister and solicitors. There is also a significant number of gentlemen and upper class individuals in the First Contingent, accounting for twenty three of the occupations; the figures for these categories was in all probability higher as the individuals who were listed as having no occupation, were more than likely gentlemen with private means.<sup>76</sup>

However, there was a small yet significant element of skilled working class individuals in the Irish companies. Labourers and builders accounted for seven percent of the total number of individuals who attested. Despite the relatively low wages and the price of enlistment, it is surprising they had the opportunity to enrol. Unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, Ireland had no yeomanry brigade. This left them at a considerable disadvantage as there would be no county funds available to pay for equipment. The Imperial Yeomanry Committee advanced £100 to equip the staff of the 13<sup>th</sup> battalion,<sup>77</sup> but other funds would have to be raised by private means. Similar to other examples throughout this thesis, the press was utilised to promote awareness of soldiers fighting in the war; Captain Pakenham keenly observed that ‘publicity is all that is required’ to raise appropriate funds.<sup>78</sup> On 12 January 1900, Pakenham received £100 pounds from the Lord Lieutenant Lord Cadogan.<sup>79</sup> The following day, the *Irish Times* published the list of donations received into the Irish Imperial Yeomanry Fund. They had received £670 14s. 6d from contributors such as the Earl of Meath, the Countess of Wicklow, Lord Dartrey and Sir John and Lady Arnott. The fund also

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<sup>73</sup> Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*, p. 59.

<sup>74</sup> I.F.W. Beckett, *The amateur military tradition, 1558-1945* (Manchester, 1991), p. 201.

<sup>75</sup> Price, *An Imperial War and the British working class: Working-class attitudes and reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902*, pp 178-232.

<sup>76</sup> Bennett, *Absent Minded Beggars: volunteers in the Boer War*, p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> *Report of the Deputy Adjutant-General of the force regarding its home organisation, inspection of the constitution of its base and advanced depots and distribution of stores in South Africa and proposals for future organisation*, [CD 803], H.C. lvi.619, 70.

<sup>78</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 Jan. 1900. The day previously it was reported that a man ‘too old for active service’ donated £25 pounds to Longford for the equipment of one yeoman. He believed that ‘every Briton must do his part ... how small is our sacrifice compared with theirs’. *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1900.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 Jan. 1900.

accepted subscriptions from men who had enlisted in the 45<sup>th</sup> Company- Victor Gibson and H.C. Villiers Stuart.<sup>80</sup> By 17 January 1900, the fund had increased to £1,012 8s. 6d, one hundred pounds of which was donated by the Earl of Listowel.<sup>81</sup> By 3 February, subscriptions had risen to £1,589 9s.<sup>82</sup> Without the financial support from the Irish landed class, a large percentage of the Irish units would have failed to fund their recruitment which would have potentially reduced the numbers of volunteers.

Across the United Kingdom, the figures for white collar recruitment within the first months of attestation were quite similar. In E. W. McFarland's study of the Scottish Imperial Yeomanry, she notes that in the first three months of recruitment, clerks, grocers, students, gentlemen, salesmen, travellers, farmers, labourers and trade jobs form a substantial component of the units, merging white collar and blue collar individuals.<sup>83</sup> In Stephen Millar's research on several English yeomanry units, people with skilled trades formed a more substantial element of the force with a heavier emphasis on farming and skilled workers. However Millar's work also illustrates the diverse nature of occupations and classes involved in the yeomanry.<sup>84</sup> The diversity notwithstanding, the majority of the occupations represented suggest that the First Contingent was a largely middle class experience across the United Kingdom. According to Ian Beckett, clerks formed the largest single occupational grouping, accounting for thirty percent of recruits. This, he explained, was due to the willingness of employers to allow their employees to enlist and as such a testament to the enthusiasm expressed by the middle class<sup>85</sup> who were interacting with the war with motivation, leaving the stability of their lives and safety, for adventure and the promise of glory.<sup>86</sup> The army which was once seen as a breeding ground for undesirables, vagrants and the unemployment, within the turn of the new century, was becoming a respectable element of society, regarded as the corner stone of success for the preservation of the Empire.

The most dynamic social group that engaged with the Imperial Yeomanry was the Irish landed gentry and Anglo-Irish gentleman class. The Irish landed gentry were perhaps

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 15 Jan. 1900.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 18 Jan. 1900

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 3 Feb. 1900. Further money was received through the *Irish Times* with £250 donated from the Kildare Street Club and forty pound contributed by 'a Schoolmaster of Four Volunteers'. Ibid., 13 Feb. 1900.

<sup>83</sup> McFarland, 'Empire-enlarging genius': Scottish Imperial Yeomanry volunteers in the Boer War', in *War in History*, xiii, p. 311.

<sup>84</sup> Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*, p 68.

<sup>85</sup> Beckett, *The amateur military tradition, 1558-1945*, p. 201. This was seen in the Guinness Brewery where the employees were actively encouraged to join the British forces.

<sup>86</sup> On a side note, it is interesting to state that clerks were also significantly represented amongst the ranks of the Irish Republican Army, during the Irish War of Independence (1919-21). James Dingley, *The IRA: the Irish Republican Army* (California, 2012), p. 73.

the most vocal in providing unwavering support for the military and the imperial mission. The military tradition was strong among the families of the landed class; they were considered one of the most militarised social groups in the British Isles, who viewed the military as a means by which to identify with their families, their empire and service to the monarchy.<sup>87</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, Ireland was heavily represented in the officer class in the British army, with around 17.5 per cent of officers from the country. Those officers mostly enlisted from the Anglo-Irish Protestant landowning class, with Jeffery asserting that they were natural unionists.<sup>88</sup> They offered their services to the Imperial Yeomanry by; aiding its organisation in Ireland; providing financial assistance to men to buy equipment; engaging with the local and national press in promoting charitable assistance for the companies; and offering themselves as an extra man in the rank and files. Their actions embodied the symbiotic relationship that existed between them and the military.<sup>89</sup>

The motivations to enlist are of interest, particularly the question of whether it was linked to patriotism or economic motivation. Alvin Jackson suggests that the empire, along with its grandeur, tradition and patriotism played a secondary role to potential Irish recruits; the appealing affordable lifestyle which the Victorian army offered to young officers was the primary factor for enlistment.<sup>90</sup> It was a time of change for the landed gentry. Their power and financial strength was diminishing and they were becoming more isolated in a hostile nationalist environment. As Nicholas Perry argues, despite the political and economic problems they faced, it seems apparent that their commitment to the military, monarchy and the empire remained unchanged. Indeed the origins of this loyalty have some basis in the fact that the Irish landed families sent their sons to England for education, which deeply embedded in them the ideas of imperialism and loyalty to the empire.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, according to historian R.B. McDowell, the ‘gentry were, with rare exceptions, staunch unionists’.<sup>92</sup> The Imperial Yeomanry offered a chance for men to escape from the pressures of Irish society

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<sup>87</sup> See Nicholas Perry, ‘The Irish landed class and the British army, 1850-1950’ in *War in History*, xviii (2011), pp 304-332.

<sup>88</sup> Keith Jeffery, ‘The Irish military tradition’ in Keith Jeffery (ed.), *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), p. 106.

<sup>89</sup> On a closer inspection of the numbers of Irish men involved in the war, Burkes *A genealogical and heraldic history of the landed gentry in Ireland* (London, 1912) is extremely useful in detailing the extent of involvement in the war. It detailed 113 men of the Irish landed gentry that were involved in the war, amongst the Irish and British regiments, the Imperial Yeomanry and the Royal Army Medical Corps (R.A.M.C.).

<sup>90</sup> Alvin Jackson, ‘Irish unionists and the British Empire, 1880-1920’ in Keith Jeffery (ed.), *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), p. 130.

<sup>91</sup> Perry, ‘The Irish landed class and the British Army, 1850-1950’ in *War in History*, xviii, p. 317.

<sup>92</sup> R.B. McDowell, *Crisis and decline: the fate of the southern Unionists* (Dublin, 1997), p. 9.

and facilitated an engagement with the United Kingdom and throughout the military.<sup>93</sup> The Imperial Yeomanry also provided the opportunity for men to begin or re-engage a career in the military. Several men seem to have understood this, as many would remain in the British army to see active service in the Great War; Pakenham would lose his life during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, having reached the rank of Brigadier-General of the British army; Richard Annesley West, 45<sup>th</sup> Company, became Lieutenant-Colonel of the North Irish Horse, Tank Corps, during the Great War, winning the Victoria Cross, before being killed; Major Holt Waring, Royal Irish Rifles, previously of the aforementioned unit, died in France in 1918 of wounds received in action. Those examples provide an argument that their service in South Africa had a profound impact that led to their continued interaction with the British Army.

Ultimately, patriotism and devotion to the Empire could not be downplayed. As Millar argues the disasters of ‘Black Week’ and the impact of social pressures created an environment that allowed for ‘psychological fulfilment’ found in the expression of patriotism.<sup>94</sup> Their parent nation had suffered three embarrassing defeats before Christmas, presenting the Irish elite class with the opportunity to show their qualities and unique shared history with their peers in the United Kingdom. The war provided a chance to express loyalty to the forms of Irish military tradition that had long been established in the British Army. It was also suggested at the time that the war provided hunting clubs with an ideal opportunity in which to combine their sporting appetite with their sense of militarism. These hunting and social clubs provided an excellent breeding ground for recruits as the men were fit, well trained on horseback and could handle fire-arms. The chance of adventure and glory with their friends and comrades may have been too enticing to turn down.

And yet motivations did vary amongst soldiers and civilians when recruiting for the regular forces, the militia or the Yeomanry. Trooper Sidney Peel, 40<sup>th</sup> Oxfordshire Company Imperial Yeomanry, offered a contrast to the level of patriotism that P.T. Ross experienced during his time of enlistment:

I can only remember one man who declared that he had enlisted from reasons of patriotism, and he was generally regarded as peculiar. If others were so influenced, they would by no means confess to it. Some came because they saw a chance of

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<sup>93</sup> Within the 45<sup>th</sup> the Irish landed gentry was heavily represented; Captain Thomas Pakenham the Earl of Longford; 9603 John Washington Brasier-Creagh of Creagh Castle County Cork; 9605 Darnley Phibbs of Lisheen County Sligo; Captain Thomas Robert Alexander Stannus of Carlingford; Lieutenant Henry Charles Villiers Stuart of Dromanagh within-the-Decies, County Waterford; James Francis Wright of Gilford Castle; Private 9697 Richard Annesley West of Whitepark County Fermanagh; and, Private Holt Waring of Waringstown, County Down.

<sup>94</sup> Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*, p. 76.

emigration at Government expense; some for love of sport and excitement; some, because their domestic affairs were in a tangle, from which enlistment offered a ready escape; some, because they were tired of the present occupation; some, because they wanted a job; some, because they wanted a medal, and some because others came.<sup>95</sup>

As regards this study, it is apparent economic motivation was not a decisive factor for enlistment. Considering the sampled attestation forms of the Irish companies, eighty-nine per cent had employment or were currently students. The other eleven per cent, considered 'unemployed', would have needed private funds by which to guarantee a place in the company, as equipment and horses were not provided by the War Office. From the evidence, it is clear that some did enlist for the adventure, comradeship, the excitement, escape from the general monotony of life in the United Kingdom, and perhaps the opportunity to travel to South Africa with the British army, and remain there once their term of service was completed. Several yeomen remained in South Africa in where they found work in the new British controlled South Africa. One individual, of the 46<sup>th</sup> Company obtained work on the Natal Government Railway; a previous organist, of the same company, joined the Johannesburg Mounted Police, clearly using the skills he had obtained in the yeomanry. There were several others who found work in the Transvaal Police and civil employment in Johannesburg District and Maritzburg. Many others, for reasons of further employment or adventure, remained in South Africa following the demobilisation of their company, with some transferred to other units, and others obtaining civilian jobs in government departments.<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, between 1901 and 1903, of the 1,010 recruits that joined the Natal Mounted Police and Cape Mounted Police, seventy-five per cent were Irish.<sup>97</sup> The Royal Commission inquiry into the war had claimed that many men of the First Contingent remained in South Africa and 'obtained good positions'.<sup>98</sup> The *Irish Independent* claimed that the 'majority of the Dublin Yeomanry went out with the object of developing into landed proprietors at the expense of Boers whose lands are to be robbed from them and given to "desirable settlers"'.<sup>99</sup> Little evidence exists to defend such a claim with the odd exception; Trooper Middleton of the 45<sup>th</sup>, wrote home to say that he 'intended to come home for a bit when all is over, as the country wont (sic) be settled for some time'.<sup>100</sup> Formerly a mining

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<sup>95</sup> Sidney Peel, *Trooper 8008 IY* (London, 1901), p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Steve Watt, 'The Imperial Yeomanry Part – One' in *Military History Journal*, vol., xii (2006), np.

<sup>97</sup> D.P. McCracken, 'Irish identity in twentieth-century South Africa' in *SAIS*, iii (1996), p. 10.

<sup>98</sup> *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. 1xi, 71.

<sup>99</sup> *Irish Independent*, 5 June 1900. Quoted from Keith Jeffery, 'The Irish soldier in the Boer War' in John Gooch (ed.,) *The Boer War: Direction, experience and image* (London, 2000), p. 147.

<sup>100</sup> *Irish Times*, 1 Sep. 1900.

engineer, it is likely that he saw an opportunity in the gold and diamond mines of South Africa. By 1904, there were 17,899 first-generation Irish in South Africa, which included Irish troops of the British army and Irish people who were ‘stirred by the fanatical espousal of pro-Boerism in Ireland and fascinated by tales’ of South Africa.<sup>101</sup> There also appeared to be wider patterns of soldiers from the colonies of Australia and Canada remaining in South Africa, following their service; with regards Canadian recruits, historian Carmen Millar states at least 349 Canadians demobilised and found civilian employment.<sup>102</sup> Historian Craig Wilcox estimated that by 1904, over 5,000 Australians were settling in South Africa, some of whom had seen active service during the war.<sup>103</sup>

While motivation to enlist varied from man to man, once they were organised into their respective companies of the Imperial Yeomanry their individual reasons became superseded by the desires and rhetoric of the British government, the British army and the press. The idea of loyalty and self-sacrifice was already incorporated into the psyche of the British people through years of propaganda and it found an outlet during ‘those dark December days’.<sup>104</sup> As Stephen M. Millar has illustrated, the imperial mission throughout the late Victorian society was implemented through education, literature, the press, the music halls and Christianity leading to exposure to ‘ideals attached to the military and the empire: loyalty, duty, self-help, and patriotism’.<sup>105</sup> The introduction of patriotic and militaristic ideals which were promoted and induced from a young age through education, left historian M.D. Blanch to conclude that ‘powerful pre-war influences helped shape popular response to the war itself.’<sup>106</sup> The masses had been subjected to tales of heroism and courage in the later part of the nineteenth century. The deaths of Lieutenants Melville and Coghill, and the eleven Victoria Crosses awarded to the defenders of Rorke’s Drift, were an example of how to preserve and enhance the image of the British soldier in times of despair and hardship. Examples of courage and self-sacrifice, was as Michael Lieven suggested, to teach ‘the young the qualities they must develop’ and to reassure ‘adults of the qualities on which they

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<sup>101</sup> D.P. McCracken, ‘Irish settlement and identity in South Africa before 1910’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxviii (1992), pp 135 and 149.

<sup>102</sup> Carmen Millar, *Canada’s little war: fighting for the British Empire in Southern Africa, 1899-1902* (Toronto, 2003), p. 90.

<sup>103</sup> Craig Wilcox, *Australia’s Boer War: the war in South Africa, 1899-1902* (South Melbourne, 2002), p. 348.

<sup>104</sup> William Corner, *The story of the 34<sup>TH</sup> Middlesex Imperial Yeomanry: from the point of view of private No. 6243* (London, 1902), p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain’s citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1900*, pp 22-23.

<sup>106</sup> M.D. Blanch, ‘British society and the war’ in S.B. Spies and Peter Warwick (eds), *The South African War* (Essex, 1980), p. 215.

had been taught to rely'.<sup>107</sup> This remained true after the battle of Colenso. The death of Lieutenant Frederick Roberts, son of Lord Roberts, was nationally mourned as he died attempting to save the guns, while the apparent heroism of Bugler Dunne offered some solace to the British public. The British soldier still remained a symbol of self sacrifice for the honour and preservation of the British Empire.

Prior to departure in March 1900, the Irish companies witnessed displays of impressive rhetoric and public scenes of support. The Duke of Connaught told the 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company that 'to help in the defence of the Empire ... that you will one and all show devotion to duty and that devotion to your Sovereign and to your country'.<sup>108</sup> Reported in the *Irish Times* Major-General Prior, Commandant of the Curragh District was certain the 45<sup>th</sup> would 'do its best to emulate the gallant deeds already preformed by the brave Irish regiments'.<sup>109</sup> The 61<sup>st</sup> South Irish Horse Company could 'be relied upon to worthily uphold the splendid prestige already gained by our countrymen'.<sup>110</sup> Their impassioned statements may arguably, have had profound effects on the men. The messages of unity, comradeship and loyalty to the British Empire were important themes which engaged with the psychology of each man.<sup>111</sup> The public and press also played a role in encouraging enthusiasm amongst the auxiliary forces and by demonstrated public acts of support for the men. Across the United Kingdom and the Empire, there was widespread rejoicing and excitement at the departure of troops to South Africa; companies were entertained at dinners and concerts in Ireland,<sup>112</sup> whilst postcards appeared in circulation called 'The Irish Imperial Yeomanry'.<sup>113</sup> The *Irish Times* reported the departure of the 45<sup>th</sup> from Dublin; the company witnessed 'the whole quay being black with people' waving Union Jacks and singing *God Save the Queen*, *Rule Britannia*, *Soldiers of the Queen* and *Come Back to Erin*. As the men boarded the ship 'Cambria', family, friends and well wishers waved, hats, handkerchiefs and sticks while rockets and fireworks were fired off to end an 'enthusiastic send-off'. Due to the intensity of the crowd and their heavy kit bags, the Trooper Fitzgibbon noted 'here it may almost be said

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<sup>107</sup> Michael Lieven, 'Heroism, heroics and the making of heroes: The Anglo Zulu War of 1879' in *Albion*, xxx (1998), p. 419.

<sup>108</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arts under arms - an university man in Khaki*, pp 46-47.

<sup>109</sup> *Irish Times*, 13 Mar. 1900.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Mar. 1900.

<sup>111</sup> Certain members of the public or soldiers did not take the condition of the war lightly and this was illustrated by a small newspaper report in the *Kildare Observer*. It was reported that a 'well-known sportsman' in Kildare initially intended to volunteer for the Imperial Yeomanry 'but when it came to the scratch, he declined'. The individual subsequently received many letters containing a 'white feather' a symbol for cowardice in the British army. *Kildare Observer*, 13 Jan. 1900.

<sup>112</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 Feb. 1900.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Apr. 1900.

our campaign began'.<sup>114</sup> This was a repeated occasion and enthusiasm did not wane despite months passing since the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry.

**Fig. 44: A contemporary drawing of the Duke of Connaught inspecting the 45<sup>th</sup> Company at Dublin's Royal Barracks, on 7 February 1900.**



Source, *Black and White*, 17 Feb. 1900.

**Fig. 45: A photograph of the Duke's inspection of the 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company**



Source, *The Sketch*, 14 Feb. 1900.

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<sup>114</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arts under arms - an university man in Khaki*, p. 56.

Similar scenes were witnessed across the Empire as tens of thousands of British and colonial troops from Canada, Australia and New Zealand boarded their respective ships to fight the Boer. The total number recorded, for the number of Colonial troops serving in South Africa, was 29,090 of all ranks.<sup>115</sup> The thousands of volunteers into South Africa was an impressive feature of the war's ability to impact on, and interest many throughout the empire, becoming a colonial and imperial melting pot. A corporal of the First Australian Horse observed the variations of the English language amongst Her Majesty's troops:

There were few distinctions in dress as the campaign grew older, and most men looked alike, but one was generally able to locate a man's habitat in the Empire as soon as he opened his lips to speak. From the rounded, full-voiced English, the broad Scotch, or the Irish brogue, the Canadian twang and the Australian drawl...<sup>116</sup>

Irishmen were distinctive amongst the men of the Empire doing their fair share for the imperial project. The imperial sentiment was infectious, remaining steadfast for the preservation of the Empire and reinforcing their shared identity.

It is apparent that among elements of the middle and upper classes, the war was popular. This was heavily influenced by the Irish landed gentry, the Irish military caste and the press. Irish interest in the war had been galvanised by the role of the Irish regiments in the war, and it was an opportunity to express their loyalty through patriotism and adventure for the British Empire. The predominantly Unionist and Protestant Irish companies understood their contribution to the war effort and the empire. They would have their opportunity to demonstrate their fighting qualities and patriotism on the hills surrounding the town of Lindley.

### **The battle of Lindley (27-31 May 1900)**

The final aspect of this chapter is to evaluate the role of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the South African War, with a case study on the battle of Lindley. In the words of Will Bennett, the engagement at Lindley 'marked the end of the Imperial Yeomanry dream'.<sup>117</sup> The battle, Keith Jeffery asserts, witnessed the Irish ascendancy class 'on the cusp of virtual extinction ... all dressed up to defend the empire, loyally waiting at Lindley for support which never came'.<sup>118</sup> The battalion, numbering some 500 men, armed with two 7mm M1895 Colt-

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<sup>115</sup> *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. 1xi, 76.

<sup>116</sup> J.H.M. Abbott, *Tommy Cornstalk: being some account of the less notable features of the South African War from the point of view of the Australian ranks* (London, 1902), p. 6.

<sup>117</sup> Will Bennett, *Absent-minded beggars: volunteers in the Boer War* (Barnsley, 1999), p. 110.

<sup>118</sup> Jeffery, 'The Irish soldier in the Boer War' in Gooch (ed.) *The Boer War: Direction, experience and image*, p. 147.

Browning Machine Guns suffered defeat and capture by Boer forces under the leadership of General Piet de Wet. The battle which lasted from 27-31 May 1900 was fought on a series of kopjes (small hills) outside the town of Lindley, north-eastern Free State. The following paragraphs in this section will provide a narrative of the engagement with some detailed analysis. This will be supported by eye-witness and contemporary accounts in order to determine the Irish experience and to evaluate their performance as an effective fighting unit. Public reaction to the defeat is discussed as is their understanding of the conflict and the battalion itself. Furthermore, contemporary perceptions of the engagement, which focused heavily on training and discipline, will be explored, as will the question of whether patriotism improved the overall fighting quality of the Irish units.

**Fig. 46: Some members of No.1 troop of the Dublin Squadron, I.Y., at Maitland Camp, Cape Town. (Table Mountain in the background)**



Source, Maurice Fitzgibbon, *Arts under arms-an university man in khaki* (London, 1901), p. 81.

Prior to Lindley, the 13th Battalion had been in South Africa for nearly two months. In that time, the men trained by sections, practised skirmishing drills on foot, and performed outpost duty and basic tasks around the camp. The remainder of the time was then spent on trains and horseback travelling across South Africa to new destinations. On 23 May 1900, the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Spragge,<sup>119</sup> departed from Bloemfontein. Under orders from Lord Roberts' headquarters, the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to

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<sup>119</sup> Spragge had notable experience in the British army prior to the war in South Africa. He served during the Jowaki Expedition in the North West Frontier (1877-78); the second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80); and the Burma War (1885).

reinforce Major-General Sir Henry Colville's under strength 9<sup>th</sup> Division;<sup>120</sup> that division, that was to form the right flank for the advance on Johannesburg, was short of mounted units. Colville was to march to the town of Lindley and then continue north towards Heilbron *en route* to Johannesburg. The 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to join forces with Colville south of Kroonstad at Ventersburg, but due to delays, the battalion was ordered up to Kroonstad. It was there that Spragge was handed a telegram with orders to join Colville at Lindley some forty-five miles away. The telegraph began a series of controversies with regards to the battle. Colville categorically denied ever sending this telegram, which caused confusion to orders and led to the isolation of the yeomanry battalion in hostile territory.

Unaware that the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered to march on to Lindley, Colville moved his force eighteen miles north of the town. As the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion continued its march, they encountered eight Boers who wished to hand in their arms and obtain passes from the commandant so they could return safely to their farms. The Boers handed over several outdated rifles with only one Mauser, which Trooper Fitzgibbon believed 'should have aroused suspicion'. It was clear that these Boers were scouts and, instead of being held prisoners, 'they naturally returned to Lindley and told their friends what they had seen.'<sup>121</sup> Trooper Fitzgibbon, clearly emotional from his battle experience, recollected the preposterous and unbelievable lack of forethought by the commanding officers:

The scouts of the Boer commandoes at Lindley had been permitted to enter our lines, to find out our numbers, our armaments, and the amount of our supplies, had even had lunch with us, and all this information and hospitality at the expense of a few out-of-date rifles, and of a few perjured oaths.<sup>122</sup>

At 1300 hrs on Sunday, 27 May, the yeomanry arrived at Lindley expecting to find Colville's division. Spragge told the court of inquiry that he found General Colville gone with no instructions of any sort left. The town was seemingly deserted save for a few Boers who were too frightened to give any information.<sup>123</sup> For a period of an hour a forward section of the DCO patrolled the town, while some officers purchased eggs, bread and chickens in the shops until they drew fire from the Boers. Boer scout intelligence had monitored the progress of the column and prepared their positions on the surrounding hills. Dr David Martin, a trooper with

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<sup>120</sup> Sir Henry Colville had a wealth of military experience in the British Army spanning over thirty years. Within his service, he served in the Suakin Expedition seeing action at the battles of El Teb and Tamai (1884-85); was D.A.A.C. in the Nile Expedition (1885-5); A.A.G. with the Frontier Forces (1885-6); Acting Commissioner in Uganda (1883-95); and commanded the Unyoro Expedition in 1894.

<sup>121</sup> L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history of the war in South Africa, 1899-1902*, iv (London, 1906), p. 254.

<sup>122</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arms under arms-an university man in Khaki*, p. 121.

<sup>123</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 416.

the 45<sup>th</sup>, remembered: ‘Suddenly, to our amazement, we heard firing commence in front of us ... the bullets were whizzing over our heads and all around us.’<sup>124</sup> Fitzgibbon recalled the first time he was under fire ‘as the beginning of a thunderstorm in summer time.’<sup>125</sup> Lance-Corporal St John Blake, of the 45<sup>th</sup>, considered it the ‘most unpleasant moment’ of his life but the image of Captain Pakenham braving the intense fire in his saddle and encouraging the men, instilled belief and renewed confidence.<sup>126</sup> As the pressure intensified and casualties began to mount, the order was given to retire from the town under cover fire. The men retired to a position some two miles north-west of Lindley where their baggage was kept and the place of defence was chosen.

The area of defence was a series of kopjes surrounding a valley 500 feet wide; the left flank was defended by the DCO; a kraal (enclosure of livestock) which commanded the eastern plateau was assigned to the Dublin Company; the right flank was guarded by the 46<sup>th</sup> Company; while the 54<sup>th</sup> was kept in reserve (see page xix for map of Lindley).<sup>127</sup> Despite it being a baptism of fire for the majority of the battalion, and their apparent lack of training and discipline notwithstanding, the men withdrew in good order. According to Sergeant George Moody, of the 46<sup>th</sup>, ‘Col Spragge was so taken by surprise’ by the Boer attack, that Lord Longford had to control the situation by encouraging the colonel to react.<sup>128</sup> As the Dublin Company retired, Colonel Spragge called out, ‘That’s the way to retire; not like a pack of sheep.’<sup>129</sup>

The following day, General Colville awoke to a telegram from Spragge: ‘Found no one in Lindley but Boers-have 500 men but only one day’s food, have stopped three miles back on Kroonstad Road. I want help to get out without great loss’.<sup>130</sup> Colville had options but he chose to remain on course to Heilbron which he believed was essential to Lord Robert’s strategy. His force was already under pressure from Boers in the surrounding areas and was an eighteen mile march away from Lindley. He also thought Spragge’s mobile force would be able to break out and make an alternative route. In the opinion of Colville, the

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<sup>124</sup> *Irish Times*, 5 July 1900.

<sup>125</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arms under arms-an university man in Khaki*, p. 126.

<sup>126</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 July 1900.

<sup>127</sup> Amery (ed.), *The Times history of the war in South Africa, 1899-1902*, iv, pp 254-257. A map drawn by Trooper Clarke, 45<sup>th</sup> Company, is provided on pages 260-261. Boer War diary of James John Clarke 1900 (MS in the possession of Michael Steemson, Wellington, New Zealand).

<sup>128</sup> George Moody, Vrede to his mother. Letter., 10 June 1900 (P.R.O.N.I., D1454/1/26A).

<sup>129</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 July 1900.

<sup>130</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 290.

message lacked urgency with regards the Boers and their supplies.<sup>131</sup> Colville sent several messengers ordering Spragge to abandon Lindley and retire on to Kroonstad; to live off the country and if necessary, abandon the wagons. All of the messages failed to be delivered. The decision to abandon the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion was met with criticism from Lord Roberts who believed that Colville ‘displayed a want of military instinct in deciding to march instead of returning to the assistance of the yeomanry’.<sup>132</sup> When questioned at the Royal Commission, Colville defended his actions by suggesting that if the battalion was killed to a man, it was his duty to see out Lord Roberts’ orders.<sup>133</sup>

In the following days, the men held out against a growing number of Boers, some 2,000 armed with two effective artillery pieces; the Maxim-Nordenfeldt ‘Pom-Pom’ and two Maxim machine guns. Due to the hardness of the ground and the lack of sufficient entrenching tools, the yeomanry were in a vulnerable position from sniper and artillery fire. The men prepared their position as best they could by building some stone shelters throughout the first night and in some cases, used anthills which added some much needed protection and cover. As space became more restricted, several counter attacks were made on the neighbouring ridges in an attempt to push back the Boers. Captain Pakenham led one such charge; Corporal St John Blake remembered the bravery of their captain- leading a bayonet charge he was shot three times, standing facing the shower of bullets in a ‘mass of blood’: ‘A truer, braver, finer fellow never put on uniform.’<sup>134</sup> It was recorded that as he finally succumbed to his wounds and dropped to the ground, shouting ‘Never mind boys! Let the best man lead you; and fight like Irishmen.’<sup>135</sup>

The accounts of heroism and hardship were illustrated graphically in reports across the Irish press, where several eye-witness narratives were published in both the *Irish Times*

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<sup>131</sup> For Colville’s defence see Major-General Sir Henry Colville, *The work of the Ninth Division* (London, 1901).

<sup>132</sup> Following the action, Lord Roberts wrote a letter to the Under Secretary of State of War detailing his concerns on the behaviour of General Colville; he believed his actions should result in him losing his position of command in South Africa. He explained the lack of initiative and military capacity on two occasions- battle of Sanna’s Post and Lindley. Due to his apparent mistakes, Roberts relieved Colville of his divisional command and ordered him to return home to England. *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 290.

<sup>133</sup> It is believed that he also carried out Roberts’s orders as he was considerably out of favour; in a letter regarding the loss of guns and transport at Sanna’s Post, Colville wrote a letter to D.W. Cowen asking ‘was Lord Roberts very angry with me’, hoping the rumour to not be true. *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 296 and 299.

<sup>134</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 July 1900.

<sup>135</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arts under arms - an university man in Khaki*, p. 162.

and the *Kildare Observer*. A letter from William Irvine, of the 46<sup>th</sup> Belfast Company, conveys the ordeal:

We had a hard fight, and were four days and four nights in the trenches ... We had hardly anything to eat, only one buiscuit (sic) and a wine-glass of tea each day and the last two days only tea without bread or biscuit ... I was glad to have my pipe, as I smoked when I got the chance'.<sup>136</sup>

The scarcity was further illustrated by Trooper James Arnold Smithwick, son of the Chairman of Kilkenny County Council, who recalled 'five days on practically empty stomachs ... our horses were dog tired.'<sup>137</sup> Trooper James John Clarke remembered three days of 'heavy sniping' and 'very hot firing.' Despite the lack of emotion and fine detail presented from this trooper, the extent of the battle is clear; continual pressure exerted by the Boer forces lead him to believe that the men 'had to surrender.'<sup>138</sup> The details of the battle portrayed the intensity of Boer fire-power. Private Irvine, at the same battle, recalled the narrow shaves he faced during the siege:

The anthill I got behind for cover, had several holes made in it, and one shot came taking the top of it away just about one inch from my head, and in another places. I was lying behind some stones, when a bullet knocked a chip off the stone at my head; it was a near shave, and several came within a few feet ... It would remind you of a hailstone shower on the lake the way the sand was knocked up by the showers of bullets. You would wonder how men could live under such fire.<sup>139</sup>

As the battle wore on, the pressure began to tell on the men, bringing their training and discipline into question. The situation became critical when two hundred Boers attacked a kopje defended by Lieutenant Alexander of the DCOs and a small company of men. As the situation wavered, the order was made to retire towards Lieutenant Robin at a nearby hill. In a state of panic Corporal Jacques offered the white flag which consequently led him to be shot by his men. However, Lieutenant Robin, apparently felt bound to this act and surrendered his whole position. This allowed the Boers access to the valley which was a position of tactical importance. Colonel Spragge, realising the difficulty of their position, ordered a general surrender in a bid to avoid 'useless sacrifice of life'.<sup>140</sup> Following the surrender, Spragge admitted to his captors that the raising of the white flag 'was a

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<sup>136</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 28 July 1900.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 Sept. 1900.

<sup>138</sup> Boer War diary of James John Clarke, 1900 (MS in the possession of Michael Steemson, Wellington, New Zealand). See pages 258-264 for diary entries.

<sup>139</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 28 July 1900.

<sup>140</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 417.

mistake'.<sup>141</sup> Lieutenant Robin was in apparent distress following the surrender, with eye-witnesses claiming that he threatened to 'blow out his brains', before his troops' intervened.<sup>142</sup> As the men awaited their captors, Sergeant George Moody recalled, that most of the men managed to 'injure their rifles first throwing away the bolt or injuring the sights or best of all giving the barrell (sic) a twist between 2 rocks'.<sup>143</sup> Remarkably, despite days of intense engagement, the battalion mingled freely with their Boer captors discussing the battle.<sup>144</sup> Such examples of respect for the opposing forces reinforced the idea that the South African War was 'the last of the gentlemen's wars'; it was generally believed that the war 'followed some set of rules for behaviour'.<sup>145</sup> However, with continued reports of alleged Boer misuse of the white flag, the use of expansive bullets, and the British policy of scorched-earth, deportations and concentrations camps, the term 'gentlemen's war' becomes increasingly void. Indeed, the South African conflict is often portrayed as one of the first modern conflicts.

Following the four days of fighting, the total casualties for the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion were seven officers and seventy-three men, with twenty-five dead. The Boers suffered seventy casualties with thirty killed. The fit and able were forced to endure the twenty-eight day march to the Boer prison laager at Nooitgedacht. The march included sleeping in the open veldt, breaking the ice in their buckets each morning and enduring intense heat throughout the day. Yet, 'considering everything', Trooper Middleton believed they were well treated.<sup>146</sup> Some remained behind at Lindley due to the seriousness of their wounds, while others remained in Reitz, a Free State town, a three day march from Lindley due to sickness. Several cases of acute rheumatism and tonsillitis were reported.<sup>147</sup> Maurice Fitzgibbon remained in Reitz as he was a medical student with three years training and consequently became medical officer of the battalion. He had, in his charge, twenty-four patients with several cases of dysentery and enteric fever. The rest of the battalion would remain in a 'beautiful barb-wired cage' for several months until relieved by British forces. One trooper put his situation into

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<sup>141</sup> According to a Boer account of the battle, it is suggested that had DCOs held their position, his column would not have fallen. The attack was the 'last and only chance' for success. See P.H. Kritzing and R.E. MacDonald, *In the shadow of death* (London, 1904).

<sup>142</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 417.

<sup>143</sup> George Moody, Vrede (South Africa) to his mother. Letter., 10 June 1900 (P.R.O.N.I., D1454/1/26A).

<sup>144</sup> Fitzgibbon, *Arms under arms-an university man in Khaki*, p. 174.

<sup>145</sup> F.R.V. Hartesveldt, *The Boer War: historiography and annotated bibliography* (Westport, 2000), p. 32.

<sup>146</sup> *Irish Times*, 1 Sep. 1900. Interestingly in the letter to his father he remains optimistic and rather thankful for the kindness of the Boers. Yet he wrote another letter to his aunt stating they were 'being half-starved and badly housed...practically in rags'. *Kildare Observer*, 20 Oct. 1900.

<sup>147</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 Aug. 1900.

perspective, illustrating the extent of weariness, sorrow and memories of the battle. ‘I can only reconcile myself to stand it when I think of the ghastly experiences I had at Lindley and my own marvellous escapes, my chums falling, day after day, around me-how much, how very much, worse off I might be.’<sup>148</sup>

**Fig. 47: Temporary military hospita at Reitz with casualties of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion**



Source, Maurice Fitzgibbon, *Arts under arms-an university man in khaki* (London, 1901), p. 205.

In Ireland, the news of Lindley was met with despair in the national press. ‘Ireland is in mourning today for more of her gallant sons who have fallen while facing their country’s foes’, described the *Irish Times*; the *Skibbereen Eagle* reported ‘widespread anxiety in Dublin’.<sup>149</sup> On 8 June 1900, the ‘melancholy roll of honour’ began to emerge in the Irish press of the defeat and subsequent capture of the Irish battalion. The paper noted with sadness, the death of Andrew Marshall Porter, son of the Master of Rolls, ‘a fine athlete and a thoroughly good fellow’, leaving a notable gap in social circles in Dublin.<sup>150</sup> Three days later the brother of Trooper McElnea, wrote to the editor of the newspaper expressing his sadness at the list of casualties. He recalled remarks made by Lieutenant Villiers Stuart at the Curragh before departure; ‘Lads with you at my back I would storm the gates of hell.’<sup>151</sup> In the House of Commons, politicians sought further details pertaining to the disaster ‘in view of the anxiety which prevails’ in Dublin and Belfast.<sup>152</sup>

In the *Irish Times* issue of 8 June 1900, the editor stated that ‘we sympathise, even better than before, with the relatives of the many Irish soldiers of humbler position but equal

<sup>148</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 1 Sep. 1900.

<sup>149</sup> *Skibbereen Eagle*, 9 June 1900.

<sup>150</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 June 1900.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 June 1900. The author ended the letter by saying, ‘I am sure when the details of the disastrous fight come to hand it will be found that Lindley was equally warm.’

<sup>152</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 25 June, 1900, lxxxiv, col. 899.

gallantry, who have endured wounds and death for the honour of the Empire'.<sup>153</sup> Interestingly, Nationalist politician Jasper Tully, M.P. for Leitrim South, commended the Irish yeomanry who 'distinguished themselves so greatly' only to be 'butchered' by the inexperienced doctors in charge of treating their wounds.<sup>154</sup> The editor of the *Irish Times* also noted the 'revolting' claims that the Irish yeomen being taken prisoner were evidence of lack of courage. Nevertheless the extent of surrenders witnessed in South Africa was so great that it worried the military and the government. Liberal M.P. George Lambert detailed several cases of unwarranted British surrenders at Stormberg, Nicholson's Nek, Sanna's Post, Reddersburg and Lindley. Regarding Lindley, he questioned 'whether these troops held out as long as they could' but did not want to 'impugn the conduct of millionaires'. Yet he did call into question the reports that only eight armed Boers provided the escort of the captured yeoman, without any attempt at escape; he continued unopposed:

...what is the value of the patriotic but untrained soldiers who volunteer to go and fight the enemy in South Africa or elsewhere? We are undoubtedly largely relying at this moment upon the patriotic but untrained men sent out to the Cape, and we want to know whether these forces are really capable of sustaining - not by their courage, that is beyond doubt, but by their training-the credit of the Empire in foreign countries. Would they be sufficient to meet the trained armies of Continental nations should they be called upon to face them?<sup>155</sup>

For Lambert, the engagement at Lindley exposed the deficiencies of the Imperial Yeomanry with regards their training and their discipline. Similarly, Lord Roberts expressed great anxiety in allowing areas of strategic importance to be protected and monitored by amateur soldiers. He asserted, in the Royal Commissioner's report on matters connected to the South African War, that:

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<sup>153</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 June 1900.

<sup>154</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 15 Feb., 1901, lxxxix, col. 247. In parliament on 19 March 1901, Mr Tully extended this point on detailing the incompetency of doctors. He 'knew a private in the Irish Yeomanry who fought at Lindley, and he received a slight injury which ought to have healed in a week or two with proper treatment, but in consequence of being dealt with by an incompetent doctor at the front that soldier was now limping about Dublin with one leg. That would not have happened if they had not tried to run the Army on society lines, with society generals and society doctors. There were numbers of men in Ireland who had lost their limbs through merely trivial wounds, and this could have been prevented if their injuries had been attended to at the time by competent doctors'. *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 19 Mar., 1901, xci, col. 546.

<sup>155</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 25 Feb., 1901, lxxxix, col. 1074. Due to the social standing of some of the troopers in the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the press and contemporary publications regularly considered that the majority of the battalion consisted of 'millionaires'. This claim was reinforced by the actions of the 47<sup>th</sup> Company (Duke of Cambridge's Own) who donated their wages to charity and covered all their own expenses. In one such example, Scottish inventor and author, K.L. Dickson, stated that the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion consisted 'mostly' of millionaires, whilst ninety per cent of the 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company were 'gentlemen'. K.L. Dickson, *The biograph in battle: its story in the South African War related with personal experiences* (London, 1901), p. 203.

...the great anxiety I felt in regard to my communications being held in many places by partially trained troops, such as the militia and hastily raised Yeomanry ... the result was that our ill-trained troops often led me into great difficulties ... the capture of the Irish Yeomanry at Lindley ... showed what a danger it was to depend on troops who were not thoroughly disciplined and organised.<sup>156</sup>

Lord Roberts also questioned the battalion's discipline stating that 'disciplined troops have much more confidence in each other and I think that is the reason why the yeomanry had to give in quickly'.<sup>157</sup> This is an interesting statement as there were several cases, throughout the war of regular British units hoisting up the white flag.<sup>158</sup> From reading his analysis of the Imperial Yeomanry, Roberts seemed at ease blaming the training of troops as the main concern. Yet this swipe could be seen as a veiled criticism of the Imperial Yeomanry Committee and the War Office in preparing those troops for war. The overall opinion of the Royal Commission's inquiry into the war, believed that the majority of the First Contingent 'could ride and handle fire-arms, though owing to want of experience with rifles their shooting was in most cases indifferent'.<sup>159</sup> Despite the reservations made by their former Commander-in-Chief, some witnesses considered the men reliable after a short time, due to their 'individual intelligence', 'independence', 'confidence' and '*esprit de corps*'.<sup>160</sup> This message was reinforced by Lord Methuen, following his examination of the battlefield; Corporal St John Blake of the 45<sup>th</sup>, recorded the message in a letter to his wife: 'Boy's don't think you are disgraced, for it was absolutely impossible for you to hold out any longer, and I, for you, can't understand how you held out for so long.'<sup>161</sup>

On 21 and 25 September 1900, a court of inquiry into the engagement at Lindley was held; this included the questioning of dozens of witnesses including Lieutenant-Colonel Spragge, Lord Longford and Lieutenant Alexander of the DCOs. The court found that:

- That Lieut.-Colonel Spragge took all necessary military precautions and occupied the best available position;
- That he held out as long as possible as he could, but could have continued to do so longer had not irresponsible persons raised white flags;

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<sup>156</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1791], H.C. xli.1, 63.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>158</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 25 Feb., 1901, lxxxix, col. 1070. Mr Lambert stated that 8,703 men and 329 officers surrendered, in addition to the capture of thirty guns.

<sup>159</sup> *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. lxi, 71.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>161</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 July 1900.

- And that the Officers and men whose cases were under investigation were taken prisoner by the chances of war

The court found that Corporal Leonard Jacques of the DCO hoisted the white flag without orders, and that the second white flag ordered by Lieutenant Robin ‘was under the misapprehension’ that he was bound to respect it. The court exonerated all officers concerned with the engagement. Colville left his position as divisional commander and subsequently took command of an Infantry Brigade in Gibraltar. However, the court’s findings placed ‘the conduct of Colville in an unfavourable light’ which led to his new position in Gibraltar being untenable. Colville returned home to England, but refused to resign his command. He was sacked and forced to retire on pay having brought his case to the press.<sup>162</sup>

Given their surrender at Lindley, the question remains whether the men can be considered an inadequate independent fighting force. The evidence presented demonstrates that the men did exceptionally well in maintaining their position under artillery fire for several days. Despite the lack of sleep, food, defences, and artillery support, the men maintained their morale and discipline. Given those circumstances, the Battalion did remarkably well considering this was their first engagement with the enemy. Colonel Frank Graves, who was in command of 83<sup>rd</sup> Regimental District and in charge of the organisation of the Belfast companies, believed that the Ulster men put in a heroic defence despite the lack of food and the tremendous odds. It was only when they became the target of artillery, that defence was futile. He insisted that the troops were carefully selected and trained which was demonstrated by their impressive resistance.<sup>163</sup> In Lindley some of the blame rested with Colonel Spragge having failed to act decisively. Lord Roberts considered his manner of defence inadequate, with areas of tactical importance held by only small numbers of men. He believed that any position was vulnerable when large numbers attacked a remote party placing the whole position at risk.

Criticism of the defeat also appeared in the British media, instigated by Arthur Conan Doyle. Within the daily British newspaper the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Doyle was sceptical of the behaviour of Colonel Spragge and the battalion. He was disappointed in the organisation and

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<sup>162</sup> *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 417. Trooper Sidney Peel, a member of the relief force, stated that the rank and file were not surprised by the recall of General Colville, despite some officers believing that Colville could have done nothing to save the battalion. Peel, Trooper 8008 IY, p. 85. For General Colville’s public defence of his actions, see *Irish Times*, 5 Jan. 1901.

<sup>163</sup> *Report of the Deputy Adjutant-General of the force regarding its home organisation, inspection of the constitution of its base and advanced depots and distribution of stores in South Africa and proposals for future organisation*, [CD 803], H.C. lvi.619, 187-188.

preparations of the defences, while seemingly bemused that the men failed to build adequate trenches. He also believed that the action was ‘the most disappointing of the whole war’.<sup>164</sup> In his book *The great Boer War*, he impresses on the reader the quality of the men believing that they would ‘fight to the death’ as their honour would expect. Nevertheless, he contradicts this by claiming that these men prepared inadequate defensive measures.<sup>165</sup> One trooper, of the Forty-Fifth Company took grave exception to Doyle’s narrative and analysis of the action. In a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the trooper wished to ‘correct’ the statement on the subject of trenches:

Our battalion had not got with them a single spade or other implement by which such a measure could have been carried out ... he(Conan Doyle) is aware that the rocky nature of the kopjes would render the making of trenches impossible, except by processes of blasting

The trooper was adamant in his defence stating that De Wet claimed they were excellent marksmen and demonstrated typical Irish bravery. Doyle replied to the letter, through the newspaper’s editor, apologising for impugning the character of the battalion. He retracted his previous statement, that the men had spades and shovels in which to prepare a trench, but quickly added that a bayonet ‘at a pinch can in time throw up some cover’.<sup>166</sup> With regards the lack of entrenching tools, this was a failure on the organisation of army stores; each battalion of the Imperial Yeomanry was supposed to be supplied with entrenching tools including; thirty shovels; six spades; and thirty pick axes. This inventory would suffice for the 509 officers and the men of the battalion and would offer the ideal tools in which entrenching could be made possible.<sup>167</sup> The failure to adequately supply the battalion with entrenching tools demonstrated a complete disregard, and disjoint from the realities of warfare during this campaign. Examples throughout the first months of the war – Nicholson’s Nek, Spion Kop and Ladysmith – revealed the importance and necessity of an effective defence, from an entrenched position; several examples throughout the Tugela campaign illustrated the futility of the offensive in certain scenarios, in the face of modern technology. The failure to sufficiently supply entrenching tools and prepare the battalion for defensive engagements demonstrates the lack of responsiveness to the changing environment of the modern battlefield.

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<sup>164</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 Dec. 1900.

<sup>165</sup> Doyle, *The great Boer War*, pp 458-460.

<sup>166</sup> Letters are contained in Fitzgibbon, *Arms under arms - an university man in khaki*, pp 168-173.

<sup>167</sup> *Report of the Deputy Adjutant-General of the force regarding its home organisation, inspection of the constitution of its base and advanced depots and distribution of stores in South Africa and proposals for future organisation*, [CD 803], H.C. lvi.619, 220.

From the evidence presented it is clear that no single party could be blamed for the surrender of the Irish battalion. Bennett believed that the battalion's defeat was not down to their training and their apparent poor discipline, rather it was the inadequate command system which confused the orders isolating the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion in hostile territory.<sup>168</sup> In many respects, this is a true assessment. The majority of men behaved admirably, displaying discipline and good morale. During the battle the battalion did not remain purely defensive as on several occasions sorties were conducted to consolidate and improve their position. However the enemies' superior numbers and heavy artillery fire eventually led to their capitulation.<sup>169</sup> Lord Roberts placed major emphasis on the inadequate training and poor discipline of the troops. He highlighted concerns over Colonel Spragge's role in the defence, questioning his tactical movements throughout the battle. However, Colville became Lord Roberts' and the government's scapegoat. The Secretary of State, St John Brodrick, raised concerns over Colville's actions, and Lord Roberts held him 'mainly responsible' for the surrender of the Imperial Yeomanry. Despite the grave reservation that Lord Roberts' held regarding the actions and shortcomings of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, it was subsequently overruled by the actions of Colville. For the Nationalist MP T.M. Healy, the blame rested with the 'mismanagement of certain English commanders' at Lindley. In the words of Healy, Colville simply 'turned his back' on the Irish battalion.<sup>170</sup> This was a superficial interpretation of the situation as the inadequate command system was equally to blame, as was the insufficient military preparation made by the War Office.

The *Irish Times* reacted to the negative reports, across the press, with regards Lindley by maintaining a firm support for the yeomen. The paper had invested interest in the Irish yeomanry since their initial embodiment, excited by the role Irishmen were to have in the war. In the face of the shambles at Lindley, solace was found by the paper in their patriotism and loyalty to the Empire; the passage from 8 June 1900 reinforces the common

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<sup>168</sup> Bennett, *Absent minded beggars: Yeomanry and volunteers in the Boer War*, p. 122.

<sup>169</sup> Interestingly surrendering was a recurring event during the South African War. This was a relatively new scenario, as throughout colonial wars surrender was never considered an option. During the South African War, General Ian Hamilton believed that the men were more anxious to surrender than to kill or wound their adversaries. This in his opinion was down to a 'common language', 'no religious implacability' and no actual hatred existed between them. It is apparent that a common understanding and culture resonated throughout the conflict that perhaps offers an example to the idea of 'the last of the gentlemen's wars'. *Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire in the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa*, [CD 1789], H.C. xli.1, 58. As regards surrendering, an inquiry was sought by members of parliament calling into question the conduct of the War Office and Lord Lansdowne; Her Majesty's generals and officers; the general conduct of the forces in the field of operations; and the training of troops. Furthermore, General Hamilton believed that surrenders would not have happened if their adversary had been a continental power.

<sup>170</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 13 Dec. 1900, lxxxviii, col. 794.

contemporary understanding of the First Contingent's unique embodiment and the strength of patriotism throughout the first months of 1900:

They did not go to the front, be it remembered, at a time when it was thought that the war would be a walk-over ... Not till after Magersfontein and Colenso had shown us how stern was the opposition to be encountered were their services called for; and they knew when they started for South Africa that certain hardships, probable wounds, and possible death, would be their fate. They never flinched, but left their offices, their college rooms, their pleasant country houses, and went forth joyfully to their part in fighting for QUEEN (emphasis in original) and country.<sup>171</sup>

**Fig. 48: Officers of the 45<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> Companies, captured at Lindley, 26 June 1900. Colonel Spragge sits at the head of the table, to the right of the picture. On his right (in order) Lieut. Stannus (45<sup>th</sup>), Captain R. Robinson (?), Lieut. Villiers Stuart (45<sup>th</sup>), Lieut. Du Pre (47<sup>th</sup>), and Veterinary Lieut. Fenner (I.Y. staff). On his left Surgeon Captain Hadley (I.Y. staff), Captain Robin (47<sup>th</sup>), Lord Longford (45<sup>th</sup>), Lieut. Wright (47<sup>th</sup>), and Lieut. Lane (47<sup>th</sup>)**



Source, H.W. Wilson, *With the flag to Pretoria: a history of the Boer War of 1899-1900*, ii (London, 1900), p. 666.

### Concluding remarks

Few tangible reminders exist in Ireland of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Shortly after the end of hostilities comrades of the 45<sup>th</sup> erected a monument in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. It was dedicated to the nine members of the company who died serving 'their country' in South Africa.<sup>172</sup> A personal memorial was dedicated to the memory of William Chetwode by his

<sup>171</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 June 1900.

<sup>172</sup> Trooper W Blake, T Gargan, J.E. Byrne, A. Marshall Porter, E. Wilmot Chetwode, C Power, N Fenner, H.J. Robinson and J Smith.

mother and sisters in St John the Evangelist Church, Emo, County Laois. At City Hall, Belfast, there is a plaque dedicated to the 46<sup>th</sup>, 54<sup>th</sup>, and the 60<sup>th</sup>, alongside four other companies of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion – Lindley is included as a battle honour.<sup>173</sup> These physical reminders were a distinguishing feature throughout the Victorian era as a result of Irish participation in British expansion. Andrew Marshall Porter, a student in Trinity College, is perhaps the only member of the company that remains somewhat, in the public consciousness – although it is highly doubtful that many know the Lindley connection.<sup>174</sup> In addition to the scholarship, a stained glass memorial was erected in memory of the trooper, which is situated in the Graduates Memorial Building, Trinity College.<sup>175</sup> The dearth of public memory on the military participation of the Irish yeomen extends to Irish historical and military research. This is partly as a result of the small Irish numbers, their short term of service and the limited impact at the battle of Lindley had on the overall outcome of the war. Despite this, the study of Irish involvement in the Imperial Yeomanry highlights many important issues regarding Ireland's military tradition, their imperial footprint and the ability of the Empire to interact with Irish society.

Sir Kelly-Kenny observed that the individuals, who attested into the First Contingent, did so through the spirit of patriotism. The evidence that has been presented in this chapter, points to patriotism being a powerful influence. Despite growing Irish Nationalism and their anti-recruitment campaigns, the imperial sentiment remained strong in Ireland amongst loyalists, Protestants, and, in addition, within small sections of the Catholic community. The northern and southern Irish companies enlisted at a time of imperial crisis. The brotherhood expressed in their overwhelming enthusiasm to enrol was linked to the bonds of the Irish military tradition, politics, culture and religion, and quite possibly to an active reaction to Irish Nationalism. The landed class was the most vocal of all Irish social groups in expressing their loyalty to the British Empire. This is not surprising due to the massive military and imperial link between this class and Britain. Because of the loss in revenue, land and political power, the landed class were isolated in Ireland and this may account for the enthusiasm and passion with which they approached the Imperial Yeomanry which in turn led to its successful embodiment. Their support for the imperial mission was

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<sup>173</sup> Martin Staunton, 'Boer War memorials in Ireland' in *South African-Irish Studies*, iii (1996), p. 299.

<sup>174</sup> In 1900, following the death of Andrew Marshall Porter, his father, A.M. Porter, made a benefaction to Trinity College, Dublin, in memory of his son. Thus, to this day, the university has awarded the Marshall Porter Memorial Prize, for diligence in the subjects of classics, Greek, Latin, ancient history and archaeology, and classical civilisation.

<sup>175</sup> Timothy Smyth, 'The Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Arch and imperial commemoration in early twentieth-century Ireland', *South African-Irish Studies*, iv (2012), p. 30.

furthered by the desire to remain patriotic to the British Empire, and the Irish military tradition, despite the evident dangers they would face. The embodiment of the Imperial Yeomanry is an example of how aligned certain elements of Irish society were with the British Empire. Similarly to Great Britain and the Empire, Ireland demonstrated unequivocal support for the imperial project. Overall this material demonstrates that Ireland was a responsive nation to the demands of the British Empire. Similarly to Irish soldiers in the British army, and Irish citizens forming an integral component of the auxiliary forces, the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry by individuals, across a wide spectrum of Irish society, revealed that individuals were influenced by the ideas of imperialism. Clearly Black Week, the involvement of Irish regiments, the influence of the press, literature, war charities and politics had an impact on Irish interest in the war. The public interest manifested itself with Irishmen volunteering to serve their country. Moreover, it further demonstrates that elements of Irish society remained undeterred by the nationalist and pro-Boer movements and sentiment, and that Ireland was not entirely an island of insubordination. Over the next two years, several new Irish companies were formed into the Second and Third Contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry.<sup>176</sup> This included the 74<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, originally of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, who participated in the defence of Rooikopjes, on 24 August 1901. The battle which occurred near the town of Griquatown in the Northern Cape, was described ‘as a terrible sight’ by a trooper of the 74<sup>th</sup>, ‘one not likely to be ever forgotten by those who took part in it’.<sup>177</sup> Notwithstanding the war’s fall in popularity, elements of the Irish and British public still maintained an interest in the British military, and viewed the Imperial Yeomanry as an ideal occupation for a limited service.

Though the battle of Lindley was considered a humiliation by the British Army, considering the method of surrender and the social background of the battalion, despite the grievances expressed by the British High Command, the battalion performed admirably. In the opinion of one individual, ‘for the most part young men who had had but little military training - fresh from the Bar, the Universities, and the public schools, this action is a remarkable episode in military history’.<sup>178</sup> The battle exemplified much of what was expected from Irishmen; brave, loyal and formidable fighters. Their patriotism expressed on their day of recruitment, did not wane in the face of adversity and went beyond the expectation the

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<sup>176</sup> The Second Contingent comprised of the 74<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 60<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> Irish Companies that enrolled into the First Contingent, transferred to the Second Contingent. The 29<sup>th</sup> (Irish Horse) Battalion of the Third Contingent consisted of six Irish companies: 131<sup>st</sup>, 132<sup>nd</sup>, 133<sup>rd</sup>, 134<sup>th</sup>, 175<sup>th</sup>, 176<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>177</sup> *Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 1901.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 July 1900.

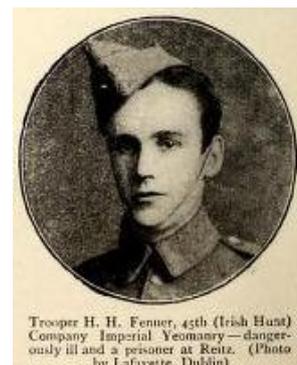
training delivered. The overall performance of the Irish units, and the significant level of volunteering, secured the future of Ireland's yeomanry forces. The development of the Irish yeomanry led to the establishment of two Irish mounted regiments of the British army – the South Irish Horse and the North Irish Horse.<sup>179</sup> The war, the Adjutant General asserted, 'evoked such patriotism, in Ireland, at Belfast and elsewhere that it is thought it would be only a suitable method of recognising this loyalty' to establish yeomanry forces in the country; six units were formed which comprised 1,800 men.<sup>180</sup> The 'loyalty' expressed was rewarded with an opportunity to serve the British armed forces throughout the Great War.<sup>181</sup>

**Fig. 49: Members of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion inside a prison at Nootgedacht**



Source, H.W. Wilson, *With the flag to Pretoria: a history of the Boer War of 1899-1900*, ii (London, 1900), p. 668.

**Fig. 50: Trooper N.F. Fenner and Trooper H.H. Fenner, 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company**



Source, *Black and White Budget*, 14 July 1900.

<sup>179</sup> See Murphy, *The Irish Brigades: a gazetteer of Irish military service, past and present*, pp 226 - 231.

<sup>180</sup> *Report of the Deputy Adjutant-General of the force regarding its home organisation, inspection of the constitution of its base and advanced depots and distribution of stores in South Africa and proposals for future organisation*, [CD 803], H.C. lvi.619, 113-114.

<sup>181</sup> For letters at the front detailing the experience of soldiers in the South Irish Horse and the North Irish Horse, see *Irish Times*, 28 Sep. 1914; 1 Oct. 1914; 6 Oct. 1914;; 2 Oct. 1915; for a letter written by Lieutenant Richard Annesley West of the North Irish Horse in France, previously of the 45<sup>th</sup> Company; he initially believed that 'There is much less hardship than in South Africa – in fact, so far, none'. *Irish Times*, 1 Oct. 1914.

## Chapter Four: The Home Front

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‘Wherever you go’ wrote one individual, ‘even into the pub behind a shutter to get a pint, it’s the same fertile topic.’<sup>1</sup> The outbreak of war in South Africa had an instant impact on Irish society; from the outset of the conflict, Irish loyalists heralded Ireland’s impressive military contribution, lauding their much publicised bravery and tenacity and feting Irish generals that rose to prominence. Moreover, sections of the Irish public actively engaged with matters concerning the Empire and the war. As a result of Irish interest in the conflict in South Africa, the public were inundated with an abundance of press coverage and literature publications. Unionist newspapers such as the *Irish Times*, *Belfast News-Letter*, *Dublin Daily Express*, *Northern Whig*, and the *Kildare Observer* among others, maintained a constant interest in the conflict, with the Irish public being continuously informed of latest developments, rumours, casualty lists, battle narratives, and Irish participation and experiences. In addition, the war filtered into music halls, church services and masses, schools, universities, public debates and lectures, taverns, concerts, plays, circuses, sports and politics.<sup>2</sup> The conflict also affected wholesale and retail prices, with items such as clothing and household goods increasing in price.<sup>3</sup>

In tandem, it was a time when nationalism became increasingly prevalent in Irish society, and the conflict further revealed the polarisation and significant divergent opinions that existed in Ireland, between Nationalists and Unionists. Irish Nationalists and pro-Boers instigated a campaign denouncing British aggression, its foreign policy in South Africa and Irish recruitment in the British army. Support for the Boers was further galvanised by the guidance of the Irish Transvaal Committee and the Irish Socialist Republican Party, the symbolic gesture and military contribution of MacBride’s Brigade, and the support of many staunch Irish Nationalist newspapers, including: the *Freeman’s Journal*, *Anglo-Celt*, *Irish Daily Independent*, *United Irishman*, *Cashel Sentinel*, *Westmeath Examiner*, *Connaught Telegraph*, and the *Cork Examiner*. The Irish pro-Boers and Nationalists showed their support by holding public demonstrations across the city of Dublin; on 1 October 1899, 20,000 people protested against ‘English’ aggression in the Transvaal at Beresford Place,

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<sup>1</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 Oct. 1899.

<sup>2</sup> For an article on the role of the Irish Literary Theatre and their contribution to the pro-Boer movement see P.T. Matthews, ‘Stirring up disloyalty: The Boer War, the Irish Literary Theatre and the emergence of a new separatism’ in *Irish University Review*, xxxiii (2003), pp 99-116.

<sup>3</sup> H.D. Gribbon, ‘Economic and social history, 1850-1921’ in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the union, ii: 1870 -1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 318.

near the Customs House, and large crowds of pro-Boers continued to protest and cause minor disturbances in the city centre.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, individuals such as Arthur Griffith, James Connolly, Maud Gonne, and W.B. Yeats helped to maintain a public campaign of ‘Boer fever’ and attempt to dissuade recruitment and support from the British army and government. Pro-Boerism also extended across the country, as corporations and committees passed resolutions of support for the Boer cause, whilst chastising the government, Irish participation and contribution to the war effort. Prior to the conflict, the Nenagh Branch of Trade and Labour Association ‘condemned’ the actions of the British Government, whilst praying that ‘God might strengthen the arm ... of the gallant Boer’.<sup>5</sup> Limerick Borough Council hoped the British would suffer another ‘Majuba’,<sup>6</sup> and the Limerick Land and Labour Association unanimously passed a resolution that condemned the ‘pharisaical and gold-grabbing policy of the English Government ... and we regret that an Irishman could be found willing to fire a shot or shed a drop blood in such an unholy war’.<sup>7</sup> Galway Urban Council passed a resolution that showed their antipathy towards the ‘renegade Irish mercenaries’ of the British army.<sup>8</sup> Cork Corporation, the Tipperary District Council, and the Limerick Branch of the United Irish Land League were other organisations that condemned the actions of the British government and voiced strong pro-Boer support.<sup>9</sup> In opposition to the those remarks made by corporations, councils and committees, Reverend J. Fenelon believed, ‘Our local councils were not very competent to form an opinion about the South African War’.<sup>10</sup>

The level of pro-Boer and anti-British rhetoric instigated by Irish Nationalists notwithstanding, sections of Irish society responded with the dutiful obedience expected by the values of imperialism. From the available evidence, it appears that the war was popular amongst elements of Irish society and they reacted with open enthusiasm throughout significant moments in the conflict; such responses were characteristic of Irish patriotic support. For loyalists, the war presented an opportunity to reinforce the bonds with the United Kingdom, and demonstrate Ireland as resourceful and loyal to the demands of the Empire. For some Home Rulers, the war was considered an excellent opportunity to demonstrate

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<sup>4</sup> D.P. McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003), pp 41-42.

<sup>5</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 7 Oct. 1899.

<sup>6</sup> *Southern Star*, 7 Oct. 1899.

<sup>7</sup> *Irish Times*, 5 Oct. 1899.

<sup>8</sup> *Cashel Sentinel*, 4 Nov. 1899.

<sup>9</sup> See other examples *Irish Times*, 23 Sep. 1899, 7 Oct. 1899 and 26 Dec. 1899; *Dublin Daily Express*, 19 Oct. 1899; *Cork Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1899.

<sup>10</sup> *Meath Chronicle*, 10 Mar. 1900.

Ireland's suitability for self-governance within the community of nations. Nevertheless, regardless of the political stance of Irish citizens during this period, the war personally affected tens of thousands of Irish families, as soldiers were quickly mobilised and despatched to the theatre of war, and the resultant loss of many of the primary bread winners had a detrimental effect on the livelihoods of families across the country.

The main focus of this chapter is to illustrate how Ireland reacted positively to the demands of the British Empire and the South African War: a period that has failed to generate significant research and interest previously. Research to date on Ireland during this period, illustrates an island that was largely defiant towards their parent nation, with little or no reference of Irish participation in the conflict and the positive contribution instigated by the Irish public. This chapter attempts to record Ireland as an active member of the British Empire. As a result of the dearth of research available on this episode of Irish history, the interpretations of Irish loyalists and the significant contribution of elements of Irish society to the war have been undermined and/or largely forgotten. In order to discuss Ireland's positive reaction and civilian interaction with the war, several elements must be discussed: firstly, the immediate reaction of Irish loyalists to the war highlighted in their response; secondly, the impact of the press, their stance on the war, and their publications of 'letters from the front', war verses and ballads; thirdly, the creation of Irish war charities and the active contribution and concern of Irish citizens for British soldiers and their families; the role of Irish nurses, doctors and the Irish Sisters of Mercy will also be discussed, as will the establishment of Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital; finally, the relationship between Ireland and the military, including the intimate effect it had on families epitomised in the committal of thirty two soldiers, that served in the South African War, into a psychiatric hospital in Dublin. The significance of public demonstrations of solidarity and citizens' active participation in the war cannot be understated; their expressions of loyalty were projected across the United Kingdom and the British Empire, revealing the country's resourcefulness and their qualities for the benefit of the union.

It is intended, therefore, that this chapter will demonstrate an Ireland undeterred by Irish Nationalists and pro-Boers and characterised by an active expression of support for the imperial project from the Irish home front. The steadfast and unperturbed attitude that will be illustrated throughout this chapter was aptly summarised by an 'Irish Imperialist'; the

individual maintained that Ireland's position in the British Empire 'was not compromised by a few cowardly scamps' like John MacBride.<sup>11</sup>

### **Loyalist reaction to the war**

On the eve of war, as the Transvaal crisis steadily grew worse, the Irish public were engaging with the latest developments from South Africa. Irish loyalists increasingly defended the political rights of the Uitlanders and damned the stance undertaken by 'Irish Krugerites',<sup>12</sup> while newspapers such as the *Irish Times*, remained staunch defenders of unionism and the British Empire, becoming the focal point of support for British policy in South Africa. Conversely, the majority of Irish Nationalists, and numerous councils and committees, sympathised with the Boer struggle against the suppressive aggression of the British Empire and the role the Uitlanders were playing in instigating a conflict. As political tensions became increasingly strained over the question of Uitlander citizenship in the Transvaal, the *Irish Times* editor lamented the 'misfortune' of dealing with 'narrow-minded set of despots', that refused to acknowledge their inability to 'retain their supremacy' in the Transvaal.<sup>13</sup> To one observer, Boer hegemony would have a detrimental impact on the rights and political representations of 'Irish Uitlanders'.<sup>14</sup> It is unclear of the exact number of Irish settlers in South Africa prior to the conflict; however, Donal P. McCracken was able to establish that 5,244 first-generation were living in the Cape and Natal, in 1891.<sup>15</sup> With a substantial number of Irish immigrants and a significant nineteenth century tradition of Irish settlement in the region, it is understandable that the Irish press would take an interest in the affairs of the 'Irish Uitlanders'. If there was a refusal to accept the Uitlanders into Transvaal society and politics, the Transvaalers would, in the opinion of the *Irish Times*, 'face the consequences'.<sup>16</sup> The question of Boer support in Ireland and the supremacy of Boers in the Transvaal was a matter of discussion for the Ennis Urban Council; certain individuals expressed confusion over the extent of sympathy for the Boers, believing that Kruger's control in the Transvaal was 'similar to the policy pursued by (Oliver) Cromwell' during the 1700s in Ireland. In a similar sentiment, following the beginning of hostilities, the *Irish Times* writer, 'Murty', described to the readers, that the 'alliance of Ireland and the Boers is the greatest disgrace Ireland has ever had':

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<sup>11</sup> *Dublin Daily Express*, 30 Nov. 1899.

<sup>12</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 Sep. 1899.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 Sep. 1899.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 Sep. 1899.

<sup>15</sup> Donal P. McCracken, 'Irish settlement and identity in South Africa before 1910' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxviii (1992), p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 Sep. 1899.

Does any man fit to be out of Richmond Asylum mean to tell me that Irishmen is as happy under Kruger as under Victoria? Would you rather find roof or altar in Ireland or the African Rand, where the government is carried on by leather whips in the hands of Boer bravos...It's a barbarous state and place, and that any boy born in Munster could throw in his lot with such a band of swashin' and rampagious (sic) rifle busters beats my comprehension. If it's to be a question for us in Ireland of Briton or Boer, then we're all bound to become John Bull-men right off!<sup>17</sup>

Although there was confidence in their imperial might in defending the rights of British loyalists in South Africa, the *Irish Times* editor understood the gravity of the situation if war unfolded: 'it will be serious, and we must be ready for a hard campaign'.<sup>18</sup>

On 11 October 1899, the two independent Boer republics - the Transvaal and the Orange Free State - declared war on the British Empire. Following months of constant speculation and anticipation, the war unleashed an immediate public response, with national and provincial newspapers reacting with fervour and industrious interest. Pro-Boerism spread across the country denouncing British aggression, Irish involvement and the Uitlanders' cause; in contrast, Irish loyalists were adamant in advocating the war effort, supporting Irish soldiers' participation and lambasting the actions of pro-Boers.<sup>19</sup> The Mayor of Waterford, Laurence C. Strange, wrote to the editor of the *Irish Times*, explaining that he refused to attend pro-Boer functions, as it would be seen as an expression of 'hostility to thousands of my own fellow-countrymen' serving in South Africa.<sup>20</sup> As the war entered its first week, sections of the population began to demonstrate their support for the war effort: 'war spirit' was reported in Kingstown as the Kingstown Literary and Debating Society strongly condemned Boer policies;<sup>21</sup> the secretary of the Newry District Loyal Orange Lodge sent a telegram to the British Government, expressing their confidence in their South African policy.<sup>22</sup> In the north of Ireland, the war became a focus of loyalist patriotism amongst the Ulster Unionist population, with 'virtually every Unionist newspaper in Ulster' supporting the British government. Throughout the province, 'Patriotic Days', lectures, public meetings, and 'War Funds' were established 'to maintain support for the war effort'.<sup>23</sup> The war also 'invigorated the imperial aspect of Ulster Unionism'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 21 Oct. 1899.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 19 Sep. 1899.

<sup>19</sup> Donal Lowry, 'Nationalist and Unionist responses to the British Empire in the age of the South African War, 1899-1902' in Simon Potter (ed.), *Ireland, Britain and the imperial press* (Dublin, 2004), pp 159-176.

<sup>20</sup> *Irish Times*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>21</sup> *Dublin Daily Express*, 13 Oct. 1899.

<sup>22</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Oct. 1899.

<sup>23</sup> James Loughlin, *Ulster Unionism and British national identity since 1885* (London, 1995), p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London, 2004), p. 66.

As the public debated the legitimacy of the campaign, Irish reservists were being called up for mobilisation; on 12 October 1899, the reservists of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers departed Armagh to the cheers of an enthusiastic crowd.<sup>25</sup> The following day, the *Kildare Observer* acclaimed the reservists of the Dublin Fusiliers ‘who were every inch the soldier’. The following contemporary account illustrates the excitement and interest that prevailed then as the public witnessed the departure of soldiers, casting aside their ‘old duds’, for a new uniform, kit and rifle:

An enormous and enthusiastic crowd followed the men to the railway station on Thursday, where some affecting scenes took place, as several reservists were natives of Naas. There were numerous handshakes from relatives and acquaintances, who wished them God speed and safety through the ordeal, and though the scene was at times pathetic, still the men showed the best of spirits. As the train proceeded on its journey a big cheer from the crowd, a return cheer from the soldiers, and shouts and cries from their relatives, who now completely broke down.<sup>26</sup>

Since the beginning of the conflict, there was a growing schism in Irish society and as dissension became increasingly audible on the streets of Ireland, it became imperative for loyalists to stand their ground and demonstrate their unequivocal support for British foreign policy, the war effort and, perhaps most importantly, Ireland’s impressive military contribution. The concerns over pro-Boer fever in Ireland and the detrimental effect it might have on recruitment<sup>27</sup> and performance in the military notwithstanding, Unionist M.P. for North Tyrone, D.J. Wilson, believed that Irish soldiers would uphold the honour of queen and country by ‘showing the quality of Irish pluck and patriotism’, which, in turn, would dispel the actions and opinions of pro-Boers in the country.<sup>28</sup> In essence, much of the Irish public’s support for the war was a reaction to the hostile rhetoric and behaviour of pro-Boers. The bravery exhibited by Irish troops in South Africa, was considered by the *Irish Times*, essential in saving Ireland ‘from the dark reproach of a stupid play actin’ extravagance of Nationalism’.<sup>29</sup> However, the fear that such actions and words would monopolise Irish society and opinion, and damage the reputation of Ireland, was unfounded as Irish loyalists began to react with enthusiasm. On 19 October 1899, Irish loyalists from Trinity College took to the streets of Dublin, in a public showing of solidarity for the war effort and as a reaction

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<sup>25</sup> *Dublin Daily Express*, 13 Oct. 1899.

<sup>26</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 14 Oct. 1899.

<sup>27</sup> Concerned about the level of disloyalty in Ireland, the *Pall Mall Gazette* warned: ‘The broadcast circulation of proclamations and leaflets, denouncing Irishmen who join the army as traitors to their country ... and recruits are being terrorised from coming forward ... If the mischief goes on, a necessary source of recruits for the army will be closed ... you cannot pass by and take no notice ... you must punish or you will lose the respect of the ready loyal section of the population.’ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 Nov. 1899.

<sup>28</sup> *Irish Times*, 13 Oct. 1899.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Nov. 1899.

to pro-Boerism in Dublin. Over one hundred students of the ‘Anti Boers of Trinity’, marched through the streets of the city centre, distributing posters and exclaiming ‘Wake up Trinity’, with the purpose of discouraging ‘the nightly exhibitions of pro Boer sentiment’, and vindicating the country’s honour, ‘for true patriotism and loyalty’.<sup>30</sup> Fearing an outbreak of violence, the Royal Irish Constabulary formed a perimeter around the students as they sang *God Save the Queen* and cheered for the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. Upon reaching the main gate of the university, a large Union Jack was unfurled, generating a ‘loud applause’. As the students continued their loyalist demonstrations throughout the evening, incensed pro-Boers reacted by beginning a small scale riot; by 2300 hrs, the police made one arrest, several people had suffered minor injuries and numerous windows were smashed at the front of Trinity College.<sup>31</sup> Irrespective of pro-Boerism, the war was infectious in Ireland, especially in the urban areas, with public expressions of union and solidarity with the United Kingdom. The degree of support was demonstrated further when reports emerged, in the press, of individuals expressing interest in forming a ‘loyal Irish volunteer corps’ for deployment in South Africa.<sup>32</sup> Such gestures were indicative of the support witnessed in Ireland during this period. Although nothing came of the volunteer corps at this time, it was a notable statement of intent; to one potential recruit, it was a declaration to ‘England and the world at large that all her sons (in Ireland) are not rebels’.<sup>33</sup> To another individual, it was the only opportunity at the time to ‘show our loyalty and devotion to the crown’.<sup>34</sup> The rhetoric had similar tones to that which underpinned the formation of the first Irish units of the Imperial Yeomanry and despite each letter being written anonymously, it is conceivable that the writer was a composite of those individuals who had attested into the First Contingent. This initial reaction in Ireland to the war was testament to the resilience and determination

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<sup>30</sup> The students attempted to organise the march with military precision, demonstrating an interesting take on the war in South Africa. ‘Whereas we, the military council of the Anti Boers of Trinity, do hereby command and set down for tomorrow the following to be the order of the day; No.1 1 Division will advance, as arranged at 7.P.M by way of Anglesea street; No.2 will make a feint on Trinity street by way of Dame Street. Deploy and advance by Suffolk Street...Every advantage to be taken, of Kopjes and other protections. Zarps (South African Police) must be avoided, and Veldt Cornets should keep in front of the line of attack ... No. 3 Division remain in reserve but must give warning of the advance of Bonds and Hollanders from the rear’. *Irish Independent*, 19 Oct. 1899 and *Irish Times*, 20 Oct. 1899.

<sup>31</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 20 Oct. 1899 and *Irish Times*, 20 Oct. 1899.

<sup>32</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 Oct. 1899.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Nov. 1899. One individual wished to field a volunteer force in South Africa by Christmas and embody the men into the South Africa Military Police. Volunteers would be recruited from the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police numbering two hundred; seven hundred would come from Irish volunteers and one hundred volunteers enlisting into a mounted infantry. See also *Ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1899.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Oct. 1899.

that would remain in the country during the winter of 1899-1900. Irish loyalists' response to the war was helped by the heralded involvement of their battalions and generals, and was quite possibly a strong reaction to the belief of an existing anti-British sentiment that continually damaged the reputation of Ireland within the British Empire. As the British Empire demanded public solidarity and commitment during the turbulent early period of the war, elements of Irish society were found at the centre of the patriotic response.

The Irish loyalists' appearances of commonality continued unabated as the public were inundated with press releases of Britain's strenuous efforts in South Africa, which were complemented with significant Irish battalion participation and their associated high casualty rates. Further evidence of interest in the war, and a possible reaction to 'Black Week', was observed on 18 December 1899 when a large crowd assembled around Trinity College to witness the university bestowing an honorary degree on Joseph Chamberlain. As expected, his presence was not welcomed by Irish Nationalists who believed that the Colonial Secretary was solely responsible for making 'numberless orphans and widows throughout the land',<sup>35</sup> he was christened 'Judas Chamberlain' by Galway Urban Council.<sup>36</sup> The previous day, Irish pro-Boers had demonstrated against the arrival of Chamberlain by staging a series of protests; what occurred in Dublin, historian Donal McCracken noted, 'was one of the most violent scenes Dublin had witnessed in a generation' as pro-Boers clashed with the Dublin Metropolitan Police (D.M.P.).<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, an enthusiastic crowd formed around the university to catch a glimpse of the man and in celebration, the crowd unfurled several Union Jacks, waved flags, and sang the National Anthem and other patriotic songs.<sup>38</sup>

During this period, heated debates also ensued in House of Commons between Irish Nationalists and Unionist MP, Colonel Edward James Saunderson. On 17 October 1899, Irish Nationalists, William Redmond, T.M. Healy and Michael Davitt expressed their outrage at the war that sought to destroy Boer liberty, for 'millionaires' and 'Majuba'. In contrast to the treasonable comments constructed by the Irish Nationalists, Colonel Saunderson for County Cavan, was a loyal defender of Irish unionism, and the most ardent and outspoken Irish Unionist in Parliament. Born in 1837, the colonel supported the government's policy in South Africa, believing British hegemony was essential to the stability of the region. Although he regretted that the war was being fought against a brave, and 'above all a Protestant people',<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 19 Dec. 1899.

<sup>36</sup> *Cashel Sentinel*, 4 Nov. 1899.

<sup>37</sup> McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War*, pp 53-56.

<sup>38</sup> *Irish Times*, 19 Dec. 1899.

<sup>39</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 17 Oct. 1899, lxxvii, col. 70.

he was adamant that ‘we cannot afford to allow an independent Power hostile to us set up in the midst of our South African polices’.<sup>40</sup> As the conflict entered its second week, Saunderson’s position remained unflappable, demanding political rights for Uitlanders, and heralding: ‘We are going to war because we are determined that Queen Victoria and not President Kruger shall be supreme...’ Similarly to other loyalists in Ireland, Colonel Saunderson attempted to understand and shame the treasonable stance taken by Irish Nationalists, who continued to forsake their oath of allegiance to Her Majesty in Parliament; he also chastised their approach of inciting Irish soldiers to mutiny and to murder their comrades.

Whilst the policies and character of the war were discussed and argued between opposite benches, Unionists took the opportunity to gain political capital from Nationalist dissension with regards the question of Home Rule; Colonel Saunderson believed ‘the attitude of Irish nationalist members on this question of the Transvaal war had given a death blow to Home Rule’. He continued: ‘If a whole lunatic asylum were summoned into conference as to how they would most injure Home Rule he did not know that they could take a more idiotic course than that which the Irish nationalists’ members have followed in the present crisis.’<sup>41</sup> In some respects, Saunderson’s statement had merit; in the opinion of the Tories, the actions of the pro-Boers and Irish Nationalist M.P.s demonstrated that ‘the Irish were unfit to govern themselves.’ Indeed, the once strong alliance of Liberals and the Irish Parliamentary Party had evaporated due to their outrage at the extent of Nationalist attitudes and opinions with regards the conflict.<sup>42</sup> Dr Rentoul, M.P. for East Down speaking at a constituency meeting on the war, believed ‘nothing could be better for the Unionists’ cause than the attitude of Irish nationalists’.<sup>43</sup> At a Unionist and Conservative meeting in Prescott, England, M.P. A. Stanley declared that ‘the war would be the death of Home Rule and those who were supposed to represent Ireland would realise that it would not be wise to hand over a country so near us to those who stood self-confessed traitors’.<sup>44</sup> As expected, however, Nationalist response and opposition to the war remained rigorous even if offered Home Rule.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly this remained a source of argument for many Unionist politicians, organisations, and commentators after the war; individuals such as Colonel Saunderson, the

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<sup>40</sup> Reginald Lucas, *Colonel Saunderson M.P., a memoir* (London, 1908), pp 291-292.

<sup>41</sup> *Dublin Daily Express*, 6 Dec. 1899.

<sup>42</sup> McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War*, pp 96-97.

<sup>43</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 16 Oct. 1899.

<sup>44</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 17 Nov. 1899.

<sup>45</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 17 Oct. 1899, lxxvii, col. 127 and *Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 7 Feb. 1900, lxxviii, col. 863.

Marquess of Londonderry, and Sir Edward Carson, continued to remind citizens of the role Irish Nationalists played during the South African War that supported and celebrated the Boer cause.<sup>46</sup> For example, at the onset of the Great War, the Unionist Association of Ireland, circulated a propaganda article that encouraged members of the Irish public to resist Home Rule, whose leaders were illustrated as disloyal Britons and pro-Germans; the article reminded its reader, that as ‘England was in a death grip’ in South Africa, Irish Nationalists ‘raised loud cheers for the Boers’.<sup>47</sup>

It can be seen, therefore, that the first months of the war, brought an enthusiastic Irish reaction, with elements of the Irish public demonstrating unequivocal support for the war effort. With the added elements of Irish participation and significant contribution to the war, the Irish public would remain keenly interested in the developments of the conflict, revealing a positive engagement with imperial concerns.

### **The Press and letters from the front**

Throughout the conflict, the Irish press was a key contribution to public understanding of the narrative of the conflict and the significant contribution of Irish soldiers to it. During the Victorian Age in the United Kingdom, the press and print was a major influence in the promotion of political and cultural ideas. The abolition of Stamp Duty in 1855 paved the way for cheaper and more accessible national newspapers; the introduction of the penny newspaper also encouraged a broadening of the readership. The accessibility of newspapers was supported by the Forster Education Act 1870 and the introduction of compulsory education in 1880, which helped increase literacy levels across Britain. In Ireland, the introduction of the National School Teachers Act 1875 and the Irish Education Act 1892, guaranteed free primary education and limited compulsory attendance for children, which led to greatly improved literacy; the increase in literacy in turn led to further and wider public interest and debate in Britain’s military campaigns. Throughout the nineteenth century, the close relationship that existed between Britain and Ireland was illustrated through the intense interest the Irish press took in imperial matters; from the question of Home Rule to the wars of imperial expansion, debate was instigated through the medium of national and provincial

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<sup>46</sup> For examples *Irish Times*, 3 Oct. 1906; *Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Lords, 20 Mar. 1907, clxxi, col. 804; *Parliamentary Debates*, fifth series, House of Commons, 23 Oct., 1912, xlii, col. 2315; Simon Rosenbaum (ed.), *Against Home Rule: the case for the union* (London, 1912), p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> The Unionist Associations of Ireland, Britons beware!: your homes or Irish home rule, 1914 (N.L.I., EPH B329).

newspapers. As a result of war correspondents, war photography, cinema,<sup>48</sup> and the Irish military and civilian involvement across the British Empire, it is no surprise that, in the words of Donal Lowry, the Irish public were in ‘little doubt about the prominence of imperial concerns in Irish life.’<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in the opinion of Edward M. Spiers, constant reports that exemplified ‘courage and carnage of battle’ in parts across the Empire, ‘provided a vicarious outlet for those trapped in the drab monotony of office and factory life.’<sup>50</sup>

At the outbreak of war, the loyalist response in Ireland was vividly portrayed throughout the Unionist press; unsurprisingly, the Unionist press were staunch advocates for the Empire, relishing the departure and contribution of Irish battalions, and dismissing the Irish Nationalists’ and pro-Boers’ stance on the war.<sup>51</sup> The *Irish Times* was the most expressive in their Unionist and pro-war sentiment and this was reflected through their appreciation of the services of Irish soldiers and the promotion of several activities, including war charities and the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry. The pro-British press undoubtedly provided an image of the war that reflected the Victorian press at this time, with a constant stream of information provided by special war correspondents, with editors encouraging imperialism, volunteering, and, in certain cases, providing a romantic stance on military participation. The editors of such newspapers also used their own columns to condemn the attitude of Irish Nationalists, suggesting that their ‘misplaced sympathy’ and severe remarks made upon the British government’s character damaged Ireland’s opportunity for self-governance. Whilst voicing compassion for the Irish soldiers at the front, the *Kildare Observer* stated: ‘Do you imagine that by wishing success to their enemies and defeat for their troops you can gain the good will or secure the votes of the English people? ... Every one of these resolutions will be used against you in the next election’.<sup>52</sup> In a similar sentiment, the *Dublin Daily Express* stated that there ‘is nothing whatever to prevent an Irish Home Ruler from being also a loyal subject of the Empire’ yet the country ‘is woefully

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<sup>48</sup> For further information with regards British war correspondents during the war please see, Raymond Sibbald, *The War Correspondents: The Boer War* (Gloucestershire, 1993); K.O. Morgan, ‘The Boer War and the media (1899-1902)’ in *Twentieth Century British History*, xiii, (2002), pp 1-16; In March 1900, ‘living pictures’ were shown to the Irish public, including scenes from across the theatre of war. Denis Condon, ‘Politics and cinematograph: the Boer War and the funeral of Thomas Ashe’ in *Field Day Review*, iv (2008), pp 132-145.

<sup>49</sup> Donal Lowry, ‘Nationalist and Unionist responses to the British Empire in the age of the South African War, 1899-1902’ in Simon Potter (ed.), *Ireland, Britain and the imperial press* (Dublin, 2004), p. 159.

<sup>50</sup> E.M. Spiers, *The army and society, 1815-1914* (New York, 1980), p. 211.

<sup>51</sup> Lowry, ‘Nationalist and Unionist responses to the British Empire in the age of the South African War, 1899-1902’ in Potter (ed.), *Ireland, Britain and the imperial press*, pp 159-176.

<sup>52</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 18 Nov. 1899

misrepresented by the men who exult in the prospect of disaster for British arms and appeal to Irish soldiers to murder their comrades in action.<sup>53</sup>

News from the front was carried across many newspapers in Ireland, with active reporting and engagement within the main headlines. The newspapers published battle accounts from war correspondents and published letters from participants, whilst editors and members of the public discussed and engaged with different military issues of the war. Similar to publications throughout Great Britain, Irish newspapers received and printed almost instant official despatches from the War Office, along with the latest war telegrams, movements of troops and engagements. Moreover, the newspapers also included a local dimension to the war, publishing reports of Irish public and political attitudes to the conflict. The press provided an image across the board of Irish support, which included: the thousands celebrating the departure of troops; the resilience of Irish citizens upon hearing the news of 'Black Week' before hundreds hurried to the recruitment depots; the jubilant scenes which were witnessed across the country following the relief of Ladysmith and Mafeking, the return of General White to Ireland, and the cessation of hostilities. Although press interest waned following the capture of Pretoria in June 1900, couched in the belief that the war was nearing a successful conclusion, the Irish public were still made aware of the cost of warfare with newspapers continuously printing full list of casualties, including frequently a listing of their local areas and their bereaved families.

The South African War was the largest muster of Irish troops since the Crimean War and thus it prompted interest from scale alone; this was further encouraged by the newspapers' publishing of the soldiers' letters. The circulation of hundreds of uncensored letters from Irish soldiers and civilians in South Africa, provided an opportunity to add a further dimension to war reporting, to increase local interest in the war, and overall, to sell more newspapers. The soldiers' letters were, as historian Thomas Pakenham stated, 'the first dramatic test of the new mass literacy ... by the working class'.<sup>54</sup> In *The Bookman*, a reviewer noted that the private correspondence of the soldier was 'a triumphant achievement of the war ... and think of our army of a quarter of a million, each one almost to a man a war correspondent, unfettered by censorious editors and subscribers!' The reviewer was satisfied by the soldiers' standard 'of literary facility ... who scarcely have been more than bright students in elementary school'; however, the estimation that 250,000 soldiers had decent literacy standards was an exaggeration, as Edward Spiers stated that sixty per cent of the

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<sup>53</sup> *Dublin Daily Express*, 26 Oct. 1899

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1979), p. 376.

army during this period was 'either illiterate or were barely literate'.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, *The Bookman* reviewer's assessment of the soldiers' correspondence with their family and friends is worthy of note and provides an interesting interpretation of the new phenomenon:

This class, so costive and reticent, or so limited and conventional, in verbal descriptions, has found a more eloquent voice in the pen. The facility is probably due to the reprobated cheap literature ... Some evidently take pains and pleasure in analysing their thought and presenting them it with genuine if unchastened art ... you will sometimes be struck by one of the rarest, most priceless touches-the groan or laughter of the inmost soul ... with infinite, with impossible labour, a supreme novelist might sift this vast published correspondence to build up some typical soldier-characters ... These 'letters from the front' will long be treasured in cottage archives...<sup>56</sup>

The letters, which were submitted to newspapers by family and friends, helped to sustain a personal interest in the war, with Edward Spiers stating that the content of the letters 'conveyed images that the official despatches could never capture.'<sup>57</sup> In the majority of cases, the soldiers' names were printed, their battalion, regiment or brigade was declared, as well as their family and location; such detail revealed the close connections that existed between the local community in Ireland and the military. With regards the content of the letters, Thomas Pakenham stated that correspondences sent home concealed the 'horrors, the blasphemies, the filthiness';<sup>58</sup> however, Edward Spiers noted that, in general, letters were 'largely descriptive' revealing 'the immense difficulties presented by a well-armed and mobile adversary ... capable of mounting strategic offensives, conducting sieges, fighting formidable defensive positions and engaging in guerrilla warfare.'<sup>59</sup> As seen throughout this thesis, the letters were expressive and extensive in their content, detailing the harrowing conditions of warfare where such correspondences provided: comprehensive descriptions of battles; revealed detailed accounts of death and injuries of comrades; personal accounts of soldiers exploring their faith in times of distress and suffering; uncensored criticism of senior officers and tactics; the prolonged strain of siege warfare; the monotony and difficulties of service; reactions to pro-Boerism in Ireland; and extensive accounts of their opinion of the enemy. Such content, published, arguably fed public interest in the war and generated sympathy for the British army and their families, particularly where, in some cases, newspapers highlighted certain aspects of the letters to reinforce their overall stance on the war.

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<sup>55</sup> E.M. Spiers, *The army and society 1815-1914* (London, 1980), p. 64.

<sup>56</sup> Y.Y., 'The literary harvest of the war' in *The Bookman* (1902), p. 132.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Spiers (ed.), *Letters from Ladysmith: eyewitness accounts from the South African War* (Barnsley, 2010) p. 169.

<sup>58</sup> Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 377.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Spiers, *The Victorian soldier in Africa* (Manchester, 2004), p. 159.

Debatably, Irish readers' opinions on the war and the Boer people may have been influenced by continued reported accounts of Boer 'outrages' against the civilian population and the British army; a common theme amongst the vast publication of letters, was Irish soldiers expressing their disgust and bewilderment at the extent of pro-Boer support in Ireland, notwithstanding, the distasteful actions of Boers on Catholics and their comrades in arms. In December 1900, an Irish soldier J. Kelly wrote home:

Just a few lines from an Irishman who is at present in South Africa serving his Queen and country. Now, I say it is time such men (pro-Boers) ... should be banished from our land ... Ireland is sorely infested at the present time, trying their best to upset the minds of the people against old England. I hope and trust that all Irish who have got the interest of their country at heart...the Boers, are nothing but mere savages, the cowardly lot.<sup>60</sup>

The public were frequently subjected to accounts of Boers destroying convents and churches, and engaging in 'uncivilised' actions on the battlefield. For example, Patrick Carroll of the Inniskilling Fusiliers felt that the accounts 'of British atrocities and Boer humanity published in the papers was mistaken' and that it was too much for him 'to stand idly by.' His response was to describe the destruction of a convent, in which Irish Sisters of Mercy resided, by Boer forces. He was adamant that he would bring back to Bailieborough 'old Kruger's whiskers on the point of my bayonet.'<sup>61</sup> Equally, the destruction of Catholic property in South Africa by Boer forces was noted in a Christmas letter from Maritzburg to a local parish priest in Dublin: 'I would not own that I was Irish, so disgusted I am ... Their sympathy should be with their poor Irish nuns who have been ruined by their friend, that wicked old man Kruger.'<sup>62</sup>

Other accounts emerged in Irish correspondences of disgraceful Boer actions on the battlefield. During the early months of the war, war correspondents detailed Boers hoisting a white flag with the intention of luring British soldiers into a false sense of security; as the British forces emerged from a protected position of cover, the Boer would open fire on the men at close range, before withdrawing. This and other similar running narratives and their associated validity, was often supported by letters from Irish soldiers, which reinforced these apparent acts of cowardice and dishonour. For example, a soldier stationed at Ladysmith, remembered one occasion, where the Boers threw down their weapons and begged for 'mercy'; as the British approached in the open, many of the Boer reacted quickly and opened fire into the advancing soldiers: 'I myself saw a Boer do this' recalled an Ulsterman, 'but the

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<sup>60</sup> *Irish Times*, 12 Jan. 1901.

<sup>61</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 26 May 1900.

<sup>62</sup> *Irish Times*, 30 Dec. 1899.

old ruffian missed, and before he could fire again, he had a foot of steel through his ribs'.<sup>63</sup> Such actions were affirmed by a Nenagh man, Corporal Berty Hennessey, of the Gordon Highlanders: 'He (the Boer) pretended he was wounded at the battle of Modder River, and when the officer went to give him aid he shot the officer dead. He was taken prisoner, tried for treachery and cowardice and shot by the troops in de Aar.'<sup>64</sup> A private of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers also expressed that such acts of continued treachery altered the rules of the conflict from a 'civilised' to a 'savage' war.<sup>65</sup> Private Francis Brunt, Royal Irish Fusiliers, claimed the Boers 'do things a savage would not do'.<sup>66</sup> Their reports were echoed by a Naas survivor at Colenso who reported, that several Boers cut the fingers off dead British soldiers 'to get their rings'.<sup>67</sup> Although the accounts were largely anecdotal, eyewitness reports were arguably significant in creating and sustaining an opposition in Ireland to the Boers. In the opinion of historian Bill Nasson, the idea of 'enemy criminality' played an important role in propaganda, presenting an evident distinction between 'civilised' and 'savage' warfare.<sup>68</sup> As a result, with evident disdain towards the Boers for their actions on the battlefield and across the operational theatre, it arguably encouraged sympathy and support for Irish soldiers and the war effort in general, and provided further examples of the need for British hegemony in the region.

### **War poems and ballads**

A further example of Irish interest in the conflict was the publication of war poems and ballads in both Unionist and Nationalist newspapers. Across Britain and Ireland the involvement of their respective troops led to an upsurge in songs which acted as a means through which the individual might relate to the war, patriotism, jingoism and imperialism.<sup>69</sup> British music from the 1850s began to include lyrics that referenced great military victories, international relations, territorial expansion, civilising and racial superiority.<sup>70</sup> An increase in the standard of education, the growth of socialism and feminism, philanthropy, and the

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<sup>63</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 12 May 1900.

<sup>64</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 30 Dec. 1899.

<sup>65</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Dec. 1899.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 Dec. 1899.

<sup>67</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 31 Mar. 1900.

<sup>68</sup> Bill Nasson, *The Boer War: the struggle for South Africa* (Gloucestershire, 2011), p. 268.

<sup>69</sup> See Dave Russell, *Popular music in England, 1840-1914: a social history* (Manchester, 1987), pp 112-130 and Steve Attridge, *Nationalism, imperialism and identity in late Victorian culture: civic and military worlds* (Hampshire, 2003), pp 16-43.

<sup>70</sup> Russell, *Popular music in England, 1840-1914: a social history*, p. 113.

Cardwell Reforms, all produced a new public attitude towards soldiering and war,<sup>71</sup> and these changes on the British mainland, travelled to Ireland, with examples of Irish citizens engaging in British politics, foreign policy and their wars of expansion. This shift in attitude is reflected in the growth of military ballads, such as the White Ballad Collection in Trinity College, Dublin, which contains around fifty Crimean War ballads. They are an excellent example of Irish public interest in war, during that period.<sup>72</sup>

During the war, ballads began to appear in newspapers, as further evidence of the influence the war was having on the public's imagination. Rudyard Kipling's *The Absent Minded Beggar*, is perhaps the best example of the power a ballad could possess and its impact on the British public, highlighting their sense of nationalism and jingoism at the onset of the war. The ballad helped to raise more than £250,000 for wounded soldiers in the conflict, whilst also creating a strong association between citizens and the military.<sup>73</sup> Deeds of heroism and sacrifice were expected by the civilian population and the abundance of songs and verses published throughout the war helped create that environment. Many Irish were uninhibited in demonstrating their support across the country, declaring 'that our talent for raisin' a few bars of home-manufactured song on passin' events hasn't grown rusty'.<sup>74</sup>

The examples below demonstrate further expressions of the interest that sections of the Irish public had for the war in South Africa and the contribution of their battalions. The Irish pro-British verse was centred mainly on the Irish regiments fighting in the war and mainly in the Natal area.<sup>75</sup> An impressive quantity of music ballads and verses were published in several provincial and national newspapers, as well as a number recorded in contemporary books. The *Kildare Observer*, the main county newspaper in the vicinity of the Curragh Army Camp, published several ballads throughout the first months of intense engagement involving Irish troops. The ballad 'Dublin Fusiliers, or the Irish Millenium'(sic) combined some of the usual elements of Irish ballads at this time, with the running theme of Irish bravery and loyalty; it also shows an awareness of the main political, geographically and wartime issues that were present during the time of publication:

Come all ye loyal Irishmen and listen to my lay,

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<sup>71</sup> M.V.W. Smith, 'The poetry of the war' in Peter Warwick (ed.), *The South African War: The Anglo Boer War 1899-1902* (Essex, 1980), p. 292. See also, Attridge, *Nationalism, imperialism and identity in late Victorian culture: civic and military worlds*, pp 107-138.

<sup>72</sup> See David Murphy, *Ireland and the Crimean War* (Dublin, 2002), pp 191-196. For examples on the Zulu War, see *Irish Times*, 17 May 1879 and *Ibid.*, 21 June 1879.

<sup>73</sup> S.M. Millar, *Volunteers on the veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Oklahoma, 2007), p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> *Irish Times*, 10 Nov. 1900.

<sup>75</sup> McCracken, *Forgotten Protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War*, p. 167.

About the glory Erin's sons has won in Africay,  
The Boers is bet-Owld Cronje's tuk-with four Thousand musketeers,  
And it's all down to the daring pluck of the Dublin Fusiliers

For five long months we fought the foe, on Kopje, Drift, and Veldt,  
Our ranks tore up with shot and shell, but still no doubt we felt.  
We faced them deadly trench's fill't-with Krugers's Mountaineers,

'Till more nor half iv the boys were kilt, in the Dublin Fusiliers<sup>76</sup>

Another example published in the newspaper, lauded the participation of Irish battalions, and commends their courage and tenacity. In the following piece, the writer remarks on the Irish at the battle of Talana Hill:

Soldiers of Ireland afar in Natal:  
Only they knew that the guns were before them,  
Only they knew there was honour to gain-  
Charged on the foe for the island that bore them.  
Routed and chased him o'er mountain and plain<sup>77</sup>

Several ballads also appeared in the press commemorating the bravery and fortitude of the Bugler Dunne at Colenso.<sup>78</sup> Below is the ballad 'Up saddle and trek', demonstrating that the 'bowld sojer boy is still the favourite of our Irish girls...opposed to the mere talkers who stay at home and denounce the war and glorify the Boers'.<sup>79</sup> 'Up saddle and trek' illustrates an element of respect and admiration from the author, for their fighting soldiers in the South African War, whilst also demonstrating local knowledge of areas around South Africa and of individuals of significance during the war:

Faith, I'm down in the deepest dejection  
For she loves Sergeant Doyle and his crutch;  
Sure the scoundrel has won her affection  
And taught her to speak double Dutch.  
She talks about Cronje and Botha  
And tells me she'll commander Doyle  
To turr'n my flank-well, in thrath a  
Man's blood at such language must boil

She knows all the Drifts on the Modder,  
And the Drifts of Tugela as well;  
But if I hark back to the Dodder  
The "drift" of my talk she can't tell.  
Of Buller she spakes with great pleasure,

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<sup>76</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 31 Mar. 1900.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Nov. 1899.

<sup>78</sup> *Irish Times*, 31 Mar. 1900 and *Kildare Observer*, 7 Sep. 1901.

<sup>79</sup> *Irish Times*, 10 Nov. 1900.

And Spion Kop melts her to tears,  
And she pours out her love without measure  
On Doyle of the ould Fusiliers

Interestingly, there were several examples of Irish soldiers writing ballads throughout the war; for example, the ballad ‘The Dublin Fusiliers’ was written by a soldier of the regiment during the siege of Ladysmith, which detailed a particular battlefield experience of the regiment:

When the Boers are on the ridges, and  
The Bullets flying thick;  
And you hear the dying groaning,  
Till it almost makes you sick;  
When the battle rages fiercest,  
When the foe first disappears,  
Faith you’ll hear the general saying,  
There’s thim Dublin Fusiliers<sup>80</sup>

Less than a month into the conflict, the *Irish Times* published a poem from a soldier in an Irish regiment; the work, entitled *From a Dublin Fusilier’s point of view*, demonstrated that the Irish soldier was clearly familiar with Irish pro-Boer sentiment during the early period of the war. It evokes much of what has been illustrated already in this thesis of soldiers writing home displaying anger and bewilderment at the level of support being expressed towards the Boer republics:

It hurts us, I can tell you, when we’re marching to the fray,  
To think our friends at home rejoice if we should lose the day  
No, its not the Irish people, for I’m sure each man enjoys  
The readin’ in the papers bout the gallant Dublin boys...

And then there’s not much glory, nor no chance of a V.C.  
In diggin’ spuds for eighteen-pence from 6 a.m. to tea.  
There’s one thing that I am thinkin’, and it’s just as clear as chalk.  
Our charge did more for Ireland than a hundred years of talk<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, there was a sentimental theme that resonated in several of the verses published, illustrating the personal impact the war had on Irish families, who had relatives serving at the front. The following piece, *A mother’s prayer*, published days before the turn of the century, was a gentle reminder of Irish sacrifice during the first months of the war, whilst providing an insight into the lives of thousands of Irish families across the island, that were intimately affected by the conflict:

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<sup>80</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 26 May 1900.

<sup>81</sup> *Irish Times*, 13 Nov. 1899.

His chair is standing empty  
(That's his portrait on the wall);  
And we do not hear him whistle,  
Hear his footsteps in the hall;  
When his well-loved name is spoken,  
Voices falter-lips grow pale,  
For our eldest is on duty  
At the front in the Transvaal;  
Oh angel, guardian angel,  
I can only watch and pray,  
But I pray thee spread thy white wings  
Round my son on Christmas Day<sup>82</sup>

Overall, it is clear that the pro-British press was a powerful imperialist tool during the Victorian era helping to maintain an interest in the war and in the affairs of Irish serving troops. The press was further complemented by contemporary histories and music ballads that helped to galvanise public awareness. As regards the content of the music ballads and verses, this revealed that certain individuals were reacting to particular incidents and engagements that were at the forefront of press attention; it also indicated that Irish civilians had knowledge of individual personalities, the environment, and the politics, and that they were interested in the welfare of British troops.

### **Irish war charities**

A significant section of Irish society remained undeterred by Irish pro-Boers and soon their words of support and defiance translated into action. The most prominent measures in the general public were the organisation of relief funds for the families and soldiers affected by the conflict and the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry. Due to the sheer number of soldiers participating in the war and the high level of casualties, dozens of charities emerged across the United Kingdom and the Empire, offering relief and financial assistance. In Ireland, several war charities materialised that provided respite for Irish widows and orphans, as well as funding equipment for Imperial Yeomanry volunteers, clothes and basic goods for Irish soldiers on tour, and subscriptions for hospital beds and medical supplies. The charities were publically subscribed, with monies raised through various methods, including, newspapers, and concerts, sporting events, auctions, church and school collections and raffles. The most prominent charities that emerged in Ireland during the conflict were, Irish Regiments Widows and Orphans Fund, the Mafeking Relief Fund, the Transvaal Relief Fund, The Shamrock

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<sup>82</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 30 Dec. 1899.

League, Irish Imperial Yeomanry Hospital Fund, Transvaal Relief Fund, the South of Ireland Relief Fund and Lady Roberts' Irish Branch of the Soldiers and Sailors Family Association. It is difficult to attain the exact number of charities and subscriptions collected; however, the table below illustrates the minimum funds that were donated in Ireland:

**Table H) List of Irish war charities and money subscribed<sup>83</sup>**

<b>Charity</b>	<b>Subscribed</b>
Irish Regiments Widows and Orphans Fund	£14,564
Lady Roberts' Irish Branch of the soldiers and families association	£32,693
Transvaal Relief Fund	£1,127
Mafeking Relief Fund	£121
Imperial Yeomanry Fund	£640
Imperial Yeomanry Hospital Fund	£2,135
The Shamrock League	£350
The South of Ireland Relief Fund	£1,500
Belfast Christmas gift to the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles	£411
Transvaal Relief Fund (Belfast Subscription)	£1,584
British Soldiers' Widows and Orphans Fund (Belfast Subscription)	£10,107
<b>Total</b>	<b>£65, 232</b>

### **Irish Regiments Widows and Orphans Fund**

On 24 October 1899, the Irish Regiments Widows and Orphans Fund re-opened in union with the *Irish Times*. Since 1 January of that year, it was reported that over £11,000 was in the fund, which had been previously subscribed to by the public.<sup>84</sup> The charity was administrated by several individuals, including Lord Frederick Roberts VC., Horace Curzon Plunkett M.P. for south Dublin and vice-president of the Agriculture Department for Ireland, Viscount Duncannon, Sir John Alexander Arnott and Sir Frederick Falkiner, a distinguished individual in Irish society, and committed member of the Church of Ireland.<sup>85</sup> As an example of the close relationship between the press, society and the military, there was an immediate reaction and desire to relieve the suffering of families affected by the deaths inflicted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers at the battle of Talana. The overall

<sup>83</sup> The figures are obtained from various publications of several newspapers. It may be of interest to place this figure in context with other donations witnessed throughout nineteenth century Ireland; in 1843 alone, £48,706 was donated by Irish Catholics to the National Association for Justice or Repeal in an attempt to repeal the Act of Union of 1800 between Great Britain and Ireland. Michael Keyes, *Funding the nation: money and politics in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2011), p. 98.

<sup>84</sup> *Irish Times*, 1 Jan. 1899.

<sup>85</sup> Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'Sir Frederick Richard Falkiner' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2011) online (ed.), [dib.cambridge.org](http://dib.cambridge.org) (18 Sep. 2013).

objective of the charity, in the words of Sir John Arnott, was ‘to relieve the immediate wants of the bereaved, and in so doing to manifest itself the gratitude which inspires the Irish people for such loyal and splendid services...’ One individual from Dawson Street, Dublin, expressed admiration for the charity, as it conveyed a true symbol of Irish feeling, ‘instead of the mischievous misrepresentations’ by certain members of Irish society.<sup>86</sup> Two days after the re-launch of the charity, over £600 had been raised, in which the editor of the *Irish Times* stated it was ‘proof that our Irish people in the truest way sympathise with the men who are fighting the battles of the country on the Transvaal borders.’<sup>87</sup> By 2 November, the fund had reached a handsome sum of £3,262. 15s. 7d.

Fortunately, evidence exists that reveals the motivations behind many of the subscriptions. Attached to the figures donated, various individuals, from diverse sections of Irish society, recorded a short message; the *Irish Times* editor stated that this act provided a voice for the subscribers ‘to prove their loyalty and sympathy with brave Irishmen doing their duty to their SOVEREIGN (emphasis in original) and country.’<sup>88</sup> The content of the short messages qualifies the popular support Irish regiments received in Ireland, where many subscribers expressed their gratitude at the magnitude of their soldiers’ bravery and sacrifice as illustrated in the press, and voiced collective sympathy and understanding for the families; in one example, Mr and Mrs Higgins from Ballinasloe donated £3. 2s. ‘to express their admiration of the characteristic bravery and loyalty to duty, to Queen, and country, of their valiant countrymen in the present war.’<sup>89</sup> A woman who contributed £1. 1s., remarked that she was ‘proud to be Irish!’, upon hearing the acts of bravery of Irish soldiers dying ‘nobly for Queen and country.’<sup>90</sup> Thomas Scully from Waterford donated one guinea to the fund, as he believed that the Irish character was represented by the ‘solid bravery of our fellows in Natal’, which would, ‘go a long way to dispel the shame’ exhibited by Irish Nationalists and pro-Boers.<sup>91</sup> In similar tones, many subscribers used the opportunity to chastise pro-Boerism that distorted Ireland’s image; ‘A Limerick Workingman’, who donated 10s. to the charity, stated ‘If those men (Irish Nationalists) would only go out and join Kruger, poor old Ireland would have a riddance of her worst enemies, though posing as her best friend’; and, following a donation of 10s., another individual from County Limerick wrote: ‘Disgust at the utterances of our so-called Nationalist members may be forgotten in our pride at the gallant

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<sup>86</sup> *Irish Times*, 24 Oct. 1899.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Oct. 1899

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Nov. 1899.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1899

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Oct. 1899.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Oct. 1899.

conducts of our Irish soldiers at Glencoe (Talana).<sup>92</sup> Such sentiments and attitudes adopted by Irish loyalists did not go unnoticed by their peers in Britain; *The Times* of London lauded the positivity of the charity in the face of dissident Nationalism: ‘...the movement should serve as a useful object-lesson; for there can be no doubt that the bulk of the Irish people applaud the honourable and gallant conduct of their fellow-countrymen who are under arms, and will show their sympathy in a practical way.’<sup>93</sup>

In Ireland, the charity was a testament of the sheer popularity and civilian interest in the war, and it reveals the impressive reputation of Irish battalions who were held in high regard. Moreover, the charity was not restricted to the subscriptions of a wealthy few, rather the success of the endeavour was guaranteed by the charity in filtering throughout Irish society. An analysis of the subscriptions shows the variety of the backgrounds of many of the individuals; the charity ranged from wealthy members of Irish society, to parish priests, bankers, medical personnel, solicitors, soldiers and veterans, teachers, servants, porters, and family and friends of the soldiers on service. The popularity of the charity is further illustrated by the dozens of local subscriptions collected across the country, through raffles, and street and parish collections: £10 6s. 7d. was raised throughout the parishes and district churches of Westport, County Mayo;<sup>94</sup> at a Jewish Synagogue in Dublin, a total of £17 14s. 6d. was raised in a collection, with subscriptions ranging from 1s. to £1.<sup>95</sup> The philanthropy also appeared to have spread to the children of Ireland, with one individual stating his five children wished to donate the contents of their money boxes.<sup>96</sup>

Contributions continued at a pace and by 9 December 1899, the sum had reached £10, 285 12s. 7d.;<sup>97</sup> the massive increase was partly due to several rugby matches held in order to raise funds, and also to the proceeds from the opening of Earlsfort Terrace Skating Rink.<sup>98</sup> There also appears to have been a reaction to events in South Africa that propelled increases in donations; one individual donated £5 upon hearing the ‘great disaster’ that befell the Irish Fusiliers at Nicholson’s Nek;<sup>99</sup> a day after the battle of Colenso, £137. 6s. 9d. was donated,

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 Oct. 1899.

<sup>93</sup> *The Times*, 27 Oct. 1899.

<sup>94</sup> *Irish Times*, 15 Jan. 1900.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 Feb. 1900.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 Oct. 1899.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1899.

<sup>98</sup> The wife of Sir John Arnott even wrote to the editor of the *New York Times*, with an appeal to the Irish-American families living in New York, for ‘sympathy and support’ for the fund; she wrote: ‘Every loyal Irish heart must beat with national pride at the valor (sic) displayed by the soldiers from the Emerald Isle in the Transvaal campaign, and I am sure many Irish scattered over America will gladly send help to their fellow-countrywomen and the orphans’. *New York Times*, 3 Dec. 1899.

<sup>99</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 Nov. 1899.

an increase of £104 from the day previous<sup>100</sup> – perhaps a reaction to the headlines: ‘Connaught Rangers suffer severely.’<sup>101</sup>

The administration of the charity is also of interest. In February 1900, there were thirty cases dealt with by the committee, with temporary relief varying between £10 and £24 a year; it was deemed reasonable following the suggestion by the War Office, that 15s per week be donated per widow, plus an additional sum for each child on a permanent or semi-permanent relief. Other Irish widows were supported by the *Daily Telegraph Shilling Fund*, in which £11,000 was donated to the bereaved.<sup>102</sup> The month of July, saw a sharp increase from February, with the number of cases under the control of the committee rising to 110 widows; forty one of these widows were to receive £15 a year, and the rest who were under temporary relief, on 15s. per week, with 2s. and 2d. per week to each child under fourteen. Four cases had been removed from the books, with one case removed for its ‘exceptionally unsatisfactory nature.’ In order to avoid confusion and overlapping, the committee stressed that a clergy man or responsible person should act as a guardian over the funding that the widow would receive. At the end of the year, the number of cases rose to 146, and three months later forty additional widows were added to the committee register.<sup>103</sup> In the summer of 1901, the committee published the numbers of widows that were receiving financial relief from the charity, as well as the associated regiments:

**Table I) Number of widows supported by the Irish Regiments Widows and Orphans Fund (1901)<sup>104</sup>**

<b>Regiments</b>	<b>No. Of Widows</b>
5th Royal Irish Lancers	7
6th Inniskilling Dragoons	12
Royal Artillery Militia	2
Irish Imperial Yeomanry	2
The Royal Irish Regiment	30
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	41
Royal Irish Rifles	30
Royal Irish Fusiliers	21
Connaught Rangers	20
Leinster Regiment	13
Royal Munster Fusiliers	16
Royal Dublin Fusiliers	40

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 21 Dec. 1899.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 16 Dec. 1899.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 26 Feb. 1900.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 16 July 1900.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 30 Aug. 1901

Kings Royal Irish Militia Battalion	1
<b>Total</b>	235

By the close of the year, the committee was supporting a further fourteen widows and 380 orphans. The amount of money being paid out to the deprived per week was £74 10s., and an annual rate of £3,800.<sup>105</sup> The public subscription reached a total of £14,564, as the administrators of the charity decided to continue to support widows and orphans until the end of 1903. In the final year, 308 widows and 472 orphans were receiving financial support; the number would have been significantly higher, but thirty widows remarried and twenty were suspended for misconduct. The final figures released by the charity for publication, are listed below:

**Table J) Number of widows supported by the Irish Regiments Widows and Orphans Fund (1901)<sup>106</sup>**

<b>Regiments</b>	<b>No. Of Widows</b>
13th Hussars	3
Fifth Royal Irish Lancers	8
Inniskilling Dragoons	16
Royal Irish Regiment	34
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	48
Royal Irish Rifles	46
Royal Irish Fusiliers	25
Connaught Rangers	23
Leinster Regiment	22
Royal Munster Fusiliers	22
Royal Dublin Fusiliers	48
8th Kings Royal Rifles	1
9th Kings Royal Rifles	1
6th Rifle Brigade	1
9th Dragoon Guards	1
Antrim Artillery	1
Donegal Artillery	1
46th Company Imperial Yeomanry	2
54th Company Imperial Yeomanry	1
61st Company Imperial Yeomanry	1

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 7 Dec. 1901.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 6 Jan. 1903.

74th Company Imperial Yeomanry	1
99th Company Imperial Yeomanry	1
Irish Horse Imperial Yeomanry	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>

Charity also appeared in the form of equipment and clothing; the Kildare Hunt Club raised awareness of the need for clothes and gifts for soldiers in the Irish Hospital. Clothing became a necessity especially after reports began to arrive back from the front line of the extreme hardships faced by the Irish regiments. Continued requests and letters began to surface in the *Irish Times*, seeking charitable support for their soldiers. The most sought after gifts were knitted socks, flannel shirts, balaclavas, Tom O' Shanter's, pipes and money.<sup>107</sup> It was noted in the paper that 'we are anxiously following the course of their fortunes ... and that we are desirous in every way to manifest our sympathy and our good wishes towards them. It is the special obligation of Ireland to show this, and it will not fail in its duty.'<sup>108</sup> While there was a demand for essential items such as, cardigans, pyjamas, cholera belts, and shoes, soldiers often requested 'luxury' gifts, including, tobacco, briar pipes, sweets and games.<sup>109</sup> Irish business and communities demonstrated an awareness of the condition of their local regiments in South Africa and sought to alleviate some of the stress and hardship; on one such occasion, the Quarter Master General of the War Office, Sir James Clarke, received with thanks fifty cases of butter from Butter Merchants, County Cork, for the local regiment the Royal Munster Fusiliers.<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, Irish charities did not limit themselves to assisting soldiers and their families, as their philanthropy extended to aid the relief of Transvaal refugees and the citizens of Mafeking affected by the siege. Following the outbreak of war, the Lord Mayor of London, Alfred Newton, established the Mansion House Fund, which was intended to bring financial relief to thousands of Uitlanders displaced by the war. The *Irish Times* voiced sympathy with the displacement of loyalists in South Africa and expressed concern over the daily reports of outrages being enacted on men, women and children by Boer forces; the editor of the newspaper believed that Ireland had 'true sympathies with the refugees.'<sup>111</sup> The

<sup>107</sup> For an example of Irish charitable support for the Connaught Rangers please see *Ibid.*, 8 Feb. 1900. It illustrates a full list of donations and their contributors which raised a total of six boxes of tobacco, fourteen dozen pipes, seventeen boxes meat lozenges, 112 shirts, 332 pairs of socks, 300 pairs of bootlaces, eleven and a half dozen handkerchiefs, 1,000 sheets of notepaper, 120 indelible pencils.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Dec. 1899.

<sup>109</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 17 Feb. 1900.

<sup>110</sup> *Irish Times*, 11 Dec. 1899.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 Oct. 1899

*Irish Times* began to receive charitable donations to the *Transvaal Relief Fund*: ‘rarely has a fund been started in this country that so well deserves the sympathy and support of every loyal subject of the Queen’, commented one subscriber.<sup>112</sup> Captain R. Staveley hoped that Ireland would not fail in supporting the Uitlanders, as he would judge the failure of helping the refugees, as a ‘national disgrace’; again, for other subscribers it was an opportunity to undermine the rhetoric and policies exhibited by Irish pro-Boers.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to supporting and sympathising with the displaced Uitlanders, in May 1900, a fund was established to ‘provide help for the distressed and weakened inhabitants’ of the town of Mafeking, following the siege.<sup>114</sup> Following an appeal by Lady Georgina Curzon, £121 82s. 9d. was donated by the people of Ireland; Lady Georgina Curzon, wrote to the *Irish Times*, ‘to express her warmest thanks for this magnificent contribution ... and we both agreed that it is exceedingly difficult to find fitting terms in which to express our gratitude for the generosity exhibited by the Irish people.’<sup>115</sup> The total amount of money collected across the United Kingdom and throughout the empire was, £29,267; *Daily Mail* war correspondent and aunt of Winston Churchill, Lady Sarah Wilson, who was stationed in Mafeking throughout the siege, recorded how the money was divided amongst the population of Mafeking: widows and orphans, refugees, town relief, seaside fund, churches, convents and schools, wounded men, small tradesmen, hospital staff, nuns and Colonel Plumer’s Rhodesian Column.<sup>116</sup> As regards the fund, the money donated appears relatively small in comparison to other incentives created during this period; nevertheless, the interest and sympathy expressed in Ireland may have been generated after the *Irish Times* gave accounts of Irish nursing staff and doctors, several Irish nuns from the Sisters of Mercy, and ‘four-fifths of officers of the Protectorate Regiment ... from the old corner (Ireland)’ that were stationed in Mafeking.<sup>117</sup>

There appeared to be one charity that emerged in Ireland that was associated with Irish Nationalists and pro-Boers – The Irish Transvaal Ambulance Fund. Over a month into the conflict, the committee received £60 with £2 donated by Nationalist M.P. John Dillon.<sup>118</sup> To one observer, the relatively low subscriptions collected in comparison to other war charities, was an example of the shortcomings and hypocrisy of Irish Nationalists:

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 21 Oct. 1899.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 18 Oct. 1899.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 19 Mar. 1900.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 15 Sep. 1900.

<sup>116</sup> See ‘Appendix I’ in Lady Sarah Wilson, *South African memories: Social, warlike, sporting: from the diaries at the time* (London, 1909).

<sup>117</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 June 1900.

<sup>118</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 27 Nov. 1899.

It has covered the country with its green proclamations; public bodies and public men have competed with each other in passing and supporting resolutions overflowing with ardent sympathy for the Boers, and with hatred to the Imperial Power. Yet the total so far reached by the fund intended to give practical effect to all this sympathy amounts to only a little over £60. Three millions of nationalists inhabiting some of the richest parts of Ireland and numbering among them many persons of great wealth, cannot after all this fuss and talk put together more than £60 ... Could there be clearer proof of the utter unreality of the disloyal sentiment which has been so flaunted throughout the country...<sup>119</sup>

Overall, the charities and their subscribers, illustrated an acute awareness of the reality of war for the soldiers in South Africa, with an understanding of the detrimental impact it had on families; they also demonstrated the importance of the press in raising support and prompting public responsiveness, to the demands of the war. Historian Donal P. McCracken noted that the vast amount of money that was raised in Ireland ‘reflected not so much large numbers of subscriptions as the generosity and wealth of individual subscribers.’<sup>120</sup> Whilst it is true to say that the charities received generous donations from wealthy individuals, these offerings did not monopolise the lengthy list of subscriptions. Regardless of the money donated, each charity revealed that the war filtered through Irish society from the landed gentry and military caste, to the middle class, and to a lesser extent, the working classes. As seen throughout the various issues of the *Irish Times*, wealthy individuals, businesses and institutions subscribed to the different war charities; for example: Sir John Arnott and Lady Arnott donated thirty guineas to the *Irish Regiments Widows and Orphans Fund*, whilst the *Irish Times* gave one hundred guineas.<sup>121</sup> However, an example of how the war transcended throughout Irish society, is reflected below by a letter to the newspaper’s editor; regardless of politics, class and religion, the *South of Ireland Relief Fund*, exemplified that there was strong support in Cork, ‘to the cause of the British Empire and its brave soldiers’:

The South of Ireland relief fund ... now amounts to 1,500 ... the sum has been freely subscribed by Protestant and Roman Catholics, by the poor and the rich, the landed gentry, the professional, the mercantile, and even by the working class, many of the latter placing pence and halfpence in a box fixed in the street ... I hope your readers will also give us credit for the fact that even in what is called ‘rebel Cork’ there is widespread a feeling in quite another direction.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>*Dublin Daily Express*, 30 Nov. 1899. Due to the lack of evidence, this researcher is unsure of the total monies collected by the fund; the last known report placed the amount subscribed in the region of over £130. *Freeman’s Journal*, 11 Dec. 1899. However, overall, the attempt to raise money and despatch an ambulance corp to South Africa was, in the words of McCracken, ‘not very successful’. McCracken, *Forgotten Protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War*, p. 50.

<sup>120</sup> McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War*, p. 103.

<sup>121</sup> *Irish Times*, 24 Oct. 1899.

<sup>122</sup> *Cork Herald*, 17 Nov. 1899.

Contained within the public subscriptions printed in the *Irish Times*, it is evident that significant elements of the Irish middle class donated money to the various charities – nurses, engineers, veteran lower ranked officers, manufactures and drapers appear occasionally. In addition, it is evident that the charities reached the wider public on a personal level, with modest collections received from Catholic and Protestant churches, and Jewish Synagogues. However, in some cases, it is difficult to qualify the class of each individual, as in many cases, a name appears with no occupation. Yet, it can be argued, considering that the majority of the charitable donations were a few pounds, to as low as a few shillings, the individuals that subscribed to the charities, were of a middle or upper class; whilst the donations of pence reveal a contribution from the lower classes. Although there is no information contained within the newspapers of the religious denominations of each subscriber, it can be argued that the substantial numbers of small donations were sourced from the Protestant working-class in Dublin. According to the 1901 Census, there were 96,124 Protestants in the County of Dublin,<sup>123</sup> with some 10,000 men of the Protestant working-class.<sup>124</sup> It is clear that the Protestant working-class in Dublin were unified and strong in their approach to politics and religion. Being natural conservatives and unionists, the Protestant working-class maintained an evident distrust of Catholic authority in the country and grew increasingly concerned about the possibility of Home Rule.<sup>125</sup> Due to the active role of the Protestant working-class in Dublin society throughout this period, it can be envisaged that they contributed a moderate amount of money towards Irish war charities during the South African War.

Importantly for this research, it challenges preconceived ideas that Ireland was simply an island of defiance and it reveals that the war had a level of popularity in Ireland, which was reflected in an active and supportive response to the conflict, the level of which might be expected from the culture of imperialism. During this period, the public response to the Irish war charities was a clear indication of Irish loyalty to the British Empire; Unionist M.P. for Saint Stephen's Green, Dublin, J.H.M. Campbell, celebrated: 'it is not merely in the front that Irish men have vindicated their loyalty and devotion to Queen and country'; he continued in detail:<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> *Census of Ireland for the year 1901*, [CD 613], H.C. xc.179, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Martin Maguire, 'The Church of Ireland and the problem of the Protestant working class of Dublin, 1870s-1930s' in Alan Ford et al (eds) *As By Law Established the Church of Ireland since the Reformation* (Dublin, 1995), p. 195.

<sup>125</sup> Martin Maguire, 'The organisation and activism of Dublin's Protestant working class, 1883-1935' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix (1994), pp 65-87.

<sup>126</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 7 Feb., 1900, lxxviii, col. 845.

Even at home we find, if you judge it by any standard capable of recognition, that the assumption of hon. Members opposite that they represent the feelings of the majority of the Irish race is contradicted. Test it by the subscriptions to the various funds for the relief of the suffering and the wounded; test it by the number of those who have volunteered for service at the front, and by the number of those who are being recruited. What has Ireland done in the interests of the Boers? I know that a subscription list was started for the assistance of the people of the Transvaal. I have in my hands a record of the magnificent total which has been obtained after six months efforts, and it amounts to 300. That, so far as I can make out, is the only active sign on the part of any Irishmen of sympathy with the Boers in this war.

Such acts of kindness had a profound effect upon the morale of the troops serving in South Africa; upon receiving 1,000 lbs of tobacco from the people of Cork, Lieutenant-Colonel E.S. Evans, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers, described the appreciation felt by his men:

...they are all very much pleased indeed to learn that our people at home, have not forgotten about us, and are taking such an interest ... The fact that our country is doing so much for us, helps us very much indeed to increase and strengthen the *esprit de corp* of the regiment, and as a great incentive to a soldier to bear all the hardships of a campaign cheerfully, and to do all he can, when opportunity offers, to add to the glories of his county.<sup>127</sup>

**Fig. 51: The Countess of Limerick's Shamrock League**



Source available on the website of Limerick City Museum

[http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object\\_id/41867](http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/41867) (9 Dec. 2013)

A successful war rests on the morale of a soldier, as it improves their combat effectiveness and unit solidarity. As seen from the letter above, the impact of support from home had a galvanising effect on their soldiers, thus demonstrating the importance of support from the home front to the war effort. As it was abundantly evident that Irish soldiers understood the level of pro-Boerism in Ireland, the level of generosity of support for soldiers and their

<sup>127</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 Feb. 1900.

families may have proved a welcome relief from the dissident voices in Ireland and their own struggles in South Africa. In addition, the success of these charities is demonstrated by the example it set for other organisations during the Great War. Following the outbreak of war in 1914, the chairman and treasurer of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families' Association, Irishman Sir James Gildea, noted that the aforementioned charity would be organised and financed 'in the same way as we did in the South African War'.<sup>128</sup>

### **Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital and nursing staff**

The involvement and contribution of the Irish War Hospital was particularly significant and their participation is one of the few studies that highlight an Irish involvement in the South African War; Anthony Kinsella has written an extensive article on the formation and experience of the hospital during the war, so it is not the intention of this chapter to examine the subject in detail.<sup>129</sup> Rather this section will highlight the Irish War Hospital as an active measure of civilian support and a further dimension of participation in the war. The creation of the Irish Hospital was commended across the United Kingdom and Ireland; in February 1900, the *Irish Times* writer 'Murty' applauded its formation and its creator, Lord Iveagh:

While every Irishman worthy of his name has a taste of the fightin' spirit in him, 'tis an odd, and not an unpleasin' thing to notice that while we kill our enemies, there's no country in world is successfully devoted to the art of healin'. If we can kill we can also cure. And so, while the Irish brogue may be heard all along the front fightin' line in South Africa, blessin' the Boers accordin' to the Articles of War, there will be an Irish hospital-financed by an Irish nobleman, Lord Iveagh, who has a genius for doin' the right thing at the right time.<sup>130</sup>

A month previously, it was reported by the *Irish Times* that philanthropist, Edward Cecil Guinness, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Iveagh, of the Guinness brewery, intended to support the health and welfare of troops by establishing the Irish War Hospital in South Africa. The hospital, which would be financially supported by Lord Iveagh, received a positive reaction from Irish loyalists; Lord Iveagh's response to the war effort was in the words of the *Irish Times*, an example of 'practical patriotism'.<sup>131</sup> The *Irish Times* reported that Lord Iveagh equipped the Irish base hospital with the 'kindliness of heart equalled only by his patriotism, having spared no expense to equip it with the very best appliances of all descriptions'; the hospital consisted

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<sup>128</sup> Letter from James Gildea, Chairman and Treasurer of SSFA, 18 Aug., 1914, to Lady Dufferin (P.R.O.N.I. Dufferin Papers, D1071/J/H/4/1).

<sup>129</sup> Anthony Kinsella, 'Lord Iveagh's Irish Hospital in South Africa 1900' in *Dublin Historical Record*, lix (2006), pp 81-94.

<sup>130</sup> *Irish Times*, 3 Feb. 1900.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 Jan. 1900.

of one hundred beds, the latest and extremely important, Roentgen Ray and various medical supplies including, anti toxins for the treatment and prevention of enteric fever, diphtheria, smallpox, blood poisoning and snake bites. In addition, Lord Iveagh purchased fifteen wagons, two water carts, two forage carts, ten marquees for hospital wards, and twenty bell tents for hospital staff accommodation; moreover, pyjamas, socks and handkerchiefs were provided for the patients, as well as champagne and brandy, which acted as ‘stimulants.’<sup>132</sup>

The privately funded hospital was certainly an Irish enterprise; the auxiliary staff consisted of some fifty men employed as ward masters, stewards, clerks, compounders, washer men, cooks, and bearers, who were all employed by the Guinness Brewery.<sup>133</sup> As the Guinness Brewery hired the vast amount of its workers from the Protestant community, it is interesting to note a distinct Protestant reaction and interaction with the war effort. The Royal Irish Constabulary (R.I.C.) allowed the selection of fifteen members of the police force to proceed to South Africa, attached to the war hospital, acting as hospital orderlies. The men were sergeants, acting sergeants and constables, who were also members of St John’s Ambulance Association; once their tour of duty finished, they were able to return to the R.I.C.<sup>134</sup> To provide the best care for the troops, the hospital also had an impressive array of doctors and dressers, under the overall charge of the surgeon in chief, Sir William Thompson. Sir William Thompson had a wealth of experience in the medical profession, being senior surgeon at the Richmond Hospital at Brunswick Street, Dublin, and past president of the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin.<sup>135</sup> Importantly, the role of hospital director was entrusted to Dublin native, Dr George Stoker of Hertford Street Hospital, London; George Stoker had valuable medical experiences in three military campaigns: the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) as a Surgeon of the Imperial Ottoman Army, being present at the sieges of Plevna and Erzeroum; the Turco-Servian War (1878) as Chef de l’Ambulance du Croix Rouge; and the Anglo-Zulu War (1879).<sup>136</sup> Sir William Thompson and Dr Stoker found support from Dr Alfred Friel and Dr James Coleman; Dr Friel, a student of Trinity College, Dublin, was considered a ‘distinguished medical scholar’, and before enlistment, he was a surgeon in Waterford City Infirmary – he was tasked with the management of the Roentgen Ray. Dr Coleman, a visiting physician to several hospitals, including the National Hospital for

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 2 Feb. 1900.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 Jan. 1900; Ibid., 17 Jan. 1900; and *Irish times*, 17 Jan. 1900.

<sup>135</sup> Sir William Henry Thompson would later drown in the Irish Sea, after *RMS Leinster* was torpedoed by a German U-boat on 10 October 1918, with a loss of around 500 lives. Philip Lecane, *Torpedoed!: The R.M.S. Leinster disaster* (Cornwall, 2005), p. 14.

<sup>136</sup> *Irish Times*, Jan 27, 1900 and ‘The Irish Hospital’ in *British Medical Journal*, i (1900), p. 93.

Consumptives, was selected due to his expertise in the treatment of enteric fever. The medical support staff consisted of six dressers; four from the Richmond Hospital in Dublin; one from Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, Dublin; and, one from the Royal Hospital, Belfast.<sup>137</sup>

The war hospital also enrolled the help of Captain John Deane, who would be chief officer of transport, and Captain W. Mould, R.A.M.C., who had previous experience in the military operations in Sierra Leone (1898-99), and would act as liaison officer with the British armed forces. Colonel Nixon went to South Africa representing Lord Iveagh; Captain the Right Honourable Rupert Guinness, the son and heir of Edward Guinness was also attached to the hospital staff.

On 2 February 1900, Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital departed from Dublin and hundreds of civilians gathered along the streets of the city to see off the hospital corps. The *Irish Times* reported the march *en route* to *S.S. Violet*:

Their march, indeed, was quite a triumphal progress, and was one of most enthusiastic demonstrations of loyalty seen in Dublin for very many years ... The crowd, growing larger and larger every moment, hemmed in the khaki-clothed contingent, until in a short time they were completely lost sight of in the vast cheering throng by which they were surrounded ... The windows of many of the houses were crowded, and hats and handkerchiefs were waved with vigour ... Some of the members of the crowd, carried Union Jacks, the waving of which served to increase the demonstrations of enthusiasm *en route*.<sup>138</sup>

Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital remained in South Africa for under a year, having spent much of their time in Bloemfontein and Pretoria; their contribution to the war effort was acknowledged and appreciated by an officer who visited the hospital, delighted by the work rate of 'seventy-seven' Irish nationals:

They are soldiers as true and brave as any that ever wore uniform ... and there is not a soldier in the entire British force that will not give three cheers for the wearers of the shamrock and one more cheer for Lord Iveagh and the Irish Hospital.<sup>139</sup>

Throughout the war, it is estimated that around one thousand nurses served in South Africa,<sup>140</sup> many of whom were Irish. Attached to the Irish War hospital were Sisters Denton, Smyth, McGonigal, Richardson, Walker and Miss Annie McDonnell. Miss McDonnell, a native from Derry, was Lady Superintendent to Dublin House of Industry School, and a founding member of the first Governing Authority of the Dublin Metropolitan Technical

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<sup>137</sup> 'The Irish Hospital' in *British Medical Journal*, i (1900), p. 93.

<sup>138</sup> *Irish Times*, 3 Feb. 1900.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June 1900.

<sup>140</sup> M.S. Stone, 'The Victorian army: health, hospitals and social conditions as encountered by British troops during the South African War, 1899-1902' (Ph.D., thesis, University of London, 1992), p. 299.

School for Nurses. Her services were considered ‘invaluable’ by Dr Coleman,<sup>141</sup> and following her contribution to the hospital she was awarded the Royal Red Cross.<sup>142</sup> In July 1900, seven nurses from Ireland boarded a ship from Southampton *en route* to South Africa to join the staff at Imperial Yeomanry Hospital at Pretoria.<sup>143</sup> The *Illustrated London News* noted that four nurses from the City of Dublin Nursing Institute enrolled into the Army Nursing Service Reserve (A.N.S.R.) in 1899; from Count Westmeath, Nurse Mary Talbot had eight years previous service in Cork Infirmary and City of Dublin Hospital; she received the decoration of Serving Sister of Hospital of St John of Jerusalem for her service during the typhus epidemic on the island of Inniskea in 1895. Nurse Sarah J. Callwell, who had also received the same decoration, trained as a probationer in the City of Dublin Hospital and sought further experience in various other hospitals in Ireland for four years; Nurse Mary Anna Davis had a wealth of experience in many institutions across Ireland, including Cork Street Fever Hospital, Dublin, the Roscrea Infirmary, Charlemont Street Hospital and the City of Dublin Hospital; and finally Nurse Rosa Lawless who had six years experience serving in Castlebar Fever Hospital, Lisburn Fever Hospital and Mespil Hospital.<sup>144</sup> Of the sisters of the Nursing Institute nurse Ellen O’Neill failed to be mentioned; however, the nurse attached to the A.N.S.R. died from pleurisy, contracted at the Imperial Yeomanry Camp Hospital in Pretoria.<sup>145</sup> Other army nurses that travelled out to South Africa were Miss Potter from Sandycove, Dublin,<sup>146</sup> and nurse Kate Evelyn Luard who was attached to Queen’s Alexander Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve.<sup>147</sup>

Considering Lord Iveagh’s Irish War Hospital, and Irish nurses’ contribution to the war in South Africa, it is interesting to note that their participation was entirely voluntary, similar to the Imperial Yeomanry. These examples provide a further dimension to Irish involvement in this war and the role that the Irish landed gentry played, revealing the levels of active support that existed during this period. Moreover, they illustrate the opportunities that Irish citizens were presented with to be an integral part of the metropolitan core of the Empire. It is unclear why these Irish citizens decided to travel to South Africa and to risk

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<sup>141</sup> James Coleman, ‘Medical experiences in South Africa’ in *Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, cxii (1901), p. 101.

<sup>142</sup> Gerard M. Fealy, *A history of apprenticeship nurse training in Ireland* (New York, 2006), p 56; Anthony Kinsella, ‘Lord Iveagh’s Irish Hospital in South Africa 1900’ in *Dublin Historical Record*, lix (2006), p. 93.

<sup>143</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 July 1900.

<sup>144</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 13 Jan., 1900; Neville Edwards, *The Transvaal in war and peace* (London, 1900), p. 326.

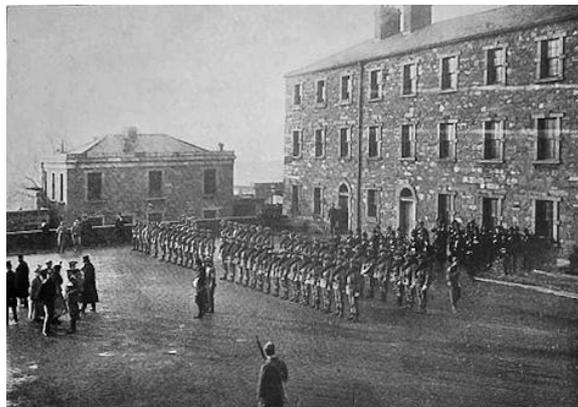
<sup>145</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 Mar. 1901.

<sup>146</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 31 Oct. 1899.

<sup>147</sup> She would later go on to serve in the Great War, recording her experience anonymously in *Diary of a Nursing Sister on the Western Front 1914-1915* (London, 1915).

their lives in a dangerous environment; perhaps, the individuals sought adventure and excitement, away from the boredom and monotony of service in Ireland; it is conceivable, given the reaction and formation of the Imperial Yeomanry, that Irish citizens were responding to the war's difficulties in a patriotic fashion – the Irish public were undoubtedly inundated by an abundance of press accounts that revealed the hardship of the campaign. Their willingness and responsiveness may have been a result of economic motivation, however this is considered unlikely as a decisive component, as from evidence each individual had stability in the R.I.C., the Guinness Brewery and in the medical profession. Arguably it was patriotism and interest in the war that may have been most influential in men and women attesting into the British army medical services and the Irish War Hospital.

**Fig. 52: Major-General Gosset inspecting Lord Iveagh's Field Hospital staff at Dublin before departure to South Africa**



Source, *The Illustrated London News*, 10 Feb. 1900.

**Fig. 53: A group of Irish nurses for South Africa – Nurse Mary Talbot, Nurse Sarah J. Callwell, Nurse Mary Anna Davis and Nurse Rosa Lawless.**



Source, *The Illustrated London News*, 13 Jan. 1900.

### **Irish Sisters of Mercy at Mafeking (13 October 1899 – 17 May 1900)**

An interesting contribution by Irish citizens can be seen through the work of the Irish Sisters of Mercy, members of a Roman Catholic religious order, stationed at Mafeking, prior to the conflict. Throughout the nineteenth century, there was a steady flow of Irish immigration to South Africa in a bid to establish a new life on the African continent. The Irish immigrants included administrators, politicians, and former soldiers of the British army, miners, farmers and many from Catholic and Protestant religious orders. Following the British acquisition of the Cape at the turn of the nineteenth century, thousands of citizens from the British Isles settled in South Africa. In a bid to ‘anglicise’ the region, the British government continued to fund schemes to increase the number of immigrants into the country; from 1820, Irish emigrants continued to avail of this scheme, which helped establish Irish communities, amongst the English-speaking population. The numbers of Irish were further enhanced by ex-British soldiers who had served in Southern Africa that decided to remain in the country.<sup>148</sup> From the 1840s, Irish immigration continued for a chance to escape the destitute conditions of the Irish famine, and by the close of the century, Irish emigrants were enticed by diamond mining and the gold rush.<sup>149</sup>

In response to the growth of immigrant Catholics in Southern Africa, Irish missionaries travelled to the continent to serve the European communities and help evangelise the region; Saint Peter’s College in Wexford became the ‘first nursery of Irish missionaries to the Cape’,<sup>150</sup> with Saint Patrick’s College, Maynooth, also providing missionaries throughout the world. The largest institution in Ireland that trained priests for service in colonial missions was the College of All Hallows in Drumcondra, Dublin.<sup>151</sup> During the last quarter of nineteenth century, there was a marked expansion of Catholics in South Africa, due to an influx of Irish and European immigrants. As a result, missions like the Marist Brothers, the Irish Dominican Sisters, the Brothers of Christian Schools, and the Order of the Holy Cross helped provide education to the settlers and preach the Christian faith in areas across the Cape Colony and eastern South Africa. Furthermore, following a request from Bishop Anthony Gaughren, Vicar Apostolic in Kimberley, Cape Colony, the Sisters of Mercy of Strabane, County Tyrone, Ireland, were asked to establish a convent in

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<sup>148</sup> J.D. Duckworth et al, ‘Some of the Irish in early Natal’ in *SAIS*, iv (2012), p. 81. Philippe Denis, *The Dominican Friars in South Africa: a social history, 1577-1990* (Boston, 1998), p. 84.

<sup>149</sup> D.P. McCracken, ‘Irish settlement and identify in South Africa before 1910’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxviii (1992), pp 136-137.

<sup>150</sup> John Colgan, ‘Irish missionaries in South Africa’ in *An Irish Quarterly Review*, xx (1931), p. 614.

<sup>151</sup> H.M. Carey, *God’s empire: religion and colonialism in the British world, 1801-1908* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 137.

Mafeking, in 1897. The following year, the Sisters of Mercy found a convent in the town, and thus, the founding sisters were closely involved in the siege of Mafeking.

**Fig. 54: The founding sisters of the Mafeking convent**



Source, [http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/south\\_africa/](http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/south_africa/) (2 July 2014)

There is a dearth in contemporary sources on the involvement of the sisters during the conflict, but it is evident that they played an important role in providing medical assistance to the inhabitants of the besieged town. Following the declaration of war, efforts were made to extract all women and children from Mafeking, by train, to an area of relative safety; however, it is understood that ‘many brave women’, including nuns and nursing staff, decided to remain in the town.<sup>152</sup> As war began, Saint Joseph’s Convent, which had just been built five months previously, was transformed into an auxiliary hospital, from where it treated some of the sick and wounded during the 217-day siege. Within the hospital, eight Irish nuns of the Sisters of Mercy tended to the wounded, under the guidance of Mother-Superior Teresa (Jane Cowley) from Dunshaughlin, County Meath;<sup>153</sup> in addition to nursing, a Dublin man present during the siege noted that the sisters also made haversacks and powder bags.<sup>154</sup> Their contribution and experience was recorded by an Irish sister, named Mother Mary Stanislaus; the account below was written in her diary in January 1900, expressing the harsh reality of siege warfare:

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<sup>152</sup> W.F. Aitken, *Baden-Powell: the hero of Mafeking* (London, 1900), p. 108.

<sup>153</sup> Sheila Lunney, ‘Cowley, Jane (Sister Mary Teresa)’ in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) online (ed.), <http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie> (4 Oct., 2013) and Julian Orford, ‘Carry on, Doctors’ in *Military History Journal*, ii (1970), np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol023jo.html> (5 Oct. 2013).

<sup>154</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 June 1900

As coffins could not be procured, the dead are sewn up in shrouds. Here all of us who could be spared from the wards helped, praying the while ... Nothing would have convinced me that I could become so familiar with death ... One poor young fellow, who looked not more than twenty, asked me to tell his mother that he died fighting bravely.<sup>155</sup>

Following the relief of the town, Inspector J.H.W. Ascough of the British South African Police, wrote to *The Times*, expressing his ‘thanks and gratitude to the rev-mother superior and sisters of mercy’:

It is impossible, Sir, to say too much for these beloved women, who notwithstanding having their home shelled over them, were constantly under fire from Boer ‘snipers,’ whose trenches were in line with the convent ... I may mention also that their convent is in a fearfully risky state, owing to having over 11 shells, including ‘Long Tomes’ (96-pounders) in it.<sup>156</sup>

In November 1900, several members of the Sister of Mercy received an audience with Queen Victoria; less than a year later on 1 October 1901, Mother Mary Teresa received the decoration of the Royal Red Cross from King Edward VII, for acknowledgment of her services during the South African War.<sup>157</sup> In 1946, aged ninety-four, Mother Mary Magdalene died having remained in Mafeking following the war; the *Irish Times* remembered the Tipperary native, for providing ‘invaluable assistance, regardless of danger’, throughout the siege.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, it is of interest to note that following the death of Mother Mary Stanislaus in 1939, the *Ulster Herald* stated that the ‘nursing services of the sisters during the Boer War received worldwide recognition.’<sup>159</sup> The presence of the Irish Sisters of Mercy in South Africa was not substantial, with limited interaction with the conflict; nevertheless, the information provided above demonstrated a further perspective and connection between Irish citizens and the South African War. Considering Irish participation and interaction as a whole, it reveals that Irish citizens served in a wide range of different capacities during the war, whether through the British military, the nursing and medical service, or as an active contributor to the imperial process, supporting the spiritual needs of settler communities and the native people in British controlled regions, and providing

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<sup>155</sup> Julian Orford, ‘Carry on, Doctors’ in *Military History Journal*, ii (1970), np. Online version. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol023jo.html> (5 Oct. 2013).

<sup>156</sup> *The Times*, 23 July 1900.

<sup>157</sup> Sheila Lunny, ‘Cowley, Jane (Sister Mary Teresa)’ in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) online (ed.), <http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie> (4 Oct. 2013)

<sup>158</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 Aug. 1946.

<sup>159</sup> *Ulster Herald*, 26 Jan. 1939.

‘important ideological support for imperial expansion’.<sup>160</sup> Due to the extensive capabilities of Irish immigrants, historian, Hilary M. Carey, considered the Irish ‘practical imperialists’.<sup>161</sup>

**Fig. 55: Irish Sisters of Mercy who nursed the wounded at Mafeking received by the Queen**



Source, *Police Illustrated News*, 24 Nov. 1900.

### **Richmond Lunatic Asylum, Grangegorman, Dublin**

At the close of the nineteenth century, the British soldier was witness to the advent of modern warfare. Due to intense battle situations, the adverse weather conditions, poor sanitation and rations, diseases, and the war’s longevity, soldiers were under a prolonged period of strain; arguably, this in turn placed several individuals under constant psychological pressure, and it made it difficult if not impossible for them to remain motivated and relatively content in the military. For some, the new environment was detrimental to the mental health of a soldier and individuals took their own lives. According to the data recorded in the Casualties List, held at The National Archives in Kew, two soldiers attached to Irish battalions committed suicide, whilst three others died from self-inflicted wounds.<sup>162</sup> Although the figures do appear low and insignificant, it acknowledges the presence of mental instability amongst serving soldiers

<sup>160</sup> Carey, *God’s empire: religion and colonialism in the British world, 1801-1908*, p. 14.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>162</sup> List of Casualties, South African War 1899-1902 (T.N.A., Administration and Correspondence, WO 108/38).

of the British army. For some soldiers and veterans of the conflict, their experience had some profound impact that ultimately led to their committal in psychiatric institutions.

Between 1900 and 1907, a minimum of fifty-four soldiers were committed to the Richmond Lunatic Asylum, Grangegorman, Dublin, with at least thirty-two of the men veterans of the South African War. Unfortunately, a comprehensive and extensive exploration of psychiatric treatment of soldiers following their campaign is a digression from the main theme of the thesis. Nevertheless, it was still an aspect of Irish life during this period, impacted by the war in South Africa; Irish doctors, nurses and hospital staff contributed a modest yet significant assistance to Irish soldiers, on their return home from the front. It also reveals, in a minority of patient cases, that the War Office covered hospital expenses for several soldiers who still remained contracted to the British army and who were committed through a military warrant. These soldiers and veterans were committed into the Richmond Asylum, Ireland's first public psychiatric institution, built in 1815, caring for the country's population of mentally ill and mentally handicapped.<sup>163</sup> The thirty-two soldiers were committed under various reasons, including, violence, dementia, paranoia, alcoholism (mania a porter), disorder action of the heart (DAH), attempted suicide, delusional insanity, acute mania, and melancholia; during the nineteenth century the most common reason for admittance was acute mania and melancholia.<sup>164</sup> In Victorian Britain, neurasthenia (fatigue, debility, insomnia and 'aches and pains') 'was the most popular diagnosis made' in asylums.<sup>165</sup>

Despite the relatively significant number of soldiers admitted into the Richmond, no detail exists throughout the vast number of case notes on each patient that relates their mental illness to their service in wartime. However, a brother of Private Owen Munster, Royal Irish Rifles, who was committed in 1902 for acute mania, believed the war had a significant impact on the soldier's health: 'I condemn that for it.'<sup>166</sup> It is understandable that medical practitioners failed to notice any correlation between war and psychological trauma, as in 1900, Edgar Jones states 'the idea that soldiers could suffer psychological damage in action was barely acknowledged.'<sup>167</sup> It is only in the last thirty years, that there has been a growing

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<sup>163</sup> For an in-depth look at the institution and its administration from its opening to the end of the twentieth century, see Joseph Reynolds, *Grangegorman: Psychiatric care in Dublin since 1815* (Dublin, 1992); it was later renamed as St Brendan's Hospital.

<sup>164</sup> Mark Finnane, *Insanity and the insane in post-famine Ireland* (London, 1981), p. 150.

<sup>165</sup> H.R. Rollin, 'Psychiatry in Britain one hundred years ago' in *British Journal of Psychiatry*, clxxxiii (2003), p. 296.

<sup>166</sup> Private Owen Munster, 1902 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

<sup>167</sup> Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, 'Psychiatric battle casualties: an intra-and interwar comparison' in *British Journal of Psychiatry*, clxxviii (2001), p. 242.

appreciation of the psychological effects war can cause; this interest has been supported by the *British Medical Journal*, the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, King's Centre for Military Health Research and the Academic Centre for Defence Mental Health in King's College, London.

Contained in the following paragraphs, are examples of the detrimental impact and psychological issues soldiers had to contend with on their unceremonious return to Ireland and the effect it had on their family. Following a medical assessment by the hospital's medical practitioner, if it was decided that the person was suffering from a mental disorder or was socially deviant, the individual would be committed. During this period, British soldiers were committed either by the army, the civil authorities or by family and relatives. The various types of committal were stipulated in the following admission forms; if a soldier was considered 'insane' whilst serving in Ireland, the person would be committed in a District Lunatic Asylum through Army Form B 2058 under agreement with the War Office; if a soldier was considered a 'dangerous lunatic', the War Office and the Secretary of State had the authority to commit the individual set out in Army Form B 262; and finally, there was a separate form of admission for individuals who were considered a danger to themselves and/or others. This was called the 'Form for Dangerous Lunatic or Dangerous Idiot', which allowed the civil authorities, such as the police, and civilians to commit a person considered a risk to society - several veterans of the South African War were committed by relatives and the police authorities .

As the majority of families celebrated the safe return of their loved ones, several households were drastically impacted. As seen in chapter one, Thomas McCarthy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, suffered a serious wound to the head during the battle of Colenso; the extent of his wounds concluded his service in the British Army. After his discharge, he worked at night for the *Freeman's Journal* for several months. However this was short lived, after his father committed his son under the authority of the Dangerous Lunatic Act; the father reported to the hospital authorities, that Thomas threatened to murder him and had assaulted his own sister. Following concerns that his son might be released prematurely, the father wrote a letter to the hospital authorities detailing the reasons why his son should remain institutionalised:

Before and after his becoming an inmate of the Asylum he has made direct threats against me personally, and his sister, whom he has actually assaulted both in the street and at my residence ... from my experience of the three months residences with me I have learned that I could not trust on his temper for half an hour. I may state that he

was insane the greater part of the time of the stay in South Africa after sustaining the wound in his head at Colenso...<sup>168</sup>

In a similar case, a veteran of the British Army and of two years of service in South Africa, Michael Hogg from Drogheda, was committed into the asylum for assaulting his mother; during his service in the South African War, he stated that he 'suffered a very great deal.' The difficulties of the campaign were further compounded, arguably, by the actions of his wife; upon returning home from duty, he found 'his home broken up and his furniture sold'. He was told by friends that his wife had committed adultery whilst he was away; in a letter to Michael Hogg, Colonel Fielding stated his wife was an 'immoral character'. The soldier also had lost his daughter, who had been apparently smothered in bed by his wife; Hogg explained the situation to the doctors at the Richmond; he stated: 'It's enough to drive me daft, aint it.'<sup>169</sup>

Certainly there was also the concern of stigma with a family member institutionalised; this occurred following the committal of Private Joseph Hoey, 2<sup>nd</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers, who had service in South Africa, India and Egypt. He was first admitted into Royal Victorian Hospital Netley, Southampton, suffering from apparent hallucinations, stating that, 'he was put out of the officer mess because he caught one of the officers cheating at cards. Thinks the food is poisonous and that the other patients are going to kill him'; the soldier was also considered suicidal and had intemperance to drink. Committed into the Richmond Asylum, his mother, from Lower Baggot Street Dublin, sent a letter to the hospital: 'would you kindly see that any letter to Mrs Hoey of 5 Adelaide Place is sent in a plain (non official) envelope as she does not want it to appear her son is in the asylum.'<sup>170</sup> Private Hoey would later die in the hospital.

Notwithstanding the apparent difficulty of transition from military to civilian life, there were cases in which the family and friends attempted to support their loved ones. Following his service in South Africa, Isaac Byrne was a chronic alcoholic and suicidal, and thus was committed into the Richmond Asylum. His wife wrote to the hospital:

I have taught(sic) about my husband coming out and have changed my mind. My life will always be miserable and I might as well spend it one way as the other. The Lord protect me ... hoping I am not troubling you to(sic) much to advise him not to take drink'.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Private Thomas McCarty, 1900 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

<sup>169</sup> Michael Hogg, 1902 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

<sup>170</sup> Private Joseph Hoey, 1904 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

<sup>171</sup> Isaac Byrne, 1905 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

Private William O'Loughlin's brother attempted to persuade the hospital to discharge his sibling:

I make this application as to claim my brother (William O' Loughlin), who had served in the Pondoland and the Boer Campaigns. He stated to me in his previous letters that he has been up for discharge on three alternative times ... I feel, Sir, quite willing to take him out, as he has a home with his brothers at Ballymore Eustace or his own farm at Vallemount, Blessington with his grand-mother and uncle. I hope, Sir, that you will favourably consider my application and recommend the discharge of my brother.<sup>172</sup>

The war left a lasting psychological legacy on the soldiers committed into the Richmond Asylum and for some of the troops their service in South Africa had indeed had a detrimental impact on their mental health and stability. This can be seen through several recorded conversations with soldiers, perhaps showing symptoms of the 'modern' psychological disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.), where P.T.S.D., is defined as a 'traumatic memory, featuring nightmares, intrusive recollections and flashbacks' leading to social avoidance.<sup>173</sup> Private Creen, 5<sup>th</sup> Liverpool Regiment, told the doctors that he was sent 'daft' by his officers, trying to 'poison' him and 'stone him to death', while he could 'hear voices from South Africa follow me all round the wall-they never leave me'.<sup>174</sup> Similarly Private William O' Loughlin, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, told doctors that he was continuously harassed in the army whilst stationed in South Africa; in one case he remembered troopers and officers attempted to suffocate him in bed. His difficult experiences remained with him on his return to Ireland, as he continued to fear prosecution from officers who would appear at night as ghosts; he recollected it was 'hell-fire struggle to get rid of those voices sometimes.' The soldier was admitted into the hospital suffering from auditory hallucinations, constantly hearing voices in French and Dutch.<sup>175</sup>

It is fitting to end this chapter on the case of Private Christopher Seagrave, 1<sup>st</sup> Leinster Regiment, which reveals the lasting legacy and effect the war had on some soldiers. Aged twenty-four, Private Seagrave was committed in the Richmond Asylum, suffering from hallucinations of sight and hearing. The soldier had spent over three years in South Africa, in which he stated 'he was out of his mind', before managing to desert and find work on a ship home to Ireland. After three weeks, he handed himself into the police, and was subsequently

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<sup>172</sup> Private William O'Loughlin, 1903 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

<sup>173</sup> Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely 'War syndromes: the impact of culture on medically unexplained symptoms' in *Medical History*, xlix (2005), p. 56.

<sup>174</sup> Private John Creen, 1900 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

<sup>175</sup> Private William O'Loughlin, 1903 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

arrested and imprisoned; during his time in prison he continued to hear voices of a girl, and began to hit his head against the wall every night. When he was transferred to the Richmond his condition never recovered, believing he was king of India, and his wife was a princess. He remained at Grangegorman until 1921, when he was transferred to St Ita's Hospital, Portrane north of Dublin. In February 1944, as the allies continued to organise the invasion of Western Europe, and as the major cities of Germany became under increasing pressure from bombing raids and the Russian encroachment from the east, Christopher Seagrave passed away. He died at the age of sixty-four, having spent forty years of his life institutionalised.<sup>176</sup>

The Richmond case studies reveal the extent to which the war filtered into the daily lives of some Irish citizens, and the lasting damage that service could have on the soldiers' health. Moreover, the significance of the sources cannot be understated, for they demonstrate that prior to the Great War soldiers were psychologically impacted by war, with a significant number suffering from a wide range of mental health issues. The deterioration of mental health, arguably as a result of the soldiers' experience in South Africa, foreshadowed the massive influx of patients suffering with psychologically issues during the Great War. In addition, it is important to highlight and where appropriate introduce the reader to the wealth of source material that is available for further research in psychiatric treatment and P.T.S.D., for soldiers of the Victorian army. The wealth of sources include Hospital Case Notes, which contain, in most cases, the religion, previous occupation, battalion/regiment, and some notes on the soldier's military background; the notes also include detailed conversations with the soldiers, in an attempt to assess the mental stability of the individual. The importance of the archive is also highlighted with the invaluable photographs of the soldiers, which are selected here for the first time, in this thesis.<sup>177</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

To suggest that Ireland's loyalist response to war was 'fairly muted',<sup>178</sup> as McCracken stated, is misleading and wholly incorrect. From the evidence presented in this chapter, notwithstanding the projection of pro-Boerism in Ireland, it is clear that sections of Irish society were supportive of their troops and the British war effort. The war was an opportunity for Irish loyalists to demonstrate their loyalty and patriotism for the benefit of the union. The Irish loyalists' continued resistance and their ability to hinder Irish Nationalists from damaging the international image of Ireland helped galvanise the union and created the Irish

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<sup>176</sup> Private Christopher Seagrave, 1904 (G.C.M., The Richmond Hospital Case Notes).

<sup>177</sup> See pages 268-273.

<sup>178</sup> McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War*, p. 103.

soldier as a hero of the Empire. The popular impact of the war was immense, given the scale of military involvement and civilian engagement and interest. This can be seen throughout the frequent appearance of letters and reports published in Unionist newspapers, such as the *Irish Times*, with Irish citizens praising the involvement and bravery of the British soldiers, whilst detailing their distrust and anger at the extent of pro-Boerism in the country.

As this chapter has illustrated, the press, as a source, was imperative to the research in understanding the loyalists' motivation and measuring their interests in the war; the press revealed that significant elements of Irish society revelled in the bravery and fortitude of Irish troops, and the public illustrated their concern for the welfare of troops and sympathised with destitute widows and orphans affected by the conflict. Through the war charities that emerged in Ireland, a minimum of £65,232 was collected on the island; to place that figure in a modern context, it would amount to a substantial sum of over €5.35 million.<sup>179</sup> In addition, this chapter has illustrated that Ireland actively supported the war effort, with the voluntary mobilisation of the Irish War Hospital and Irish nurses; such gestures of support were indicative of true patriotism that was conspicuous in this period. The presence of the Irish Sisters of Mercy during the siege of Mafeking demonstrated a further dimension to Irish interaction with the British Empire, where their efforts evangelised areas within the confines of British territory.

Throughout the war, the Irish public continuously showed support: either by witnessing the departure of troops for the front line; holding pro-war meetings and rallies; and reacting, like most places across the British Empire, positively and audibly to the relief of the besieged towns and the cessation of the conflict. With continued press interaction, the mobilisation of almost every Irish battalion, the militia and the Imperial Yeomanry, the war would undoubtedly affect the civilian population. The positive response was not entirely surprising for the period: firstly, because the reaction was socially acceptable and mainstream for this period and in all actuality Irish Nationalism and pro-Boer sentiment deviated from accepted social norms, linked to the rules and institutions of British society; secondly, because of the sheer volume of Irish soldiers serving in South Africa, that obviously would generate a natural interest in the conflict. On this subject, John Redmond stated 'It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that there is scarcely a family in Ireland, from the poor people who live in Dublin slums to the highest in the land, that is not represented, in one shape or other,

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<sup>179</sup> This calculation was aided by The National Currency Converter, which converts old money to the prices in the year 2005. Therefore, it was calculated that £65,232 in 1900, was worth £3,722,137 in 2005; as each pound was equivalent to €1.44 in 2005, the spending power generated was €5,359,877. 'The National Archives Currency Converter' <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid> (10 Dec. 2013).

upon one side or other at the front.’<sup>180</sup> Indeed, Irish regular battalions, cavalry, militia and yeomanry units suffered in the region of 5,000 casualties, with the General Registrar of Ireland recording 1,800 Irishmen killed.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, as revealed in this chapter, dozens of Irish families suffered the emotional stress of a loved one returning home with psychiatric problems. Ultimately this would be significant and relevance, as it foreshadowed the thousands of Irish soldiers committed with ‘shell shock’ and other mental difficulties following their service during the Great War.

Undeniably Irish Nationalism and the pro-Boers faction was a strong movement, with clear political and cultural motivations, that received a strong mandate from the Irish public. However, this was just one reflection of life in Ireland. There were elements of Irish society – the landed gentry, the military caste, the unionist and loyalist’ communities, home rulers, Catholics and Protestants and Irish soldiers themselves – who formed a commonality behind the British Empire, supporting its success, which would ultimately have a benefit for the population in Ireland. Home rulers especially, and similarly during the Great War, envisaged their cooperation with the United Kingdom during the South African War, as a test to galvanise trust and to promote Ireland’s movement for devolution. Overall, notwithstanding the continued pressure from Irish Nationalists and pro-Boers, there was a failure in deterring Irish interest in the welfare of their troops and success for British arms. Ireland emerged as a distinctive member of the Empire, with their reputation greatly enhanced by the bravery of Irish troops and the population’s demonstrations of collective solidarity. Prior to the Great War, Ireland’s importance and emergence amongst the nations of the Empire is reflected by English novelist and poet George Meredith; in his poem, entitled, *Ireland*, he writes that Ireland is ‘No longer England’s broken arm’ and these words were indicative for John Redmond, who suggested Ireland is ‘one of the strongest bulwarks of the Empire’.<sup>182</sup>

However, less than twenty years following the war in South Africa, the level of Irish participation and significance of support was ultimately overshadowed by the domestic turmoil in Ireland and the events in war-torn Europe. With a renewed focus on Ireland’s national identity, and an attempt made to distance the country from the British Empire, little or no interest was developed in the Great War, let alone the conflict in South Africa for many years. Nonetheless, the significance of public demonstrations of solidarity and citizens’ active

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<sup>180</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, House of Commons, 7 Feb., 1900, lxxviii, col. 834.

<sup>181</sup> Ciaran Wallace, ‘Lest we remember? Recollection of the Boer War and the Great War in Ireland’ in *E-rea*, x (2012), np. Online version. <http://erevues.org/2888> (8 June 2013).

<sup>182</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, fifth series, House of Commons, 15 Sep. 1914, lxvi, col. 912; John Redmond, *The Home Rule Bill* (London, 1912), pp 99-100.

participation in the South African War cannot be understated; the expressions of loyalty were projected across the United Kingdom and the British Empire and revealed the importance of Ireland in empire building. Such scenes, witnessed during the turn of the century, foreshadowed the commitment and loyalty expressed by Irish loyalists in 1914.

**Fig. 56: The photograph shows the Lower House, a section of the Richmond Asylum, which has been abandoned over many years. It is believed that this structure has a preservation order, so it will be incorporated into the new Dublin Institute of Technology campus. The photograph was taken on the roof of nurses' home, by this researcher, at St Brendan's Psychiatric Hospital. The nurses' home has since been demolished.**



Source, Author's collection.

**Fig. 57: This photograph is directed on the opposite side of the hospital grounds. The building on the left is a Roman Catholic Church built in 1849, and, on the right, stands unit '23' which is understood to have been present at the turn of the twentieth century.**



Source, Author's collection.

## Chapter Five: Commemoration

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**Fig. 58: Royal Dublin Fusiliers Memorial, St Stephen's Green, Dublin.**



**Source, *Irish Times*, 15 June 1907.**

On 16 November 1903, Reginald Brabazon, 12<sup>th</sup> Earl of Meath, wrote to the editor of the *Irish Times* following the successful and celebrated homecoming of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers:

Many counties and cities throughout Great Britain and Ireland connected with regiments which have distinguished themselves in the late war erected memorials to the memory of the gallant dead, but as yet no memorial celebrates the noble deeds of the heroes of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers who died in South Africa for King and country.<sup>1</sup>

Following the South African War, there was a desire amongst sections of the Irish community to celebrate the return of each Irish battalion and unit and to commemorate their participation. The widespread enthusiasm was instigated on 1 June 1902, when the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Timothy Harrington, received a telegram from the Secretary of State for War, St John Brodrick, declaring that Boer representatives in the presence of Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner had signed a document containing the terms of surrender. The previous day the war had officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging. The news was

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<sup>1</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Nov. 1903.

welcomed with widespread elation across the United Kingdom and the British Empire.<sup>2</sup> Despite the heavy rain and deserted streets, newsboys heralded the news throughout Dublin city centre, as newspapers busied themselves preparing a special edition for that evening. At 2200hrs students of Trinity College lit a bonfire at Botany Bay in the grounds of the university and on receiving the welcomed news of surrender, the Church of Ireland's Saint George's Church in Drumcondra, rang its bells for thirty-five minutes.<sup>3</sup> Citizens of Dublin generously decorated Grafton Street, College Green, Nassau Street, Dame Street, South George's Street, Kildare Street, Dawson Street and Sackville Street with bunting and flags in celebration of the news; Trinity College, the Bank of Ireland and the Custom House enveloped their buildings with large flags and decorations. Outside of the city, the public lit several bonfires in the predominantly Protestant areas of Clontarf, Sutton, Malahide, Howth, whilst the entire seafront of Kingstown was decorated in bunting.<sup>4</sup> There were further celebrations in Newry, Omagh, Enniskillen, Limerick, Coleraine, Birr, Belfast, the Curragh Camp in Kildare and Kilkenny.<sup>5</sup> In Kilkenny, as news broke of the cessation of armed conflict, loyalists hoisted several Union Jacks over Ormond Castle; a fireworks display and music was planned by the local militia, but pro-Boers counter demonstrated and the police had to intervene.<sup>6</sup> Prayers were offered in churches and cathedrals across the country in thanksgiving for the restoration of peace in South Africa. The reaction was not unexpected given the interest that prevailed in Ireland throughout the war and the loyalists' response to the war effort. On a side note, these celebrations were not an isolated feature in Ireland or in the United Kingdom during the conflict; as seen in chapter two, the Irish public reacted with public showings of support at the relief of Ladysmith and the return of General White. Three months later, there were further friendly celebrations in areas across Ireland, upon hearing the news of the fall of Pretoria (5 June 1900).<sup>7</sup> However, similar to some scenes throughout Britain, the relief of Mafeking brought about some disorder in Ireland. In Belturbet, County Cavan, 'jingo-orangeism' was reported, as crowds burnt an effigy of Paul Kruger, whilst juveniles broke into the Petty Sessions Courts, hoisting a Union Jack out the front.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in Belfast, further disturbances were reported, with several accounts emerging of

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<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 2 June 1902

<sup>3</sup> *Irish Times*, 2 June 1902.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 June 1902. For information on prominent Protestant areas of Dublin during this period, see R.B. McDowell, *Crisis and decline: the fate of the southern Unionists* (Dublin, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Irish Independent*, 5 June 1902.

<sup>7</sup> Jubilant scenes were reported across Ireland following the news of the fall of Pretoria. Celebrations were witnessed in Dublin, Belfast, Drogheda, Downpatrick, Athlone, and Newtownbutler. *Irish Times*, 6 June 1900.

<sup>8</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 26 May 1900.

Catholic buildings and individuals being attacked by ‘Orange ruffianism.’<sup>9</sup> Overall the celebrations were friendly demonstrations of support, showing an interest and awareness of the latest developments in the conflict.

As the formal phase of the war ended, Irish civilian and press interest had waned as the British forces embarked on a protracted attritional war, which included containment and scorched-earth policy. Nevertheless, with the ratification of the Vereeniging Treaty, the Irish population welcomed home the return of the Irish battalions, with celebrations and events held in locations across the country. Between 1902 and 1903, Irish towns and cities across the island held homecoming celebrations for several returning battalions. On 26 May 1902, the local population of Birr, County Offaly, provided a warm welcome for the return of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Leinster Regiment; the chairman of the Birr Urban District Council, John Dooly, addressed the battalion noting their ‘excellent discipline, courage and manly endurance’, and remarking that ‘we simply voice the feelings and sentiments of our fellow citizens of Birr.’<sup>10</sup> In February 1903, the 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers dressed in their khaki uniform, were engulfed by members of the public as they marched through Derry by torchlight procession following a banquet held in their honour, attended by the Duke of Abercorn.<sup>11</sup> One of the most celebrated events of 1903 was the arrival of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers into the city of Dublin; three years of press and civilian interest culminated towards an impressive welcome from the Dublin population. A banquet and medal ceremony was held at Central Hall, in the Royal Dublin Society’s buildings in Ballsbridge at the behest of the 12<sup>th</sup> Earl of Meath, Hon. Colonel of the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers; the earl stated that the battalion deserved a ‘proper welcome home after an absence of twenty years, and its brilliant services in South Africa ... at a terrible cost in officers and men.’<sup>12</sup> Accompanied by the regimental bands of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Dublin Fusiliers, the soldiers dressed in their civilian clothes marched towards Central Hall, *via* Thomas Street, Cork Hill, Dame Street, Nassau Street, Merrion Square North, Lower Mount Street and Northumberland Road. The Central Hall was described by the *Irish Times*: ‘profusely decorated with palms and evergreens ... and the roof and gallery railings were handsomely draped with red, green and blue muslin, while the names of the various engagements in which the men were prominently displayed.’ During the ceremony the

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<sup>9</sup> See *Freeman’s Journal*, 21 May 1900 and *Belfast News-Letter*, 22 May 1900.

<sup>10</sup> Colonel F. Luttman-Johnson, *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Prince of Wales Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) in South Africa, 1900, 1901, 1902* (London, 1913), p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Cassidy (ed.), *The Inniskilling Diaries 1899-1903: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa* (Barnsley, 2001), pp 161-163 and *Irish Times*, 14 Feb. 1903.

<sup>12</sup> *Irish Times*, 26 Oct. 1903.

Colonel-in-Chief of the battalion, the Duke of Connaught, commended the performances of the line regiment detailing their participation during the first months of the war:

...you took a leading part in the Battle of Talana. You then went back to Ladysmith, and after falling back across the Tugela, you were attached to the army of Sir Redvers Buller, in the Irish Brigade under General Hart. During all those weary months on the Tugela, you took a leading part in every action that took place, and you distinguished yourselves so much at Pieter's Hill that when the relief force of Ladysmith marched in, the general officer commanding gave you the post of honour, and you led the troops that marched into Ladysmith.

In addition, a letter written by the Earl of Meath was read out:

The citizens of the Metropolitan county and City are proud of the men, who mindful of their origin, have known how to make the name of Dublin to be honoured in all lands. Both officers and men have done their duty to King and country, and we, their Irish brothers, accord them a hearty welcome on their return to the dear land of their birth.

Eighteen officers and 523 soldiers of the rank and file received their South African War service medals from the Duke of Connaught, as thousands gathered along the streets of Grafton and St Stephen's Green to see the soldiers – public enthusiasm reached great heights as the battalion colours came into view.<sup>13</sup> The scenes typified the profound interest the Irish public had during the course of the conflict, its awareness of Ireland's participation in the military and particularly, its pride in their performance. This attention and respect for their fellow-countrymen was demonstrated in a desire to commemorate the individuals who lost their lives in the conflict, notwithstanding the increasing spread of Nationalist agitation. In order to get a sense of the scenes that were widely prevalent during a homecoming celebration, the rare photograph below depicts the return of the 61<sup>st</sup> Dublin Company of the Imperial Yeomanry in June 1901, to the city of Dublin. The second photograph illustrates the return of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, as they marched through the city of Derry, surrounded by members of the public. Considering the large numbers present in these two photographs, it can be argued that the two images include interested and enthusiastic Irish loyalists from a cross section of the Protestant and Catholic community.

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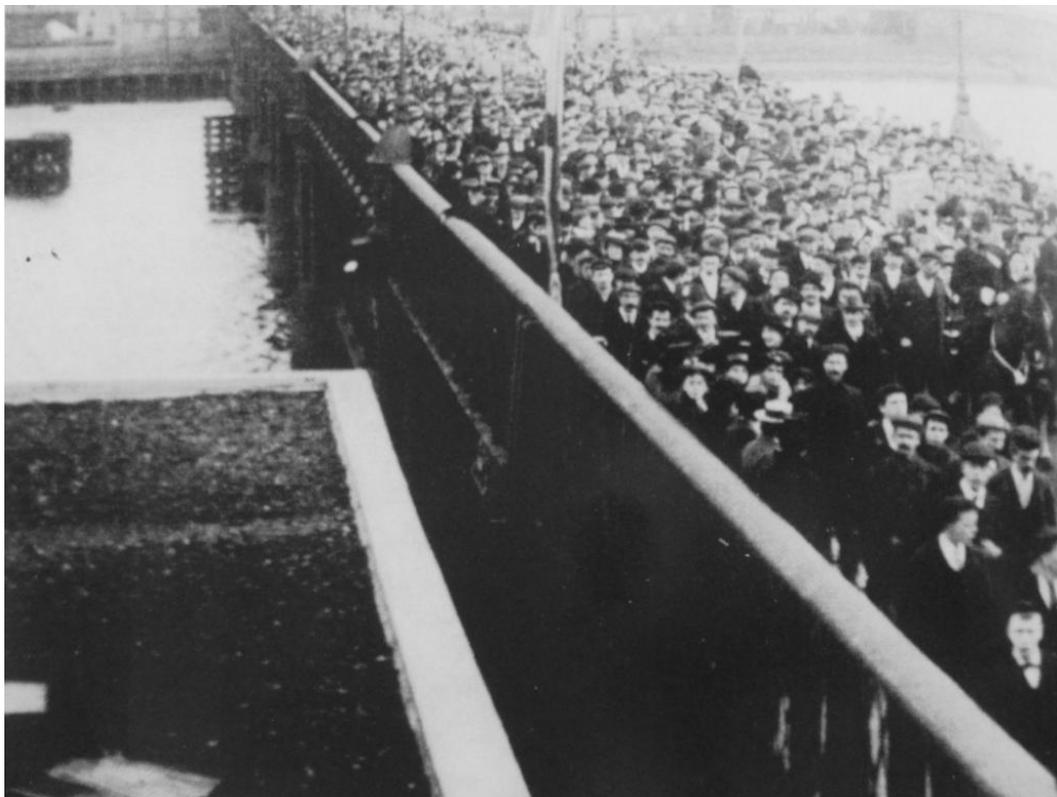
<sup>13</sup> C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (London, 1908), pp 218-228; *Irish Times*, 14 Nov. 1903; *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Nov. 1903.

**Fig. 59: ‘Ireland’s capital does itself justice’ – the return to Dublin of the 61<sup>st</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry**



*Source, Navy and Army Illustrated, 29 June 1901.*

**Fig. 60: The city of Derry welcomes home the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers**



*Source, Martin Cassidy, The Inniskilling diaries, 1899-1903; 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in South Africa (Barnsley, 2001), np.*

Such an interest in celebrating Ireland’s contribution and sacrifice was understandable given the intense press and public attention that had been generated by Irish units’ active participation in some of the most celebrated battles and operations of the campaign. Furthermore, the importance of commemoration was supported by the close military tradition that existed between Ireland and the British Empire throughout the nineteenth century. Naturally, given the extent of Irish participation and the culture of commemoration that existed in the United Kingdom, dozens of war memorials were erected and unveiled across the island of Ireland. Throughout Ireland there are a minimum of fifty-four South African War memorials that are found mostly in Church of Ireland cathedrals and churches, cemeteries, parks and public spaces. This was not unusual, as throughout the Victorian era of imperial expansion memorials were becoming increasingly prevalent throughout the United Kingdom, celebrating and remembering the sacrifice of the British soldier. Indeed, as illustrated throughout this thesis, the Irish were lauded for their bravery, devotion and sacrifice for the Crown and so it was judged imperative by members of the press and public to commemorate their deeds. With the war being the largest muster of Irish troops to that date and due to the conflict’s longevity, the campaign resulted in unprecedented death rates, which were commemorated in to a significant number of public and private memorials. In order to place the number of South African War memorials in context, the table below illustrates the recorded minimum of war memorials found in Ireland, erected during the Victorian era:<sup>14</sup>

**Table K) The minimum number of Irish war memorials erected during the Victorian era**

<b>Campaigns 1837-1902</b>	<b>No. Of Victorian War Memorials</b>
South African War	54
Crimean War	21
India	21
Afghanistan	6
Egypt and Sudan	5
Anglo - Zulu War	4
Burma Campaigns	3
First Anglo - Boer War	2
New Zealand	2

<sup>14</sup> ‘Inventory of South African War memorials’ in the United Kingdom (<http://www.ukniwm.org.uk/>) (9 Oct. 2013). ‘Inventory of South African War memorials in Ireland’ (<http://www.irishwarmemorials.ie/>) (9 Oct. 2013). Martin Staunton, ‘Boer War memorials in Ireland’, in *SAIS*, iii (1996) pp 290-304; Timothy Smyth, ‘The Royal Dublin Fusiliers’ Arch and imperial commemoration in early twentieth-century Ireland’, *SAIS*, iv (2012), pp 25-32.

China	1
East Africa	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>

The majority of the memorials listed are personal monuments that commemorate the memory of one particular individual that died, many of which are found on Church of Ireland grounds. Their personal memorials demonstrated the significance of religion and faith for the bereaved families and friends, who, in the vast majority of cases, had no body to mourn. Moreover, the erection of such monuments illustrated the importance of recognising an individual's personal involvement and achievement within the British army and the relatives' pride in their association with the soldier. While these personal plaques continued on throughout the twentieth century, there was a growing trend for regimental memorials to be erected in conjunction with the extension of the British Empire. The trend of popular imperialism was gathering significant pace during the 1870s, especially the period known as, 'the scramble for Africa'. Successive British governments, encouraged by popular demand, sent regiments across the globe to 'civilise', further their control, and prestige, and increase their stakes in trade. As Africa was being painted red by the conquering British, wars were a regular occurrence and so too was the increased death toll. Due to public demand and necessity, larger memorials were placed in community spaces across the landscape to commemorate and remember the fallen. Collectively, however, these memorials were overshadowed by the construction of hundreds of monuments across Ireland in celebration and commemoration of the tens of thousands of Irish soldiers who died during the Great War, fighting for the British army – the most impressive and contentious war memorial dedicated to these soldiers is the Irish National War Memorial Gardens, in Islandbridge, Dublin.

Interestingly, there is considerable literature on Ireland's commemoration of the South African War.<sup>15</sup> It is one of the few areas of research on Ireland and the conflict that has generated interest amongst historians and scholars. This interest is reflected in the growing attention, knowledge and understanding of Ireland's imperial background and moreover, the continued interest in the processes of commemoration in the country. The war memorials of the South African War reflected the sentiment of Irish loyalists during this period. Following years of press and civilian interest in the conflict, and the contribution of

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<sup>15</sup> Staunton, 'Boer War memorials in Ireland', in *SAIS*, iii, pp 290-304; Smyth, 'The Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Arch and imperial commemoration in early twentieth-century Ireland', *SAIS*, iv, pp 25-32; Ciaran Wallace, 'Lest we remember? Recollection of the Boer War and the Great War in Ireland' in *E-rea*, x (2012), np. Online version. <http://erea.revues.org/2888> (8 June 2013).

Irish battalions, cavalry units and civilian volunteers, it is unsurprising that supporters and relatives of the deceased wished to commemorate and remember their sacrifice and also remind the public of their country's important role within the British Empire. One of the series of reminders of Ireland's contribution to British imperialism was the significant amount of war memorials scattered across the country's landscape, revealing the personal and cultural connections with the Crown and Irish participation in empire-building. However, throughout the twentieth century many memorials were removed by the Irish government or destroyed by Nationalists for their unwelcomed link with the British Empire.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, after the formation of the Irish Free State, and the disbandment of several Irish regiments (1922) the political and cultural landscape altered drastically.<sup>17</sup> The Irish state began a process that attempted to dissociate Ireland's cultural, military and political connections with the United Kingdom against the backdrop of the troublesome nature of remembrance in Irish history - most notably in connection with the Great War and the Irish Civil War. Throughout the twentieth century Ireland's historiography has been a contentious issue of debate between academics, politicians and the public.<sup>18</sup> Where other war memorials were removed, others have largely been forgotten, with the structure and its message blending into the architecture of the city. As a result, with little or no public interest in the war memorials of the South African War, the majority of memorials have remained relatively unscathed and largely unnoticed.

This final chapter presents a study of the commemorative process in Ireland that followed the South African War and the rhetoric which underpinned the memorials, and helped to promote and validate their construction. The war memorial that will be discussed in detail is Fusiliers' Arch, which revealed the interest that once existed in Ireland and which is still a focus of debate on Ireland's imperial past. In addition, the chapter will reveal the impressive array of other public and private memorials that are dotted across Ireland that illustrate the close relationship that existed between Irish society and the military.

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<sup>16</sup> Smyth, 'The Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Arch and imperial commemoration in early twentieth-century Ireland' in *SAIS*, vol. iv, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers, the Connaught Rangers, the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, the Royal Irish Regiment, the Royal Munster Fusiliers, Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment, and the South Irish Horse. See David Murphy, *The Irish Brigades, 1685-2006: a gazetteer of Irish military service, past and present* (Dublin, 2007), pp 105-250. See also, Keith Jeffery 'The British army and Ireland since 1922', in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), pp 431-458.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: history and memory* (Cambridge, 2003); Ian McBride (ed.), *History and memory in modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001).

## **Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Memorial Arch**

The total cost of the reception committee for the return of the Dublin Fusiliers was £219 14s. 6d., a sum generously subscribed by the public. The committee had £29 4s 10d in surplus money,<sup>19</sup> which was subsequently transferred into a new account that proposed the erection of a war memorial for the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. On 16 November 1903, the Earl of Meath wrote a letter to the editor of the *Irish Times* under the title 'Memorial to the Royal Dublin Fusiliers'; contained within were his reasons why Ireland should erect a lasting memorial to the arduous efforts and sacrifice of the Dublin Fusiliers:

Of all the regiments in His Majesty's service there is none which covered itself during those trying years of war with greater glory than the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

It is only right, therefore, that the citizens of Dublin and of the metropolitan Irish county should have an opportunity of showing their admiration for the soldiering qualities displayed by their own regiment, and their desire to honour the memory of the brave men who sacrificed their lives at the call of duty.<sup>20</sup>

A committee was formed that consisted of several Irish peers, including the earls of Howth, Drogheda, Pembroke, Longford, Lord Iveagh, Lord Talbot of Malahide and Lord Plunket; it also included many officers and veterans of the line and militia battalions of the Dublin Fusiliers, some of whom had seen service in the South African War.<sup>21</sup> The request for a memorial is understandable given the nature of Irish participation, their significant contribution in the South African War and the evident success witnessed during the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion's homecoming. This bolstered the confidence for the organisers to build a lasting memorial in the city centre that commemorated the sacrifice of the regiment and celebrate Dublin's close relationship with the regiment. Similarly to the creation of war charities and the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry, the landed gentry played an important role in the commemorative process following the conflict; the Earl of Meath, a zealous Unionist, imperialist, and philanthropist was instrumental in raising awareness for the erection of the memorial. He was an aristocratic Anglo-Irish landlord with an estate in Killruddery, Bray County Wicklow, who, in the words of Historian David H. Hume, devoted the last thirty years of his life, 'to the ideals which he believed the British Empire should represent.'<sup>22</sup> His clear passion and exuberance for the ideals of the Empire were illustrated through many of his books, which addressed the theme of duty, strength and strong principles. Admiral Lord

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<sup>19</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 Dec. 1903.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 Nov. 1903 and *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1903.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1903.

<sup>22</sup> David H. Hume, 'Empire Day in Ireland' in Keith Jeffery (ed.), *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), p. 150.

Charles Beresford recalled that the Earl of Meath showed ‘splendid and untiring effort in the cause of Empire’<sup>23</sup> - his years of service culminated in the creation of ‘Empire Day.’<sup>24</sup> The memorial was a representation of the importance of the Irish contribution to empire-building and it further exemplified Ireland’s strong military tradition, providing a suitable example to the youth of Ireland, of the ideals of devotion and duty.

From 1904, the momentum to raise awareness and gather sufficient subscriptions for the monument gathered pace; the committee worked tirelessly organising raffles, concerts and sporting events across the country. The initial idea of a bronze statue was estimated to cost £3,000 which would be based solely on the generosity of the people of Dublin and surrounding counties. The Earl of Meath believed that all sections of society should contribute some money to pay for the monument; this in effect, he claimed, would: ‘constitute greater honour to the dead than one erected by the gold of a few rich individuals.’ Moreover, this would be a positive reflection on the memorial, as the majority of the war dead they wished to memorialise were of the poorer working class.<sup>25</sup> Similarly to the charity subscriptions detailed in the previous chapter, the newspapers printed the names of the individuals and businesses that donated money, which in turn prompted a greater public interaction and interest in the memorial. Interestingly, there was a belief within the committee that the proposed memorial would obtain the respect of Irish citizens, irrespective of their politics. Indeed, it was generally understood that the people of Dublin wished to commemorate the memory and sacrifice of the Dublin Fusiliers, who in the words of the Earl of Meath, ‘saved the Empire.’<sup>26</sup> It was, however, a rather naive assumption by the memorial committee to believe that the entire city and county of Dublin would support the memorial’s construction; it might even be considered ignorant, or indeed arrogant, giving the magnitude of pro-Boer activity in Dublin throughout the war. Nevertheless, the committee were steadfast in galvanising support for the memorial’s construction, as a failure in its endeavour, would ‘constitute an eternal disgrace to Dublin’.<sup>27</sup> Their efforts were further stimulated by the support of King Edward VII.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Reginald Brabazon Meath, *Memories of the twentieth century* (London, 1924), p. 263.

<sup>24</sup> Jim English, ‘Empire Day in Britain 1904-1958’, in *Historical Journal*, xlix (2006), pp 247-276 and David H. Hume, ‘Empire Day in Ireland’ in Keith Jeffery (ed.), *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), pp 149-168.

<sup>25</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 May 1904.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 Oct. 1904.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 May 1904.

Over the next two years, there were evident signs of progress. With funds successfully secured, the committee agreed to a design submitted by architect John Howard Pentland, the principal surveyor for the Board of Public Works; the assistant consultant was Sir Thomas Drew. In June 1906, the committee revealed that the memorial would be modelled on the Roman triumphal Arch of Titus; it was hoped that it would be a credit to the city and a ‘fitting tribute to brave soldiers.’<sup>29</sup> The Grafton Street entrance of St Stephen’s Green was chosen as an adequate location for the memorial. At a height of thirty-three feet, the arch would include the names of 212 officers and men of the line and militia battalions of the regiment, who lost their lives during the war. It would also include the regiment’s battle honours of the war: Talana, Colenso, Hartshill and Ladysmith, Laing’s Nek and the Tugela Height. Engraved into the front of the arch were Talana and Colenso, which included a Latin inscription:

FORTISSIMIS SVIS MILITIBVS  
HOC MONVMENTVM  
EBLANA DEDICAVIT MCMVII<sup>30</sup>

In addition, a bronze cartouche was displayed bearing a crown, a globe, branches of bay and symbols from the regimental badge - a tiger and elephant.<sup>31</sup> The front view also bore the motto of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers ‘SPECTAMUR AGENDO’.<sup>32</sup> The back of the arch recorded the battles of Hartshill and Ladysmith and a panel also read:

IN MEMORY OF THE OFFICERS NON COM  
COMMISIONED OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE  
ROYAL DVBLIN FVSILIERS WHO FELL IN  
THE SOVTH AFRICAN WAR AD. 1899-1900

On each flank, which incidentally bears some bullet holes from the 1916 Rising, the memorial commemorated the series of battles along the Tugela Heights and the battle of Laing’s Nek. The arch, in the opinion of the *Irish Times*, would be a ‘reminder of the glorious

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15 June 1906.

<sup>30</sup> ‘To her most brave soldiers, Dublin dedicated this monument 1907’.

<sup>31</sup> The regimental arms consisted of the ‘Royal Tiger’ for notable battle honours at Plassey, Buxar, and the sieges of Chandernagore, Chunar and Allahabad during the Presidency of Bengal, 1757, 1764-5; and an ‘Elephant’ for services on the Coromandel Coast, which included several sieges and battles from 1747 to 1783. Arthur Mainwaring, *Crown and company: the historical records of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, formally the 1<sup>st</sup> Bombay European Regiment, 1662-1911* (London, 1911), p. 376.

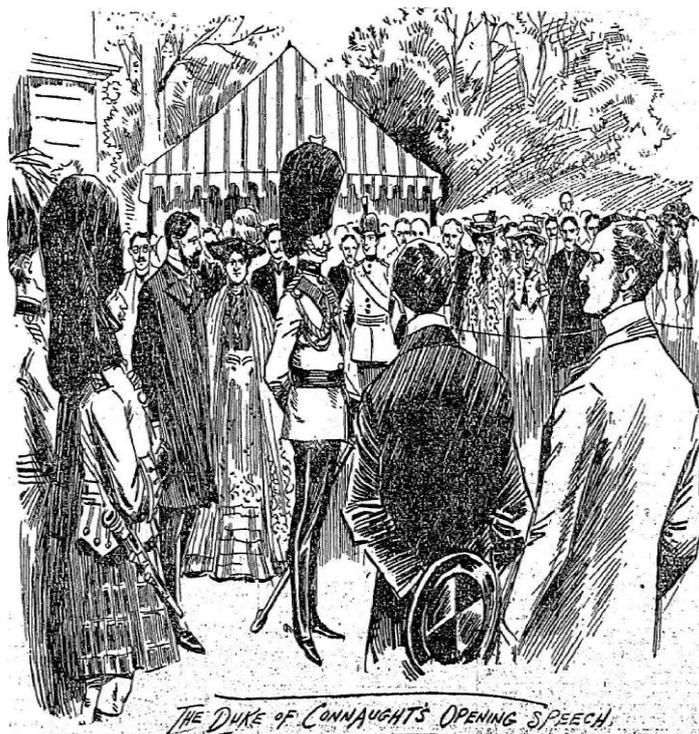
<sup>32</sup> ‘Let us be judged by our own deeds or By our deeds we are known’. Murphy, *The Irish Brigades, 1685-2006: a gazetteer of Irish military service, past and present*, p. 198.

deeds performed by its sons in the regiments so prominently identified with the county and city.<sup>33</sup>

On 19 August 1907, in the presence of thousands of onlookers, several battalions and distinguished guests, the arch was officially unveiled to the public. The *Irish Independent* provided the reader a taste of the excitement that was prevalent: ‘Grafton Street was gay with a profusion of flags and floral decorations, and the windows of the houses in the vicinity of the memorial were early crowded with sightseers.’<sup>34</sup> In a series of public speeches, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, John Hamilton-Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen, first addressed the crowd:

...the main purpose of this movement, and of this memorial, is one which when rightly understood may be regarded with sympathy and goodwill by the whole community, irrespective of widely divergent opinion. We are not here for the glorification of war, whether the war in general, or any particular war. We are here especially to celebrate and to commemorate the exercise and manifestations of qualities which all thoughtful people recognise as commendable and excellent - namely, such qualities as courage, self - control and devotion.<sup>35</sup>

**Fig. 61: The Duke of Connaught’s opening speech**



Source, *Irish Independent*, 20 Aug. 1907.

<sup>33</sup> *Irish Times*, 15 June 1907.

<sup>34</sup> *Irish Independent*, 20 Aug. 1907.

<sup>35</sup> *Irish Times*, 20 Aug. 1907.

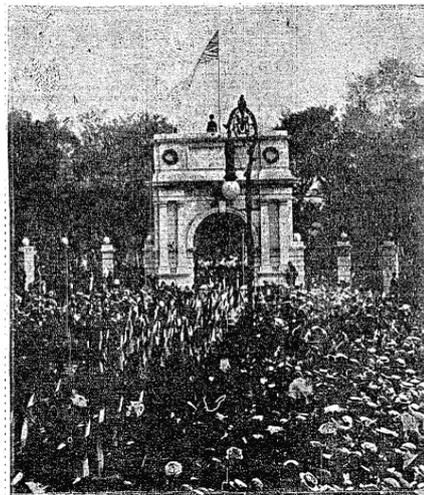
H.R.H., The Duke of Connaught, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Forces, and Colonel-in- Chief of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, commended the veterans of the South African War in his closing remarks:

Men of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers you have reason to be proud of the way Irishmen, and especially men from Dublin, have done their duty and have proved themselves worthy successors to those who have gone in the regiment before you, and I am proud to have been associated with you as your Colonel-in-Chief on an occasion which will live long in the annals of the regiment<sup>36</sup>

The memorial had cost £1,800 for the labour and material, along with sundry expenses of £130; the expenses were covered by the generosity of Ireland's citizens with received donations totalling £1,956.<sup>37</sup> The memorial was considered by Major Cecil Romer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers as a 'handsome addition to the ornamental architecture of the city' standing in 'one of the most prominent and most beautiful parts of the city'; furthermore, he believed that the memorial had special significance that acknowledged duty and courage:

...even without the sight of more than one poor woman, silently weeping from the re-opening of the never healed wound in her heart. For there is nothing truer than that a victory is only less terrible than a defeat ... our thoughts flew back through the many happy years of good comradeship we had spent with the gallant friends whom we never cease to mourn, and whose names will be treasured memories as long as the regiment endures.<sup>38</sup>

**Fig. 62: Fusiliers' Arch during the opening ceremony**



Source, *Irish Independent*, 20 Aug. 1907.

<sup>36</sup> *Irish Independent*, 20 Aug. 1907.

<sup>37</sup> *Irish Times*, 5 Oct. 1907.

<sup>38</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 238.

In his memoirs, *Memories of the twentieth century*, the Earl of Meath mentioned little with regards to the construction or the opening of the memorial; however, a letter is included written by the High Court Justice in Ireland, John Ross P.C., congratulating him on his great success:

I should have been glad of an opportunity of saying that in substance the memorial is your achievement. All the difficulty was in the beginning, and you did not spare yourself. You infected everyone with your enthusiasm ... I congratulate your lordship on the success of the whole work which was largely due to yourself.<sup>39</sup>

With the grand opening of the arch, Major Romer, wrote that ‘the curtain drops on the last of drama of the South African War’ in Ireland.<sup>40</sup> The *Kildare Observer* believed the memorial to be ‘one of the most beautiful and artistic ornaments of the Irish capital’.<sup>41</sup> Irrespective of politics, the editor of the *Irish Times* believed that every member of the Dublin community will be deeply moved by the ceremony that celebrated honour and devotion to duty; the writer continued:

This monument to the gallant deeds of their fellow - countrymen will be for all loyal Irishmen a permanent record of what Ireland has done for the Empire. To the loyal citizens of Dublin especially it will be a continual source of pride and inspiration.<sup>42</sup>

‘Murty’ a writer for the *Irish Times*, commented on the arch:

That grand memorial on Stephen’s Green is a fine adornment to the centre of the city – a true monument to the valour of Irishmen in the military service of the King and the country, and it’s also a great testimonial to the public spirit of the subscribers who’ve put it up.<sup>43</sup>

The years of work and devotion to the memory of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was an immediate undoubted success. In the words of the Earl of Meath, the memorial ‘will be an ever present reminder to the coming generations of the citizens of Dublin of the obligations of loyalty, of faithfulness of duty and to honour, which Ireland demands of all her sons.’<sup>44</sup> James M. Mayo notes that war memorials are ‘a social and physical arrangement of space and artefacts to keep alive the memories of persons who participated in a war sponsored by their country.’<sup>45</sup> That, in essence, was the rhetoric and understanding that underlined the process

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<sup>39</sup> Brabazon, *Memories of the twentieth century*, pp 116-117.

<sup>40</sup> Romer and Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland*, p. 238.

<sup>41</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 17 Aug. 1907.

<sup>42</sup> *Irish Times*, 20 Aug. 1907.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Aug. 1907.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 Aug. 1907; *Irish Independent*, 20 Aug. 1907.

<sup>45</sup> James M Mayo, ‘War memorials as political memory’, in *Geographical Review*, lxxviii (1988), p. 62.

commemorating the Dublin Fusiliers. The Earl of Meath understood the importance of commemoration in society for the present and future generations, which acted as a ‘teaching tool’ on the importance of sacrifice, loyalty and devotion.<sup>46</sup> As remarked by Joep Leerssen, ‘monumental history is useful because it provides present generations with inspiration.’<sup>47</sup> However, as the political landscape altered drastically, the sentiment and meaning behind the arch transformed; in the words of historian Donal McCracken, the memorial became a ‘lasting reminder to Irish nationalists of the war’, which quickly adopted the colloquial title ‘Traitor’s Gate.’<sup>48</sup> The monument thus was interpreted as a reminder of an imperial Ireland serving as an ‘inconvenient truth’ to many who wished to disown their country’s active participation in empire- building. The day after the ceremony, Ireland’s oldest Nationalist newspaper, the *Freeman’s Journal*, denounced the arch for what it attempted to represent:

Dublin has nothing to do with the erection or dedication of it ... From first to last Dublin believed, and believes, the war in which those men were engaged to be unjust and disgraceful. From such a war no glory is to be gained; such a war deserves no commemorating memorial.<sup>49</sup>

This gradually became the accepted understanding; in 1927 Captain Redmond spoke in Dáil Éireann:

Is it suggested that because there is a memorial at the corner of Stephen's Green to the Dublin Fusiliers who died in the Boer War that the people of Ireland, or even a majority of them, were in favour of that war? Nothing of the kind. There is a monument...to a Dublin regiment who took part in a war which nobody in their senses would suggest had the approval even of a very small percentage of the Irish people. Does anybody coming to Dublin and looking at that gate and at that memorial think that the action of these men had anything to do either with our history in the past or with our future?<sup>50</sup>

His interpretation is understandable and not without merit when considering the political climate following the Great War and the War of Independence. Nevertheless to simply disregard Irish motivations, interest and participation in the British Empire and the close links that existed symbiotically, is misleading. The memorial, as Keith Jeffery explains, reflected the extent of loyalist passion which was aroused by the South African War.<sup>51</sup> However, in modern Ireland very few people understand the meaning behind the arch, with Timothy

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<sup>46</sup> David Fitzpatrick, ‘Commemoration in the Irish Free State: a chronicle of embarrassment’ in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and memory in modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 185.

<sup>47</sup> Joep Leerssen, ‘Monument and trauma: varieties of remembrance’ in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and memory in modern Ireland*, p. 207.

<sup>48</sup> D.P. McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003), p. 148.

<sup>49</sup> *The Freeman’s Journal*, 20 Aug. 1907.

<sup>50</sup> *Dáil Éireann Debates*, 29 Mar., 1927, xix, col. 410.

<sup>51</sup> Keith Jeffery, ‘The Irish soldier in the Boer War’ in John Gooch (ed.), *The Boer War: direction, experience and image* (London, 2000), p. 150.

Smyth stating that this is unsurprising given the ‘similar cultural amnesia’ which exists with regards the memory of Irish soldiers who actively engaged with the British military during the two World Wars.<sup>52</sup> In the opinion of historian Ciarian Wallace, remembering Ireland’s active collaboration with the British Empire and the soldiers that died in South African War, ‘does not fit Ireland’s official self-image, or the sense of identity of the average Irish citizen.’<sup>53</sup>

**Fig. 63: Fusiliers’ Arch circa 1907/1908**



Source, C.F. Romer and A.E. Mainwaring, *The Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War with a description of the operations in the Aden Hinterland* (London, 1908), p. 232.

Furthermore, this selective amnesia that exists in Irish culture and historiography can be illustrated again with the statue of the dead Royal Dublin Fusilier, which was once attached to Queen Victoria’s memorial on Leinster Lawns, Dublin. Unveiled in 1908, the memorial was a tribute to the monarch and a remembrance of Irish heroism during the South African War.<sup>54</sup> Following the formation of the Irish Free State, the presence of Queen Victoria at Leinster Lawns in front of the Irish Parliament was considered highly contentious. The changes to the political and cultural landscape demanded the removal of the statue, with many considering it unattractive and of no value<sup>55</sup> - it was eventually removed in 1948, a year before the Irish Free State officially became a republic. In 1987, after four decades of

<sup>52</sup> Smyth, ‘The Royal Dublin Fusiliers’ Arch and imperial commemoration in early twentieth-century Ireland’, *SAIS*, iv, p. 31.

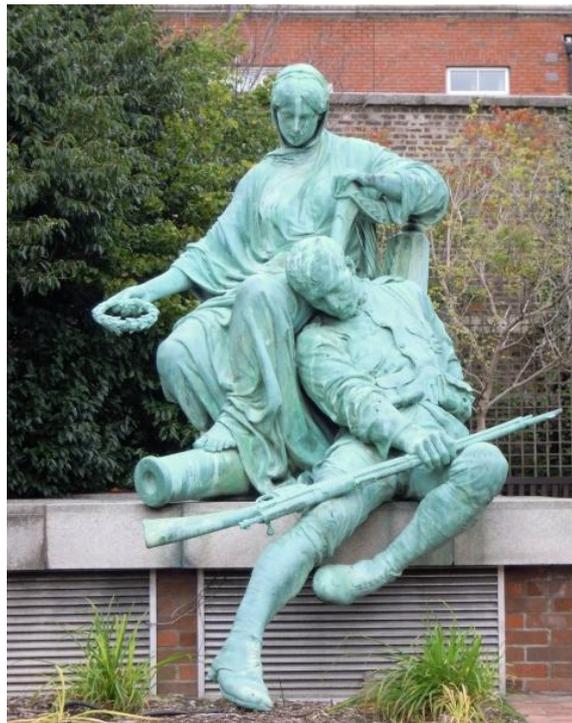
<sup>53</sup> Wallace, ‘Lest we remember? Recollection of the Boer War and the Great War in Ireland’ in *E-rea*, x, np. Online version. <http://erea.revues.org/2888> (8 June 2013).

<sup>54</sup> James H. Murphy, *Abject loyalty: Nationalism and monarchy in Ireland during the reign of Queen Victoria* (2001), p. 289.

<sup>55</sup> *Dáil Éireann Debates*, 11 Dec., 1930, xxxvi, col. 10.

obscurity, the statue of Queen Victoria was despatched on permanent loan to Sydney, Australia, where it now sits in front of a shopping mall. The fate of the Dublin Fusilier was less ceremonious; the soldier now sits in a secluded garden, placed on an air vent in Dublin Castle. To view the bronze statue one must pass through a closed gate, cross a private car park and continue into a garden. Moreover, there is no sign to direct the public towards the statue and upon viewing it, there is no plaque to explain what the memorial commemorates.<sup>56</sup>

**Fig. 64: The ‘dead’ Dublin Fusilier once attached to Queen Victoria’s memorial in Dublin.**



Source, Ciaran Wallace, ‘Lest we remember? Recollection of the Boer War and the Great War in Ireland’ in *E-rea* (2012), np. Online version. <http://erea.revues.org/2888> (8 June 2013).

### **Regimental and battalion memorials**

Throughout the country there are other memorials, dedicated to the memory of Irish battalions and units, which were unveiled prior to Fusiliers’ Arch. In 1906, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Dunraven, Windham Thomas Wyndham – Quin, Hon. Colonel of the 5<sup>th</sup> Munster Fusiliers, wished to commemorate the valour and military character of his regiment from 1882 to 1902.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Colonel O’ Donovan, commanding officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Munster Fusiliers wished to emulate the memorial process that was witnessed repeatedly throughout the United

<sup>56</sup> Wallace, ‘Lest we remember? Recollection of the Boer War and the Great War in Ireland’ in *E-rea*, x, np. Online version. <http://erea.revues.org/2888> (8 June 2013).

<sup>57</sup> *Irish Times*, 22 Aug. 1903.

Kingdom.<sup>58</sup> Following a public appeal, subscriptions amounted to £1,039 and the location for the twenty four foot iron cross was generously donated by the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Kenmare, Valentine Browne.<sup>59</sup> In September 1906, the Royal Munster Fusiliers Memorial in Killarney, County Kerry, was unveiled and in the words of the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Kenmare, Valentine Browne, the memorial ‘was to remind us and our children that there cannot be a more splendid ambition or more glorious a fate than to give our lives in the service of our King and country.’<sup>60</sup> Two years previously, following a short campaign by the *Irish Times*, a small unit memorial was placed outside the Roman Catholic, Saint Andrew’s Church, Westland Row, Dublin. It commemorated the nineteenth fallen members of the 74<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company of the Imperial Yeomanry who died ‘fighting for their King and Country during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902’. Unveiled by the Duke of Connaught, he trusted the memorial ‘will ever be valued, not only by the citizens of Dublin, but by all Irishmen.’<sup>61</sup> The Earl of Meath was once again at the heart of the commemoration process, being patron for the erection of the memorial.<sup>62</sup> It is believed that there was one other memorial dedicated to Catholic soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers who died during the South African War. The memorial that was unveiled in July 1905, at Saint Brigid’s Church, the Curragh Army Camp, was considered a ‘very handsome memorial’.<sup>63</sup> However, it is thought that the memorial was destroyed in a fire that gutted the entire church, in 1923.

Within the Anglican cathedral of Saint Patrick’s in Dublin there is an impressive array of monuments and regimental colours that celebrate Ireland’s illustrious military past connected with the British Empire. The military regalia and the dozens of war memorials offer a significant insight to Ireland’s military tradition; there are plaques commemorating the service and sacrifice of battalions and individual soldiers who died in many obscure places throughout the wars for the expansion and preservation of the British Empire, ranging from Afghanistan, to China, to the fields of Europe during the Second World War.<sup>64</sup> Within the walls of the cathedral, there are six memorials dedicated to the war dead of Irish units – 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1 Aug. 1904.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 27 Jun. 1905.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 27 Sep. 1906.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 6 May 1904.

<sup>62</sup> In 1903 a small tablet monument was placed at Trinity Church, lower Gardner Street Dublin. It was in remembrance of the deaths of three troopers of the 74<sup>th</sup> Imperial Yeomanry, who were killed during the defence of Rooikopjes, when a British convoy came under attack from several hundred Boers. The troopers remembered were Ernest R. M ‘Lean, Charles A.V Bonyngne, and John Olliffe, 74<sup>th</sup> (Dublin) Company Imperial Yeomanry, and past members of the 10<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company Boys’ Brigade, Trinity Church. The individuals were childhood friends, and are buried in the same plot in South Africa. See *Irish Times*, 22 Aug. 1903; Will Bennett, *Absent-minded beggars: volunteers in the Boer War* (Barnsley, 1999), p. 194.

<sup>63</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 July 1905.

<sup>64</sup> See Victor Jackson, *The monuments in St Patrick’s Cathedral Dublin* (Dublin, 1987).

Irish Lancers, 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Hussars, 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company Imperial Yeomanry, 1<sup>st</sup> Leinster Regiment and two memorials for the Royal Irish Regiment. There is also a memorial for the five members of the 16<sup>th</sup> Queen's Lancers who died whilst attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> Hussars. Two months prior to the opening of Fusiliers' Arch, a nine foot Celtic mural cross was unveiled, dedicated to soldiers of the Royal Irish Regiment who died during the South African War. The Very Reverend, the Dean of the Chapel Royal, Canon Carlton, remarked that it was a 'privilege ... to be guardians of many memorials of distinguished Irish regiments.' He continued to state that it was 'fitting ... that we should welcome, a monument which will recall to future generations the service' which the regiment 'rendered with faithfulness and devotion for two years and a half during the last trial of our arms ...'.<sup>65</sup> Incidentally, the memorial was designed by Sir Thomas Drew, the same individual who created the triumphal arch at Saint Stephen's Green. In the opinion of Joep Leerssen, cathedrals such as Saint Patrick's represented the shared history that existed between Ireland and Britain and the overall reliance and dependency of the Protestant Ascendancy in maintaining that relationship. Moreover, the political element to the commemoration demonstrated that the Nationalist tradition in Ireland had no means in which to control and deter the growing dedication and monumentalism of British imperialism by the Protestant and loyalist Ascendancy.<sup>66</sup> Of the other war memorials, many are found in former British army barracks and public spaces that would have had a strong Unionist and loyalist connection. Significantly, the memorials dedicated to the war dead of the South African War, were testament of how elements of Irish society were committed to the war effort and the importance of remembering Ireland's contribution and sacrifice. Furthermore, such representations of Irish loyalty to the Crown would have been hoped by some sections of the community to last long in the public memory and act as an important influence on society. Illustrated below is a list of regiment and battalion memorials on the island that have been recorded by the *UK National Inventory of War Memorials*, *Irish War Memorials Project* and other sources:<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 May 1907.

<sup>66</sup> Joep Leerssen, 'Monument and trauma: varieties of remembrance' in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and memory in modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp 204-222.

<sup>67</sup> Information obtained from: Mildred G. Dooner, *The "last post": a roll call of all officers (naval, military or colonial) who gave their lives for their queen, king and country, in the South African War, 1899 – 1902* (London, 1903); Martin Staunton, 'Boer War memorials in Ireland', in *SAIS*, iii (1996), pp 290-304; Timothy Smyth, 'The Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Arch and imperial commemoration in early twentieth-century Ireland', *SAIS*, iv, pp 25-32; 'Inventory of South African War memorials' in the United Kingdom (<http://www.ukniwm.org.uk/>) (9 Oct. 2013) and 'Inventory of South African War memorials in Ireland' (<http://www.irishwarmemorials.ie/>) (9 Oct. 2013).

**Table L: List of regiment and battalion memorials in Ireland**

<b>Regiment/Unit</b>	<b>Location</b>
Royal Irish Rifles	City Hall Belfast, Antrim
46th, 54th, 60th, 131th, 132nd, 133rd, 134th, Imperial Yeomanry	City Hall Belfast, Antrim
2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers	Armagh City, Armagh
5th Royal Irish Rifles	Down City, Down
74th Imperial Yeomanry	Dublin City, Dublin.
Royal Dublin Fusiliers	St Stephen's Green, Dublin
Royal Dublin Fusiliers Soldier	Dublin Castle, Dublin.
Connaught Rangers	Renmore Barracks, Galway
4th and 5th Dublin Fusiliers	Curragh Army Camp, Kildare
Royal Irish Regiment (cross)	St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
Royal Irish Regiment (window)	St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
5th Royal Irish Lancers	St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
16th Queen's Lancers	St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
8th Royal Irish Hussars	St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
45th Imperial Yeomanry	St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
1st Leinster Regiment	St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Enniskillen, Fermanagh
1st Inniskilling Fusiliers	Enniskillen, Fermanagh
6th Royal Inniskilling Dragoons and Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Enniskillen, Fermanagh
Munster Fusiliers	Killnary, Kerry
3rd Leinster Regiment	Birr, Offaly
Royal Irish Regiment	Clonmel, Tipperary
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Omagh, Tyrone

Similarly to the construction of Fusiliers' Arch, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Leinster Regiment memorial built in a cemetery in Crinkill, Birr caused indignation amongst town planners and sections of the local population. Despite the motion passing, George Hackett of the Urban District Council of Birr voiced his concern of commemorating the destruction of an independent nation; Hackett empathised with the Boer struggle, drawing parallels with Ireland:

I do not see what right we have at all to honour the memory of a few militia men who went to South Africa as volunteers to crush, or help to crush, an independent nation - a nation of independent farmers who were trying to keep their independence- what we have been trying to do for the last hundred years ... there was not one of them killed in action; they died of disease.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Dublin Daily Express*, 23 Sep. 1903.

It is abundantly evident that Nationalists were discontented with the commemoration of Ireland's role in the South African conflict, and moreover, the influence of British imperialism and militarism on Irish society. The motivations that underpinned each commemoration and memorial that was erected in Ireland gradually became irrelevant: all that mattered to Nationalists was their association with Britain. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century attempts were made by different elements of Irish society, including the government and the Irish Republican Army, to break any historical link with the United Kingdom – the most infamous case being the destruction of Nelson's Pillar in 1966 by Irish republicans. With regards to the South African War, Donal McCracken wrote that Fusiliers' Arch was one of the few British monuments in Dublin which had not been blown up.<sup>69</sup> However, there were three reported attempts to blow up the war memorial at Connaught Avenue, County Cork, which commemorated officers, NCOs and men of County Cork 'who lost their lives in the service of Empire during the South African War 1899-1902'; the monument was unveiled on 22 October 1904, following a public subscription. In 1919, however, a portion of the face of the Celtic cross was blown away by an explosion; in 1925, a further attempt was made to destroy the monument, with witnesses remembering 'a bright light was seen in the sky', followed by a loud explosion.<sup>70</sup> The material damage to the memorial was slight indicating that the attack was badly organised and carried out by individuals not familiar with the handling of explosive devices; the perpetrators also burned a wreath which had been placed at the memorial.<sup>71</sup> On 28 February 1941, an 'illegal organisation' once again failed to destroy the memorial and instead damaged eight houses nearby.<sup>72</sup> The act would not generate much media attention until the perpetrators of the attack were captured while attempting to blow up Union Garda Station, Cork. Three individuals were arrested and charged by the Special Criminal Court in Collins Barracks, Dublin for the possession of explosives and for their role in the memorial attack – the men were named locally as John Barry, Patrick Casey, and Denis Kavanagh. Moreover, Barry and Casey were charged alongside five others in connection with possessing the explosive, gelignite. The individuals associated with the memorial attack were charged with possession of revolvers, whilst the entire group had an impressive arsenal of two Thompson sub machine guns, 111

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<sup>69</sup> D.P. McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003), p. 148.

<sup>70</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Nov. 1925.

<sup>71</sup> *Southern Star*, 21 Nov. 1925.

<sup>72</sup> *Irish Times*, 1 Mar. 1941 and *Ibid.*, 8 Mar. 1941.

sticks of gelignite and seven revolvers. The official individual charges brought against the men who attempted to destroy the memorial were as follows:<sup>73</sup>

- 1) Causing an explosion
- 2) Possession of explosives under suspicious circumstances
- 3) Possession of ammunition with intent
- 4) Placing an explosive near a building
- 5) Possession of a firearm and ammunition with intent
- 6) Carrying a firearm and ammunition without a certificate
- 7) Membership of an unlawful organisation.

**Fig. 65: A contemporary photograph of the damage caused by the explosion at the South African War memorial in Connaught Avenue, Cork (2014)**



Source, <http://www.irishwarmemorials.ie/Memorials-Detail?memoId=247> (1 July 2014).

The three pleaded guilty to the charges and were sentenced to between eighteen months and five years; they denied any affiliation with ‘an illegal organisation’ which was most probably the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.).<sup>74</sup> Patrick Casey, while awaiting trial in Arbour Hill Prison, Detention Barracks, Dublin wrote ‘we are sorry for it and all that, but those things cannot be helped. We may be wrong but we don’t think we are. We did what we knew is right to our minds.’<sup>75</sup> In a letter from Patrick Casey’s mother, dated 2 November 1941, we get a sense of the individual’s background and his politics: ‘The war is terrible. Russia is nearly

<sup>73</sup> Military Intelligence, 1941 (M.A.C.B., Special Criminal Courts, G2/3729; G2/3730; G2/3732)

<sup>74</sup> *Irish Press*, *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent*, 4 Sep 1941. The men who were tried and convicted by the Special Criminal Courts were all released within the following year.

<sup>75</sup> Patrick Casey, Military Intelligence, 1941 (M.A.C.B., Special Criminal Courts, G2/3730)

finished & then England comes next she will just get a taste of what her black & tan done to the Irishmen and in 1916 too.’<sup>76</sup> This case is evidence of the fact that the legacy of Ireland’s participation in the British military was uncomfortable for certain individuals, particularly for members of the aforementioned Nationalist organisation. The failed destruction of the memorial was an attempt to erase the physical evidence which recalled the memory of Cork natives fighting for the British Empire and the close symbiotic relationship that once existed between Ireland and Britain.

### **Personal plaques**

It is estimated that throughout the island there are thirty-one personal memorials dedicated to a number of officers and men that lost their lives during the conflict. It is conceivable that the number is higher given the extent of Irish participation and the lack of a complete national database of all war memorials in the country. The majority of the memorials listed below are monuments dedicated to specific individuals, whilst the Portora and Cork memorials commemorate a group of individuals, but not necessarily the battalion:<sup>77</sup>

**Table M) List of personal memorials in Ireland**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Regiment</b>	<b>Place of death</b>	<b>Location of memorial</b>
Lieutenant Robert Earnest Reade	1st King's Royal Rifles	Boshman's Pan	Belfast, Co. Antrim
Lieutenant Robert Earnest Reade	1st King's Royal Rifles	Boshman's Pan	Drumbeg, Co. Antrim
Kerr McClintock	Imperial Light Horse	Elandslaagte	Derry City, Co. Derry
Earl of Ava Archibald	Imperial Light Horse	Wagon Hill, Ladysmith	Bangor, Co. Down
Captain Charles James Kinahan Maguire	Royal Sussex Regiment	Diamond Hill, Pretoria	Bangor, Co. Down
Earl of Ava Archibald	Imperial Light Horse	Wagon Hill, Ladysmith	Clandeboye, Co. Down
Captain James Thomson Seeds	5th Royal Irish Rifles	Kroonstadt	Down City, Co. Down
Lieutenant Colonel Henry Averall Eagar	2nd Royal Irish Rifles	Stormberg	Newcastle, Co. Down
Lieutenant William Harold	1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Pretoria	Ballybrack, Co. Dublin

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Information obtained from: Dooner, *The “last post”: a roll call of all officers (naval, military or colonial) who gave their lives for their queen, king and country, in the South African War, 1899 – 1902* (London, 1903); ‘Inventory of South African War memorials’ in the United Kingdom (<http://www.ukniwm.org.uk/>) (9 Oct. 2013) and ‘Inventory of South African War memorials in Ireland’ (<http://www.irishwarmemorials.ie/>) (9 Oct. 2013).

2nd Lieutenant Arthur Hugh Montgomery Hill	1st Royal Irish Fusiliers	Talana Hill	Blackrock, Co. Dublin
Patrick J. Lawlor and Peter J. Murphy	Irish Hospital Orderlies	Draghoendar/Bl oemfontein	Glasnevin, Co. Dublin
Trooper Andrew Marshall Porter	45th Dublin Imperial Yeomanry	Lindley	Memorial Buildings, Trinity College, Dublin
Trumpeter Vernon A. Swaine	14th King's Hussars	Martizburg	Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin
Lieutenant Colonel Eustace Guinness	84th Royal Field Artillery	Bakenlaagte	Stillorgan, Co. Dublin
Lieutenant G.W. Morley and Lieutenant N.H. Lincoln	2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Relief of Ladysmith/Bosc hbult	Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh
Captain Robert Richards Challenor	2nd Connaught Rangers	Boschbult	Church Lane, Co. Galway
Captain George Antony Weldon	2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Talana Hill	Athy, Co. Kildare
Captain George Antony Weldon	2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Talana Hill	Naas, Co. Kildare
Robert George Buchanan Riddell	3rd King's Royal Rifles	Spion Kop	Kilkenny Town, Co. Kilkenny
Edward Erskine Wilmot-Chetwode	45th Dublin Imperial Yeomanry	Lindley	Emo, Co. Laois
2nd Lieutenant William Charles Robert Croker	1st Royal Munster Fusiliers	Boshof	Limerick City, Co. Limerick
Captain Eyre Lloyd	2nd Coldstream Guards	Bakenlaagte	Limerick City, Co. Limerick
Trevor Taylor Preston	Imperial Light Horse	Waggon Hill, Ladysmith	Julianstown, Co. Meath
Captain William Atkins	Wiltshire Regiment	Nooitgedacht	Monaghan Town, Co. Monaghan
Reginald Owen Gethin	N/A	Relief of Mafeking (plaque)	Sligo Town, Co. Sligo
Reginald Owen Gethin	N/A	Relief of Mafeking (altarpiece)	Sligo Town, Co. Sligo
Captain Alexander Charles Going	Scottish Borderers	Karee	Cahir, Co. Tipperary
Captain William Ernest Davis Goff	3rd Dragoons Guards	Vryheid	Waterford City, Co. Waterford
Henry Walker	2nd Coldstream Guards	Bloemfontein	Bray, Co. Wicklow
Men of the country and city of Cork	Several listed	N/A	Connaught Avenue, Co. Cork
Past pupils of Portora Royal	N/A	N/A	Portora Royal School,

School		Co. Fermanagh
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The memorials are evidence of a further dimension to the relationship that existed between Ireland and the British Empire during this period. The detail recorded on the memorials reveals the extent of Irish representation in many battalions and units of the British army, and moreover, the importance of the military tradition in Irish society. Furthermore, the memorials and their location reveal an interesting connection between religion and the military. Of the thirty-one known personal memorials on the island of Ireland, twenty-five are located in parishes and cathedrals of the Church of Ireland; the other six are located in a former landed-estate, a barracks of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in Naas, the Graduate Buildings in Trinity College, Dublin, an Anglican school and a public space. With some eighty per cent of the personal memorials being commemorated by the Church of Ireland, it reflected the close unity between the Church, the military and the British Empire. Moreover, it reveals the importance of the military tradition that existed among families of the Protestant Ascendancy, which helped reinforce their social and economic reputation in Irish society.

In tandem with other sources, the detail inscribed on the memorials offers the researcher further information on the extent of Irish participation during the conflict and the importance of commemorating their sacrifice. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Eustace Guinness of the 84<sup>th</sup> Battery, Royal Field Artillery, son of Henry Guinness of Stillorgan, died at the battle of Bakenlaagte (30 Oct., 1901), aged forty one, and is commemorated by a plaque at St Brigid's Church Stillorgan. His conduct at the battle was deemed 'heroic' as he died attempting to fire a round of case shot; twenty nine of his thirty-two gunners were casualties.<sup>78</sup> A further example is contained in St Mary's Cathedral, County Limerick where a white marble plaque commemorates the death of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant William Charles Robert Croker 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers who was killed in action at Boshof (23 Feb., 1902). The Limerick native from Trough Castle was killed in the line of duty, after their company got separated from the main convoy. They held their position until their ammunition was expended; Lieutenant Croker refused to surrender when ordered to by the surrounding Boers, and was consequently shot dead. His memorial in the cathedral notes that he refused to surrender.<sup>79</sup> A further memorial is mounted in St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork, in memory of Lieutenant Colonel William Aldworth, D.S.O., Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry; the

<sup>78</sup> Dooner, *The "last post": a roll call of all officers (naval, military or colonial) who gave their lives for their queen, king and country, in the South African War, 1899 – 1902*, pp 153-154.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p 80.

following description that appeared on Aldworth's memorial, demonstrates the immense strength and capability of the British Empire and it also gives an interesting insight in the career of a British officer with vast experience of different theatres in the Victorian Army; it reads:

Born Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> 1855 fell at Paardeberg South Africa Feb 18 1900 whilst gallantly leading the charge of the Cornwalls. He served with much distinction in the Burmese Expedition 1885-6. The Isazai Expedition 1892. The Chitral Relief Force 1895. The Tirah Expeditionary Force 1897-8 including the actions of the Sampagna and Arhangh Passes. The operations against the Khanikhel Chamkanis and in the Bazar Valley. He is buried close to where he fell.

As Aldworth led the charge against General Cronje's defences at Paardeberg, he reportedly called out to his men; 'we will make the name of the Cornwalls ring in the ears of the world, boys'. Major General Smith-Dorrien, one of handful of survivors of the battle of Isandlwana (1879) 'deeply deplored the loss of this gallant and distinguished officer'.<sup>80</sup>

These memorials acted as a 'moral compass', which sought to provide the youth with an understanding of the ideals which were the foundation for those who lived and died out of duty and sacrifice for their country. As the church was the centre of faith and a focal point for the community, it was inherently important to allow an opportunity for the families and friends of the deceased to preserve the honour of their dead in this place. Moreover, the attachment of faith to the monuments is significant, revealing the valued interaction between religion, society and warfare.

In contrast to the many memorials of those who fought with the Empire, there is just one memorial in Ireland dedicated to a volunteer who died fighting alongside the Boers; Hugh Carberry aged 23, died on 23 October 1899 at Modderspruit. Upon hearing the news of his death, the Nationalist community of Armagh collected £125 for the erection of a memorial in his memory. In June 1902, Michael Davitt unveiled the memorial in a Roman Catholic cemetery with an inscription that reads; 'Bravely fighting for the Boers and their independence and against the unjust aggression of England'. Michael Davitt considered him 'a great favourite with all the boys' and Colonel Blake commented that he was one of the nicest soldier he had.<sup>81</sup> The day of the unveiling witnessed a 'riot' between members of the Nationalist community and some fifty armed members of the police force, following the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp 5-6.

<sup>81</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 4 Apr. 1903.

refusal of the pro-Boers and Irish Nationalists to allow a government agent near the proceedings.<sup>82</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

As the years progressed, Irish interest in the affairs of South Africa declined. Occasionally reminders of the war appeared in the Irish press with reports of the death of veterans, anniversaries and commemorations. Following the Great War, the turbulence of domestic politics and the internal conflict in Ireland, the South African War increasingly became a distant memory for both Nationalists and loyalists. As a result of little modern research and public knowledge of the conflict and Ireland's participation, the memorials continue to remain isolated, largely forgotten and disassociated with the country's historiography. Fusiliers' Arch has blended into the structural landscape of the city, with little public understanding, acknowledgment or appreciation of it. Furthermore, the isolated Royal Dublin Fusilier in Dublin Castle symbolises an inadequate understanding of the island's shared past with the British Empire and the discomfort of approaching history with a fresh and objective perspective.

Across the British Empire, thousands of war memorials were erected that commemorated the war dead of the South African War, celebrating and remembering the participation of British and colonial units.<sup>83</sup> The public memorials constructed in Ireland, were erected on the premise which honoured the dead and recognised Ireland's proud contribution to the war effort – the various memorial committees often stated that the war memorials did not glorify armed conflict. Indeed, it can be seen in the evidence that the public monuments to the dead were a process of recognising the core strengths of the British military and Empire – duty, honour and sacrifice were essential themes. Similarly, the private memorials, that remembered an individual's death, recognised the personal sacrifice of a soldier and the importance of the military tradition in Irish families. The memorials illustrate the importance of the political and military ascendancy in Ireland, and the role that the Irish landed gentry held in Irish society. As seen throughout the chapter, the Irish loyalist class were undoubtedly proud subscribers to the ideals of imperialism and Empire; notwithstanding the increasingly precarious position of Irish southern Unionists and the landed gentry, they

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<sup>82</sup> D.P McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003), p. 146 and *Dundalk Democrat*, 14 June 1902.

<sup>83</sup> According to the UK National Inventory of War Memorials in 2001, there were 1,311 memorials unveiled for the South African War. See Jane Furlong et al in 'They shall not grow old: an analysis of trends in memorialisation based on information held by the UK National Inventory War Memorials' in *Cultural Trends*, xxii (2002), pp 1-42. The research is an ongoing process with the figure reaching 1,818 this year. <http://www.ukniwm.org.uk> (10 May 2013).

still exhibited a strong influence in Ireland. Their unflinching and determined dedication to Ireland's war memory revealed their personal attributes and their desire to commemorate the country's proud military tradition. It can be established that the political, loyalist and Protestant ascendancy in Ireland had a level of responsibility in remembering those who had lost their lives during the conflict, with even the impression that the soldiers' spiritual remains were in their ownership. Indeed, the contest for possession of the dead is a theme that has been prevalent in Irish commemoration.<sup>84</sup>

The celebrations and commemorations that followed the South African War signified the popularity of the military and the war in Ireland, amongst sections of the Irish public and press; certainly, the memorial process was a natural progression from the extensive interest that was witnessed during the war. The aspiration to commemorate the individuals who died for Queen and Country, was facilitated by the far-reaching contribution of Irish soldiers; the extent of Irish participation within the formation of the 'Irish' Imperial Yeomanry and the mobilisation of the militia; and the tens of thousands of pounds raised by Irish organisers and contributions, which helped maintain a civilian and local interest in the war and the livelihood of Irish troops. Notwithstanding the increased dissidence and the loss in power and finances, the Irish landed gentry still appeared strong and united in Irish society; the social group still had an influence in endorsing projects that reflected their own ambitions and interests, and demonstrated their resolute support for imperial culture and Empire. The memorials that appeared in Ireland reflected an island that was proud of its heritage and association with the British Empire. It was an expression of Ireland's development within the United Kingdom as a loyal and proactive member of the union. For the individuals and committees that erected the memorials, it was an opportunity to signify positive aspects of Irish society within the Empire. In addition, it would demonstrate to the citizens of Ireland, the positives of continuing alongside their parent nation. Certainly, it was evident that celebrating and commemorating past triumphs and struggles, and highlighting Ireland's contribution within the British Empire, revealed an underlining political motivation with connections to national identity and strong cultural links with the United Kingdom.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, the memorials that were erected across the Empire reflected a selective interpretation of Ireland's contribution to the war effort. The memorials bore no inscriptions

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<sup>84</sup> David Fitzpatrick, 'Commemoration in the Irish Free State: a chronicle of embarrassment' in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and memory in modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 184.

<sup>85</sup> T.G. Ashplant et al, 'The politics of war memory and commemoration: contexts, structures and dynamics' in T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (eds), *The politics of war memory and commemoration* (London, 2000), p. 7.

that reminded the public of the concentration camps, Britain's scorched-earth policy and the masses of deportations. Rather, the impressive array of memorials and monuments revealed a proud heritage of military tradition and its importance in society where memorials noted significant engagements that their country or local battalion were involved in, which would add to the illustrious military annals. However, the message inherent in the public memorials which were unveiled in Ireland came to be vehemently opposed and contested given that the commemorations did not represent a shared history that was representative of Irish Nationalism. Nevertheless, today in modern Ireland there has been a growing appreciation of Ireland's rich heritage in the British military, with a special renewed interest in the Irish contribution during the two World Wars. This interest has been reignited with the Royal Visit of 2011, and the forthcoming centenary of the Great War. However, there remains a dearth of research and public interest in the contribution of Irish soldiers during the South African War. Were such a selective memory and policy to continue, Ireland's historiography and the public's understanding of its own history would largely remain patchy at best, and ignorant at worse, and colloquial names such as 'Traitor's Gate' will continue to exist. The Office of Public Works' planned removal of Fusiliers' Arch, for the construction of the Metro North Line, is indicative of the lack of knowledge and understanding of the importance of the monument to Ireland's historiography.

**Fig. 66: A modern photograph of the front of Fusiliers' Arch.**



Source, 'Inventory of South African War memorials in Ireland'  
(<http://www.irishwarmemorials.ie/html/showPicture.php?pictureID=334>) (14 Feb. 2014).

# Conclusion

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The aim of this thesis was to illustrate aspects of Ireland's response during the South African War, and to examine the contribution and participation of the Irish soldiers and public. With a dearth in modern research, this thesis has attempted to sufficiently address certain aspects of Irish military and social history that have escaped the attention of most scholars and historians. Therefore, this study is an effort to address these issues of disparity in Ireland's historiography, through five research chapters, in order to establish aspects of Irish society and military history that had an impact on the country. From the research presented in the preceding chapters, it can be shown that elements of Irish society were active and supportive of the British Empire.

Chapter one and two emphasised the importance and extent of Irish recruitment and participation in the British army, with elements of the press and public recognising the courage, sacrifice and marital prowess of the Irish soldier. Notwithstanding the sheer volume of pro-Boer sentiment that existed during this period, it appears that the Irish soldier remained a loyal and valued component of the military. However this reaction is not surprising, considering the strong military tradition that existed in Ireland during the nineteenth century, and the overall professionalism of Irish troops, their comradeship, *esprit de corps* and loyalty towards their regiment and monarch. The importance of Ireland's military contribution cannot be understated given the impressive numbers that fought during the war, the manner of their performance, and the close proximity of the Great War. Importantly, the study of the Irish experience was supported and analysed through an array of letters from soldiers at the front; this approach offered a unique understanding of the immense difficulties that were experienced by Irish soldiers and officers during the first six months of the conflict.

The chapters on the Imperial Yeomanry and the Home Front argued that sections of Irish society supported the British Crown and the military. This can be witnessed with the creation of several Irish units into the Imperial Yeomanry following 'Black Week'. The attestations of these men were indicative of the Irish response during this period. From the evidence, it can be argued that these men did not enlist due to financial pressures, but through the spirit of patriotism, duty and a strong imperial sentiment that had existed in Ireland. Such a reaction is of interest to Irish historiography, as it is generally assumed that Irishmen who were recruited into the British army, were dispirited and impoverished, with little other

options and opportunities available. Conversely, the Irish units that were formed were from a wide spectrum of society, which included: the landed gentry, students, labourers, farmers, clerks, drapers and engineers. With the reverses of 'Black Week', the existence of a strong Irish military tradition, the influence of the press, the involvement of Irish battalions and units, and the noteworthy response from across the Irish Home Front, it is no real surprise that individuals wished to respond to the war difficulties in a patriotic fashion.

With the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry, the mobilisation of the militia, and the continued presence of the Irish in South Africa, it is understandable that Ireland was profoundly interested by the war. Through a range of press reports, contemporary publications and letters and diaries written by participants, it is clear that the military and the war were relatively popular amongst sections of Irish society. Such signs of interest were witnessed continuously, with civilians lining the streets, barracks and ports of Ireland, celebrating the departure and arrivals of British battalions, units and personnel. The evident public interest in the conflict, and the concern for the welfare of their troops, provided a strong foundation for the creation of several charities, which generated tens of thousands of pounds. The publically subscribed donations helped support families affected by the conflict, and also provided essential materials for soldiers at the front. In addition, with the creation of Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital, the recruitment of dozens of Irish doctors and nurses into the British medical services, and the involvement of the Irish Sisters of Mercy, it demonstrates a wider public interaction and interest in the conflict, and the importance of their contribution. This active civilian response illustrates that the war had an impressive level of popularity in the country, whilst demonstrating that elements of Irish society maintained a strong unity with the British Empire.

Therefore, this response to the war effort is of interest when considering the gravity of powerful rhetoric that was being disseminated to the Irish public by the Irish Transvaal Committee and pro-Boers. It is apparent that pro-Boerism did not have an impact in deterring sections of the Irish public's attention and interest away from supporting the involvement of Irish troops and Britain's policies in Southern Africa. Indeed, it can be argued that pro-Boerism was counter-productive in ways, as it galvanised opposition against Irish Nationalists, who were often considered offensive and disloyal amongst elements of Irish society. Overall, the loyalist reaction was characteristic of how Ireland naturally responded to the military and the British Empire during the nineteenth century. With the support of sections of the press, the landed gentry, the military, and loyalists, Ireland's trusted place within the British Empire was reinforced continuously, which would arguably help support a

case for Ireland to achieve devolved power. However, the pro-loyalist measures witnessed in Ireland were often overshadowed by Irish Nationalists and pro-Boers; as evident throughout this thesis, several commentators, politicians, and elements of the British and Irish press, were steadfast in the belief that the Irish nation could not progress as a devolved power under the influence of Irish Nationalism and anti-English sentiment. Finally, the chapter on the Home Front also revealed an aspect of the war that had a drastic impact on the lives of dozens of families across Ireland and the United Kingdom – the committal of British soldiers into the Richmond Asylum. With this inclusion, it introduces a significant aspect of modern warfare that is rarely considered in modern histories prior to the Great War. It is a further example of the impact the war had on the lives of soldiers and their families during and after the cessation of the conflict.

With regards to commemorating the war in Ireland, the memorials were erected with the idea of providing future generations with impressive reminders of the principles that underpinned the military and the British Empire. The memorials reflected the substantial interest that existed during the South African War, and the awareness of Ireland's contribution within the British Empire. Moreover, the significant number of private memorials was a fitting tribute to how aligned certain aspects of Irish society were with the British military, and the importance of the Irish military tradition in Irish society. However, the aspirations that were promoted with the commemoration of Irish units and personnel were quickly erased with the formation of the Irish Free State. As Ireland attempted to recover from the Great War, the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War, little attention was paid to the past sacrifices of Irish units in the British army. With the protracted mission of distancing Ireland's history away from the United Kingdom, the memorials became an inconvenient reminder of that shared heritage. Nevertheless for a brief period, the memorials represented a proactive nation that was loyal and duty-bound to the British Crown. The commemorations remembered that shared experience with the British Empire, and it was the intention for these memorials to fashion future generations with the ideology that helped maintain the Empire.

As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this thesis was an attempt to illustrate significant elements of Irish and military history during the South African War that have failed to generate serious research. Considering the significant participation of Irish soldiers and civilian interest, this study could not be a comprehensive history of Ireland and the South African War. Indeed, there is a wealth of material and research areas that warrant further study and examination. One could argue that the lack of historical research undertaken

on Ireland's involvement in the war was a result of the dearth of accessible primary materials available. However, there is an impressive range of primary sources obtainable in Irish and British repositories, which include: the Public Record Office in Belfast, The National Archives in London, the National Army Museum, London, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the National Library of Ireland. The following paragraphs highlight areas of potential research that will hopefully be undertaken by this researcher in the coming years.

Following the relief of Ladysmith, the war continued on for a further two years. With their overwhelming strength in troops, coupled with crumbling Boer morale, further British successes were witnessed with the capture of the Orange Free State capital, Bloemfontein (13 March), the relief of Mafeking (18 May) after 217 days, the fall of Johannesburg (31 May) and the capital of the Transvaal, Pretoria (5 June); the British believed that the war had reached a successful conclusion with the capture of the two Boer capitals. However the leadership misjudged the Boers 'centre of gravity', and consequently, the war entered a new phase of bitter, protracted guerrilla warfare, epitomised by the British implementation of scorched-earth, containment, and the introduction of the blockhouse system.<sup>1</sup> This phase of the war lasted until May 1902, resulting in the death of tens of thousands of soldiers, insurgents, members of the native population and Boer women and children. The Boer forces increasingly dwindled under the might of the British Empire, but hard line guerrilla fighters – known as *Bittereinder* (Bitter-enders) – continued to struggle on. However, with the prolonged suffering of their families, the destruction of their livelihoods, limited resources, and constant mass deportations to the islands of St Helena and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the *Bittereinders* finally succumbed to British pressure, and peace was finally declared.

The majority of the Irish battalions and cavalry units remained until the end of the war in South Africa, with further Irish units of the Imperial Yeomanry and militia battalions being mobilised and despatched to the front. As a result, the Irish soldier remained intimately involved in the war of attrition, manning blockhouses, conducting 'sweeping' operations, guarding concentration camps, slaughtering livestock, and burning wagons and homesteads – elements of involvement that needs further investigation.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there are other aspects of Irish involvement that need further examination. In a similar theme to Timothy Bowman's

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<sup>1</sup> The idea that a nation's resistance would collapse following the capture of the centres of government was reinforced by Colonel C.E. Callwell's influential work, *Small wars: their principles and practices* (1896), which stated that to capture the enemy's capital cities would 'paralyse the forces of resistance of the country'. C.E. Callwell, *Small wars: their principles and practices* (London, 1896), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> See J.W. Morton, 8<sup>th</sup> (King's Royal Irish) Hussars. *Diary of the South African War, 1900-1902* (Aldershot, 1905) and J.W. Yardley, *With the Inniskilling Dragoons: the record of a cavalry regiment during the Boer War, 1899-1902* (London, 1904) for an Irish units involvement in the latter stages of the war.

*Irish regiments in the Great War: Discipline and morale* (2003), it would be of interest to analysis the impact the war had on the discipline and morale of Irish soldiers' during the conflict. The basis of this study can be measured by analysing the General Courts Martial Registers found in The National Archives in London, and comparing and contrasting the numbers and types of offences that occurred throughout various stages of the campaign. Indeed, as Stephen M. Millar suggested, as the British soldier began to increasingly interact with Boer civilians and insurgents, coupled with the monotony of service and the war's longevity, there was an increasing likelihood of poor discipline.<sup>3</sup> Following a study of the General Courts Martial Register from July 1900 to August 1901, this historian was able to establish that 785 soldiers attached to Irish units were tried in courts-martial for offences against military law; some of the reasons included: striking a commanding officer; insubordination; mutiny; stealing or receiving stolen goods; being drunk on duty; sleeping at his post; assaulting and stealing from civilians; damaging public property; desertion; and murder. The sentences would range from hard labour, jail, demotion in ranks, a heavy fine and execution. Of the 785 soldiers that were tried by courts-martial, forty-three were acquitted.<sup>4</sup>

**Fig. 67: Men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons implementing scorched-earth policy – slaughtering cattle that would prove useful to sustaining the Boer war effort.**



Source, J. Watkins Yardley, *With the Inniskilling Dragoons: the record of a cavalry regiment during the Boer War, 1899-1902* (London, 1904), p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> S.M. Millar, 'Duty or crime? Defining acceptable behaviour in the British army in South Africa, 1899-1902' in *Journal of British Studies*, xlix (2011), pp 311-331.

<sup>4</sup> Judge Advocate General's Office: General Courts Martial Register. South Africa: Boer War (T.N.A., W0 92/8 and 92/9).

Further aspects of research could include the attestation of the Irish companies that formed the Second and Third Contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry. Individuals such as Adjutant-General Sir Thomas Kelly-Kenny and historian Richard Price considered that these men, who were recruited, did so through economic necessity. It would be of interest to Irish military history and the history of the Imperial Yeomanry in general, to determine how accurate that statement is. Finally, an area that has failed to generate much scholarly research is the creation and formation of colonial units that were raised in South Africa during the war. As seen through the formation of the Driscoll's Scouts and several other units, it is evident that Irish colonists formed a substantial component of British irregular cavalry and scouting. The study would be an attempt to understand the motivations of Irishmen to enrol in British units that aided the war effort. Moreover, it would offer another case study that demonstrates that Irish settlers actively engaged in the imperial process, to the detriment of natives and locals.

Notwithstanding the wealth of primary sources available for research in archives across Ireland and the United Kingdom, there continues to be little research conducted on Ireland's involvement, experience and support for the British war effort during the South African War. Of course this is not unexpected, as there is little acknowledgement or consideration for Ireland's service in the British army prior to the Great War. Aside from David Murphy's *Ireland and the Crimean War* (2002), there remains an obvious lack of research that investigates aspects of Ireland's military history with the British army during the nineteenth century. In the opinion of David Murphy, this is part due to the 'lack of will on the part of Irish historians to address this subject' of Irish participation in British military campaigns. Furthermore, when compared to the lack of scholarly research undertaken on Ireland's impressive military contribution during the Great War throughout the last century, Murphy notes 'it is not surprising the Irish in the military campaigns of the nineteenth century have been forgotten.'<sup>5</sup> In the words of another historian, 'Officially at least, the Boer War is simply not worth remembering', especially when considered alongside the Irish participation in the Great War, which is 'worth recalling'.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, with the South African War being under the shadow of the Great War and the important domestic events that led to the formation of the Irish state, the conflict in South Africa and the wars throughout the nineteenth century continue to remain forgettable and largely irrelevant in the context of Irish history. In addition, the situation has not been aided by the lack of graduate programmes that

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<sup>5</sup> David Murphy, *Ireland and the Crimean War* (Dublin, 2002), pp 230-231.

<sup>6</sup> Ciaran Wallace, 'Lest we remember? Recollection of the Boer War and the Great War in Ireland' in *E-rea*, x (2012), np. Online version. <http://erea.revues.org/2888> (8 June 2013).

are available in Ireland, with a focus on military history; in the opinion of Ian Speller, The Centre for Military History and Strategic Studies at NUI Maynooth, is ‘something of an oasis in otherwise rather arid terrain’.<sup>7</sup> Despite the constant relationship between Ireland and military service, there remains a reluctance to promote military history in academia – this is an issue that resonates across the globe. With regards to Ireland, this scepticism towards military history may be found with an unwillingness to consider the importance of Irish military service in the British army. Or perhaps in a wider context, in the words of historian, Michael Howard, is ‘due also to a certain fear in academic circles, where military history is liable to be regarded as a handmaid of militarism, that its chief use may be propagandist and “myth-making”’.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the reluctance to appreciate the importance of military history is replicated across many countries in the world. In the words of Stephen Morillo and Michael Pavkovic:

Military history is not the most respected branch of historical inquiry in academic circles. In part this is because of its popularity with the general public and its importance in educating professional military personnel. The root of this disrespect, however, mostly lies in its subject: war’. There exists a deep suspicion that to write about war is somehow to approve of it, even to glorify it.<sup>9</sup>

This issue of disrespect and neglect has not been aided by the popular readers market. Although popular military histories are accessible to the general public and have the potential of generating further interest in a subject, it is too often the case that the study is non-academic, and gives the impression that the discipline is unscholarly.<sup>10</sup> Despite this idea of irrelevance, military history allows a greater understanding of warfare and global history; in the words of historian John Keegan: ‘The written history of the world is largely a history of warfare...’<sup>11</sup>

Alongside the South African War, there were many British campaigns during the Victorian era that boast an impressive Irish involvement that has basically escaped the attention of Irish historians and the wider public. This is illustrated by the dozens of war memorials that are scattered across the Irish landscape, revealing that military connection during the nineteenth century. Indeed, the relatively recent publications of Richard Doherty and David Truesdale, *Irish winners of the Victoria Cross* (2000), David Murphy, *The Irish*

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Speller, ‘The use and abuse of history by the military’ in *Building a better future. Contributions by the Irish Defence Forces* (2012), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Howard, ‘The use and abuse of military history’ in *Journal of the US Army War College*, xi (1980), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Morillo and M.F. Pavkovic, *What is military history* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> See Jeremy Black, *Rethinking military history* (London, 2004), pp 26-65.

<sup>11</sup> John Keegan, *A history of warfare* (New York, 1993), p. 386.

*Brigades, 1685-2006: a gazetteer of Irish military service past and present* (2007), Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (ed.), *A military history of Ireland* (1996), and Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (2004), offer an insight into service of Irishmen in the British army, the importance of recruitment in the country, and the impact of Irish natives in aiding the process of imperial expansion. Following the Crimean War (1854-56), Irishmen and Irish units were frequently despatched across the globe to protect and expand British interests. In Africa alone, prior to the South African War, the Irish would have a part to play during the Ashanti War (1873), the Ninth Cape Frontier War (1877), the Anglo-Zulu War (1879), the Transvaal War or First Anglo-Boer War (1880-81), the Gordon Relief Expedition (1884) and the re-conquest of Sudan (1898). Overall, such evidence of participation demonstrates that Ireland actively engaged with the British Empire, having an important impact on Irish society, overseas colonialism, and on the foundation of states across the world. With such significant omissions in Irish historiography, it is important to readdress this imbalance and continue to investigate Ireland's relationship with the British Empire and military.

**Fig. 68: 'Ireland in the war': The title page of an article that appeared in a special edition of *The Illustrated London News*. The article included a description of each regular Irish battalion's performance during the first year of the campaign, accompanied by several illustrations and photographs.**



**Source, *The Illustrated London News record of the Transvaal War, 1899-1900: the achievements of the home and colonial forces in the great conflict with the Boer republics* (London, 1900), p. 47.**

With the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the political establishment began to systematically distance itself from the British Empire and the country's role in imperial expansion. Following the Great War, and the domestic turmoil of the Irish War of Independence (1919-21) and the Irish Civil War (1922-23), the South African War was overshadowed and quickly became a distant memory. As a result, in the words of Donal P.

McCracken: ‘for ordinary Irish people the link with South Africa had largely gone’.<sup>12</sup> However, there were sporadic reminders of Ireland’s contribution to the war effort, with reported deaths of veterans, anniversaries, commemorations, and some references would appear occasionally in Dail debates. In 1920, Sergeant Thomas Craddock of the R.I.C. was gunned down outside the Great War Club in Athlone by suspected members of the I.R.A; it was reported by the *Irish Times*, that the victim was wearing his South African War service medal at the time of his death.<sup>13</sup> That same year, a South African War veteran named James Franklin was sentenced to five years penal servitude, for ‘odious and heinous’ crimes against a girl, under the age of thirteen.<sup>14</sup> In 1929, Irishman Captain John Tarleton, a veteran of the war in South Africa and Europe, who served in the 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons, was found dead after receiving a self-inflicted wound.<sup>15</sup> Although there was a steady stream of information still being published in the press – mostly of Irish pro-Boer activity – within thirty years of the conflict, the *Sunday Independent* claimed that the war was ‘forgotten history’.<sup>16</sup> Of course, veterans of the conflict still remembered their contribution and still maintained an association with their respective battalions; in 1927, it was reported that Catholic veterans from Enniskillen, held an annual parade in Fermanagh, placing a wreath on a South African War memorial.<sup>17</sup> Three years following the end of the Second World War, some twenty veterans of the South African War, attached to Royal Irish Rifles, commemorated the anniversary of the battle of Stormberg, by placing wreaths at the war memorial in Belfast.<sup>18</sup>

It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that the war sparked an interest and debate amongst government departments, the Irish president and members of the public. In 1952, Irish president Sean T O’Kelly received a letter from the National Committee of the Irish Brigade Memorial Fund at Johannesburg, South Africa; its purpose was to establish a fund to erect a monument to the Irishmen who fought alongside the Boers:

... to the memory of those brave Irishmen, who risked their lives and in some cases made the supreme sacrifice in the cause of justice and freedom, when they fought for the Boers, in that small nation’s struggle against an imperialist’s aggressor.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the next twenty years, the committee continuously sought to encourage a significant contribution from the Irish government, as a token of good will between the two

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<sup>12</sup> D.P. McCracken, *Forgotten protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast, 2003), p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 Aug. 1920.

<sup>14</sup> *Munster Express*, 6 Dec. 1920.

<sup>15</sup> *Irish Times*, 24 Aug. 1929.

<sup>16</sup> *Sunday Independent*, 16 Mar. 1930.

<sup>17</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Aug. 1927.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Dec. 1948.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to the President from the National Committee of the Irish Brigade Memorial Fund, 29 Aug. 1952 (N.A.I., Office to the President, 2002/7/19).

countries and recognition of the strong historical links. The memorial fund was much publicised in the Irish media, and it generated much discussion, due to the delicate issue of establishing political and historical links with the apartheid regime in South Africa. One individual wrote to the Department of the Taoiseach: ‘Is this showing good feeling towards Britain-the only market on your doorstep? Is it about time that your government stopped taking all it can from Britain while stabbing her in the back’;<sup>20</sup> in the opinion of another, the individual found it ‘difficult’ to comprehend why the Irish government were considering this proposal:

I suggest that the £500 would be better spent if it were donated to the society for the abolition of apartheid in S. Africa or maybe could be devoted to the erection of a monument to the hundreds of Irishmen who were killed fighting (what has emerged to be a deplorable administration) on the other side.<sup>21</sup>

In 1975, the Irish government eventually donated the aforementioned sum to the memorial, despite the public and government departments’ concerns of commemorating a relationship between Ireland and an apartheid state. From this example alone, it revealed the ‘official’ stance of the Irish government and the country, by presenting a legacy of Irish Nationalism and rebellion against an ‘oppressive’ state. With an obvious reluctance to commemorate the thousands of Irishmen who fought for the British army during the South African War, it is evident that certain aspects of Ireland’s history are selective and subjective. Moreover, choosing to forget Ireland’s contribution to the British war effort and endorsing a memorial for a few hundred men that fought for the Boers, demonstrates how the Irish government and certain political and cultural bodies, wished Ireland to be perceived by their international neighbours. This selective ‘amnesia’ was an idea that was considered during the early stages of the South African War; in a speech made by Rev. Father Kavanagh, at the unveiling of a 1798 memorial in Thurles in 1900, it was evident how Ireland would approach their past:

...who will remember the Irish slaves, who fell in England’s battles in the cruel, cowardly – aye, and unjust war being made against the heroic Boers? The country will be glad to forget their existence, and will cover with the veil of contemptuous silence their unregretted memories.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, with such an approach that still resonates to this day, individuals unfamiliar with Irish history can be forgiven for assuming that Ireland was merely a ‘colony’, having no active role in overseas colonialism, and remaining a nation of rebellion towards the British Crown. This

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<sup>20</sup> Letter to the Taoiseach from a member of the public, 5 July 1966 (N.A.I., Department of the Taoiseach, 2000/6/308).

<sup>21</sup> *Irish Times*, 6 July 1966.

<sup>22</sup> *Nenagh News*, 24 Mar. 1900.

is how Ireland's history and relationship with the United Kingdom has been approached and projected to the outside world. However, notwithstanding the increasing domestic turmoil that existed in Ireland, for a brief period, the Irish soldier and elements of Irish society remained loyal and faithful to the Crown and the ideals that underpinned the British Empire. The importance of that relationship should not be downplayed or unappreciated; for example: the South African War was the last conflict that witnessed widespread celebration at the return of Irish soldiers to Ireland. Moreover, the soldiers were able to re-assimilate into Irish society. Conversely, in 1918, the bulk of Irish soldiers who returned home were distrusted for their association with the British military. Ireland's participation was 'officially' forgotten and a collective national amnesia followed. Despite the continued participation of the Irish in the British army, the relationship that continued to exist was unmentionable, and remains somewhat of a taboo subject. However, in recent years there has been a growing public and official awareness of Ireland's involvement in the Great War; this has been aided by Queen Elizabeth's state visit in May 2011, and the centenary of the First World War (2014-2018). Furthermore, the passing of The Defence Forces (Second World War Amnesty and Immunity) Act 2013 by the Irish government, which granted amnesty and immunity for soldiers of the Defence Forces who served with the Allies during the conflict, has illustrated Ireland's progression and respect for the country's past involvement with the British military. Therefore, considering the public's attitude and public showings of solidarity towards the Irish soldier in 1902, and comparing that reaction to future conflicts, it could be argued that the South African War was a defining moment in Irish military and social history.

The issue of commemoration and remembering Ireland's involvement in the war and imperial development remains somewhat of a contentious issue and a distinct difference in opinion still exists. On 7 January 2012, an individual wrote to the editor of the *Irish Times*, explaining how she was able to locate the grave of her relative who lost his life during the South African War. The deceased relative was Private Dennis Kinsella, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, who had his name inscribed onto Fusiliers' Arch; from this information, the woman was able to begin the search for a grave.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, twelve days later, the editor of the aforementioned newspaper received a letter from an individual, who wished to remove Fusiliers' Arch entirely, as it commemorated the 'murder of innocent women and children by any so-called Irish man'. In its place, he proposed to build a memorial to the Irish pro-

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<sup>23</sup> *Irish Times*, 7 Jan. 2012.

Boers.<sup>24</sup> From these recent examples, it is evident that the idea of remembrance remains a contested issue in modern Ireland. Although the case of the individual wishing to remove Fusiliers' Arch can be considered somewhat excessive, it is evident that some remain unprepared to accept or consider the value of understanding and remembering the country's symbiotic relationship and strong heritage with the British Empire. Despite the growing interest in Ireland's role during the First and Second World Wars, there still remains a hesitancy to focus on the symbiotic connections that existed between Ireland and Britain. With a continued focus on projecting Ireland as a nation of dissidence and rebellion towards the British Crown, the country's historiography, in this respect, will remain relatively unbalanced. Therefore it is imperative to encourage scholars to 'revise' certain aspects of Irish history, and to fairly assess and consider Ireland's contribution towards imperial development. As a result of this research, it is hoped that it complements other Irish histories on this period, for a better appreciation and understanding of Irish involvement in the British Empire, as an important aspect of Irish historiography.

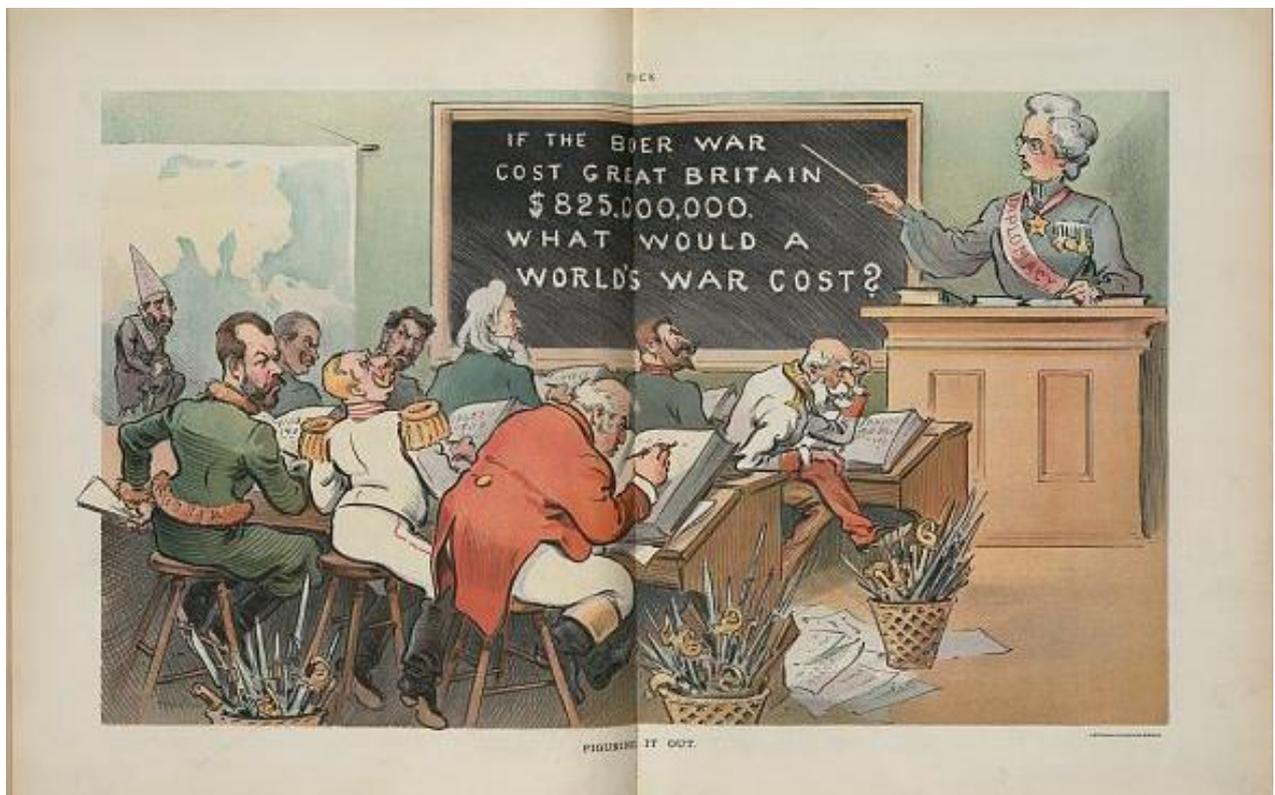
Despite increased anti-English sentiment in Ireland, the South African War was not the last conflict that involved a large number of Irish soldiers and citizens. With the declaration of war between the United Kingdom and Germany in August 1914, Ireland was again entrusted to fight for the British Empire. Following their patriotic response witnessed during the South African War, it was a natural continuation for civilians to invest their interest in the affairs of the British Empire and for Irish soldiers to maintain the strong military tradition between Ireland and her parent nation. Similarly to the South African War, observers, politicians, the public and military personnel, generally believed that the war in Europe would be over by Christmas 1914. However, the British army and her allies would embark on a protracted conflict that would cost the lives of millions of soldiers, including the deaths of tens of thousands of Irishmen. In many respects, the high death toll was a result of poor innovation and imagination amongst British staff officers and commanders, who largely failed to adhere to the changing environment of the modern battlefield. Although lessons were provided during the South African War, British senior officers continued to rely heavily on offensive tactics, supported by the professional and discipline of the British soldier. Of course, this failure to adhere to the changing environment of the battlefield was widespread across the European armies in 1914. As detailed throughout the first two chapters of this thesis, the British soldier witnessed the advent of modern warfare, with the primacy of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 19 Jan. 2012.

smokeless weaponry, the superiority of the defence, the increasing futility of the offensive, and the incompetence of many British officers; therefore, it can be argued that war in South Africa had significant relevance to the frontline conditions in Western Europe. Considering the proliferation of modern weaponry and the wealth of knowledge and lessons gained from the South African War, the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), and the Balkan Wars (1912-13), it is rather incredible that many officers and leaders throughout the armies of the Great War continued to rely on tactics that were shown to be obsolete and outdated, on recent occasions.

**Fig. 69: 'Figuring it out'. (Back row), 'Russia' (Nicholas II), 'Germany' (Wilhelm II), and 'England' (John Bull), and in the front row, 'Austria' (Franz Joseph I), 'France' (Emile Loubet), 'United States' (Uncle Sam), 'Japan' (Emperor Meigi), and 'Italy' (Victor Emmanuel III), and on the left, sitting on a stool, is 'Turkey' wearing a 'Dunce' cap.**



Source, *Puck*, 4 Nov. 1903. Available on the website of the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010652316/>) (15 Dec. 2013).

# Appendices

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## **Appendix 1: List of Irish units**

### **Regular Infantry that served in South Africa**

1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers

Irish Guards (some units were despatched to South Africa, acting as M.I.)

1<sup>st</sup> Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)

2<sup>nd</sup> Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)

1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers

2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers

1<sup>st</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers

2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers

1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers

2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers

1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Regiment

2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Rifles

1<sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers

2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers

### **Militia infantry that served in South Africa**

3<sup>rd</sup> The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)

4<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers (Queen's Own Royal Dublin City Militia)

5<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers (Dublin County Light Infantry Militia)

5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles (Royal South Down Light Infantry)

3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers (South Cork Light Infantry Militia)

### **Regular Cavalry**

6<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers

8<sup>th</sup> King's Royal Irish Hussars

5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers

**Militia artillery that served in South Africa**<sup>25</sup>

Antrim Artillery

Donegal Artillery

**Infantry militia mobilised and despatched across Ireland and the United Kingdom**<sup>26</sup>

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Station</b>
4th Royal Irish Regiment	Aldershot
5th Royal Irish Regiment	Salisbury Plain
4th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Aldershot
5th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Salisbury Plain
3rd Royal Irish Rifles	Newry
4th Royal Irish Rifles	Finner(Ballyshannon)
5th Royal Irish Rifles	Enniskillen
6th Royal Irish Rifles	Sheffield
3rd Royal Irish Fusiliers	Dublin
5th Royal Irish Fusiliers	Devonport
4th Connaught Rangers	Gravesend
4th Leinster Regiment	Salisbury Plain
5th Leinster Regiment	Aldershot
6th Royal Munster Fusiliers	Gosport
7th Royal Munster Fusiliers	Salisbury Plain
3rd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Gosport
4th Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Shorncliffe

<sup>25</sup> Both companies worked on the lines of communication alongside the 3<sup>rd</sup> Leinster Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Munster Fusiliers and 5<sup>th</sup> Dublin Fusiliers. *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 57.

<sup>26</sup> Data for the infantry and artillery militia were sourced from *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1, 145 and 146. It is of interest to note that while numerous militia battalions did not officially serve in the war, they did despatch soldiers from their units to reinforce their parent battalion. An example of this occurred with the militia reserves of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles, who despatched reservists to the front, to reinforce the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Rifles following their losses at Stormberg. In addition, it is important to state that on the day of embodiment, 176 men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles (108<sup>th</sup> Louth Rifles) refused to serve aboard in South Africa - a legal choice within their terms of services. The decision was a matter of contention amongst the Nationalist population of Ireland, who felt that hundreds more were coerced to enlist for South Africa against their wishes. See Donal Hall, 'The Louth Militia munity of 1900' in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*, xxiv (1998), pp 281-195.

### **Artillery militia mobilised and despatched across Ireland and the United Kingdom**

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Station</b>
Cork Artillery	Cork Harbour
Dublin City Artillery	Portsmouth
Limerick City Artillery	Chatham
Londonderry Artillery	Lough Swilly
Mid-Ulster Artillery	Plymouth
Sligo Artillery	Portsmouth
Tipperary Artillery	Plymouth
Waterford Artillery	Plymouth
Wicklow Artillery	Portsmouth

### **Embodiment of militia medical corps**

Dublin District Company

### **Volunteer medical services**

Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital

### **Irish units of the Imperial Yeomanry**

45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company

46<sup>th</sup> Belfast Company

54<sup>th</sup> Belfast Company

60<sup>th</sup> Belfast Company

61<sup>st</sup> Dublin Company

74<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company

99<sup>th</sup> Irish Company

131<sup>st</sup> Irish Company

132<sup>nd</sup> Irish Company

133<sup>rd</sup> Irish Company

134<sup>th</sup> Irish Company

175<sup>th</sup> Irish Company

176<sup>th</sup> Irish Company

## **Appendix 2: Irish Victoria Cross Winners**<sup>27</sup>

Name: 3733 Private John Barry  
Regiment: 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Regiment  
Born: 1 February 1873  
Died: Belfast, South Africa, 8 January 1901  
Action: Monument Hill, 7/8 January 1901  
*London Gazette* Citation: 8 August 1902

During the night attack on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1901, on Monument Hill, Private Barry, although surrounded and threatened by the Boers at the time, smashed the breach of the Maxim gun, thus rendering it useless to its captors, and it was in doing this splendid act for his country that he met his death

Name: Major Edward Douglas Brown, 14<sup>th</sup> Hussars  
Regiment: 14<sup>th</sup> Hussars  
Born: 6 March 1861  
Died: 3 February 1940  
Action: Geluk, 13 October 1900  
*London Gazette* Citation: 15 January 1901

On the 13th October, 1900, at Geluk, when the enemy were within 400 yards, and bringing a heavy fire to bear, Major Brown, seeing that Sergeant Hersey's horse was shot, stopped behind the last squadron as it was retiring, and helped Sergeant Hersey to mount behind him, carrying him for about three-quarters of a mile to a place of safety. He did this under a heavy fire. Major Brown afterwards, enabled Lieutenant Browne, 14th Hussars, to mount, by holding his horse, which was very restive under the heavy fire. Lieutenant Browne could not otherwise have mounted. Subsequently Major Brown carried Lance-Corporal Trumpeter Leigh out of action

Name: Surgeon-Captain Thomas Joseph Crean, 1<sup>st</sup> Imperial Light Horse  
Regiment: 1<sup>st</sup> Imperial Light Horse  
Born: 19 April 1873  
Died: 25 March 1923  
Action: Tygerkloof, 18 December 1901  
*London Gazette* Citation: 11 February 1902

Thomas Joseph Crean, Surgeon Captain, 1st Imperial Light Horse. During the action with De Wet at Tygerskloof on the 18th December 1901, this officer continued to attend to the wounded in the firing line under a heavy fire at only 150 yards range, after he himself had been wounded, and only desisted when he was hit a second time, and as it was first thought, mortally wounded

Name: Lieutenant William John English  
Regiment: 2<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse

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<sup>27</sup> Compiled from various issues of the *London Gazette* and Richard Doherty and David Truesdale, *Irish Winners of the Victoria Cross* (Dublin, 2000). The thirteen recipients of the Victoria Cross included here are either Irish-born or had Irish parents. The total number of Victoria Crosses awarded for gallantry during the South African War numbered seventy-eight. With almost seventeen percent of that figure being Irish, it demonstrates the bravery of Irish troops and the importance of Irish recruitment in the British military.

Born: 6 October 1882  
Died: 4 July 1941  
Action: Valkfontein  
*London Gazette* Citation: 14 October 1901

This Officer with five men was holding the right of a position at Valkfontein on the 3rd July, 1901, during an attack by the Boers. Two of his men were killed and two wounded, but the position was still held, largely owing to Lieutenant English's personal pluck. When the ammunition ran short he went over to the next party and obtained more; to do this he had to cross some 15 yards of open ground under a heavy fire at a range of from 20 to 30 yards

Name: Captain Charles FitzClarence  
Regiment: The Royal Fusiliers, attached Protectorate Regiment  
Born: 8 May 1865  
Died: 12 November 1914  
Action: Near Mafeking, 14 and 27 October, and 26 December 1899  
*London Gazette* Citation: 6 July 1900

On the 14th October, 1899, Captain FitzClarence went with his squadron of the Protectorate Regiment consisting of only partially trained men, who had never been in action, to the assistance of an armoured train which had gone out from Mafeking. The enemy were in greatly superior numbers, and the squadron was for a time surrounded, and it looked as if nothing could save them from being shot down. Captain FitzClarence, however, by his personal coolness and courage inspired the greatest confidence in his men, and, by his bold and efficient handling of them, not only succeeded in relieving the armoured train, but inflicted a heavy defeat on the Boers, who lost 50 killed and a large number wounded, his own losses being 2 killed and 15 wounded. The moral effect of this blow had a very important bearing on subsequent encounters with the Boers.

On the 27th October, 1899, Captain FitzClarence led his squadron from Mafeking across the open, and made a night attack with the bayonet on one of the enemy's trenches. A hand-to-hand fight took place in the trench, while a heavy fire was concentrated on it from the rear. The enemy was driven out with heavy loss. Captain FitzClarence was the first man into the position and accounted for four of the enemy with his sword. The British lost 6 killed and 9 wounded. Captain FitzClarence was himself slightly wounded. With reference to these two actions, Major-General Baden-Powell states that had this Officer not shown an extraordinary spirit and fearlessness the attacks would have been failures, and we should have suffered heavy loss both in men and prestige.

On the 26th December, 1899, during the action at Game Tree, near Mafeking, Captain FitzClarence again distinguished himself by his coolness and courage, and was again wounded (severely through both legs).

Name: Sergeant Edward James Gibson Holland  
Regiment: Royal Canadian Dragoons  
Born: 2 February 1878  
Died: 18 June 1948

Action: Komati River, 7 November 1900.

*London Gazette* Citation: 23 April, 1901.

Sergeant Holland did splendid work with his Colt gun, and kept the Boers off the two 12-pounders by its fire at close range. When he saw the enemy were too near for him to escape with the carriage, as the horse was blown, he calmly lifted the gun off and galloped away with it under his arm.

Name: Captain Robert Johnston,

Regiment: Imperial Light Horse

Born: 13 August 1872

Died: 24 March 1950

Action: Elandslaagte

*London Gazette* Citation: 12 February 1901 (The citation also included Captain Charles Herbert Mullin, Imperial Light Horse).

On the 21st October, 1899, at Elandslaagte, at a most critical moment, the advance being momentarily checked by a very severe fire at point blank range, these two Officers very gallantly rushed forward under this heavy fire and rallied the men, thus enabling the flanking movement, which decided the day, to be carried out

Name: Lieutenant James Edward Ignatuis Masterson

Regiment: 1<sup>st</sup> Devonshire Regiment

Born: 20 June 1862

Died: 24 December 1935

Action: Wagon Hill, Ladysmith

*London Gazette* Citation: 4 June 1901

During the action at Wagon Hill, on the 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1900, Lieutenant Masterson commanded, with the greatest gallantry and dash, one of the three companies of his regiment which charged a ridge held by the enemy and captured their positions.

The company were then exposed to a most heavy and galling fire from the right and left front. Lieutenant Masterson undertook the message to the Imperial Light Horse, who were holding a ridge some hundred yards away, to fire to the left front and endeavour to check the enemy's fire.

In taking the message he crossed an open space of a hundred yards which was swept by a most heavy cross fire, and although badly wounded in both thighs, managed to crawl in the deliver the message before falling exhausted into the Imperial Light Horse trench. His unselfish heroism was undoubtedly the means of saving several lives.

Name: Corporal George Edward Nurse 66<sup>th</sup> Battery, Royal Field Artillery

Regiment: 66<sup>th</sup> Battery, Royal Field Artillery

Born: 14 April 1873

Died: 25 November 1945

Action: Colenso

*London Gazette* Citation: 2 February 1900

At Colenso on the 15th December, 1899, the detachments serving the guns of the 14th and 66th Batteries, Royal Field Artillery, had all been either killed, wounded, or driven from their guns by Infantry fire at close range, and the guns were deserted. About 500 yards behind the guns was a donga in which some of the few horses and drivers left alive were sheltered. The intervening space was swept with shell and rifle fire. Captain Congreve, Rifle Brigade, who was in the donga, assisted to hook a team into a limber, went out; and assisted to limber up a gun. Being wounded, he took shelter; but, seeing Lieutenant Roberts fall, badly wounded, he went out again and brought him in. Captain Congreve was shot through the leg, through the toe of his boot, grazed on the elbow and the shoulder, and his horse shot in three places.

Lieutenant Roberts assisted Captain Congreve. He was wounded in three places.

Corporal Nurse also assisted.

Name: Captain Hamilton Lyster Reed  
Regiment: 7<sup>th</sup> Battery, Royal Field Artillery  
Born: 23 May 1869  
Died: 7 March 1931  
Action: Colenso  
*London Gazette* Citation: 2 February 1900

Captain Reed, who had heard of the difficulty, shortly afterwards brought down three teams from his battery to see if he could be of any use. He was wounded, as were five of the thirteen men who rode with him, one was killed; and thirteen out of twenty-one horses were killed before he got half-way to the guns, and he was obliged to retire.

Name: Lieutenant Frederick Hugh Sherston Roberts  
Regiment: King's Royal Rifle Corp  
Born: 8 January 1872  
Died: 17 December 1899  
Action: Colenso  
*London Gazette* Citation: 2 February 1900

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Lieutenant the Honourable F. H. S. Roberts (since deceased). Lieutenant Roberts assisted Captain Congreve. He was wounded in three places.

Name: Sergeant William Bernard Traynor  
Regiment: 2<sup>nd</sup> West Yorkshire Regiment  
Born: 31 December 1870  
Died: 20 October 1956  
Action: Bothwell Camp  
*London Gazette* Citation: 17 September 1901

During the night attack on Bothwell Camp on the 6th, February, 1901, Sergeant Traynor jumped out of a trench and ran out under an extremely heavy fire to the assistance of a wounded man. While running out he was severely wounded, and being unable to carry the man by himself he called for assistance. Lance-Corporal Lintott at once came to him and between them they carried the wounded soldier into shelter. After this, although severely wounded, Sergeant Traynor remained in command of his section, and was most cheerful, encouraging his men till the attack failed.

Name: Sergeant-Major Alexander Young, Cape Police  
Regiment: Cape Police, South African Forces  
Born: 27 January 1873  
Died: 19 October 1916  
Action: Ruiter's Kraal  
*London Gazette* Citation: 8 November 1901

Towards the close of the action at Ruiter's Kraal on the 13th August, 1901, Sergeant-Major Young, with a handful of men, rushed some kopjes which were being held by Commandant Erasmus and about 20 Boers. On reaching these kopjes the enemy were seen galloping back to another kopje held by the Boers. Sergeant-Major Young then galloped on some 50 yards ahead of his party and closing with the enemy shot one of them and captured Commandant Erasmus, the latter firing at him three times at point blank range before being taken prisoner.

**Appendix 3: Below is a list of the men who were especially mentioned from General Buller for their conspicuous gallantry in the field throughout the Tugela Operations:<sup>28</sup>**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Bn. Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers**

Sergeant-Major Martin, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1899. – Colenso, and all other actions in which he was engaged, he valiantly kept up the ammunition supply.

3640 Private Thompson, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, - He volunteered to rescue Private Nesbitt, a heavy wounded man, and laboriously brought him to cover through hot fire.

5019 Drummer Fitzgerald, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1899. – Colenso. Accompanied his Colonel and valiantly carried messages for him exposed to very heavy fire.

3108 Lance – Corporal Cleland, 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> February. – Rendered very valuable assistance to the wounded under heavy fire.

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<sup>28</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xlvii, 52 and 53.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers**

6039 Lance Corporal (Thomas) O'Neill, 27<sup>th</sup> February (killed). – Conspicuous gallantry in attack on Pieter's Hill. His body was found by the side of a dead Boer, transfixed by his bayonet, he himself having been shot dead.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Bn. Connaught Rangers**

5829 Private Livingstone. Colenso, 15<sup>th</sup> December. – His Colonel being severely wounded, he removed him through a hot fire, and though receiving a bullet in the neck, continued till he had put Colonel Brooke under cover 200 yards back

3309 Lance-Corporal Parslow. Colenso, 15<sup>th</sup> December.- He pluckily placed a wounded man under cover, and in a similar attempt was severely wounded.

3465 Private Kenny, 23<sup>rd</sup> February.- Gallantry rescued a wounded man of the Imperial Light Infantry, who lay exposed to heavy fire.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers**

1664 Sergeant Sheridan, 4290 Sergeant Hunt, 3861 Lance-Corporal Kelly and 5628 Lance-Sergeant Church. – Distinguished by their great coolness, ability, and pluck, in fighting and commanding their men at the battle of Colenso and in other engagements.

3892 Private Kelly, 27<sup>th</sup> February.- Conspicuous gallantry in going forward under fire to carry out an Officer who was wounded, and again in going to the rear for ammunition which he brought and distributed under heavy fire.

**Appendix 4) In a written report to General Buller, White endorsed the commendations of dozens of officers, NCOs and men during the period prior and during the siege of Ladysmith. The short list below includes officers and men that were Irish or who were attached to Irish units:<sup>29</sup>**

Brigadier-General J. Wolfe Murray, commanding Lines of Communication  
Major-General J.D.P. French, commanding the Cavalry  
Major A.J. Murray, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General  
Major A.C. King 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers  
Major W. Adye Royal Irish Fusiliers, Field Intelligence  
Lieutenant J.E.I. Masterson 1<sup>st</sup> Devonshire Regiment  
Private M. Henley, Nursing Orderly 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment  
Colour-Sergeant T. Linnane 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers  
Colour-Sergeant J. Hayes 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers

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<sup>29</sup> *South African despatches, ii. Natal Field Army*, [CD 458], H.C. xvii, 7,8, 10, 31, 37 and 38.

**Appendix 5: Title: Return of casualties which occurred in Natal during the war**<sup>30</sup>

<b>Irish Regiment</b>	<b>Killed or died from wounds</b>	<b>Died of disease</b>	<b>Wounded</b>	<b>Captured</b>	<b>Missing</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Officers/NC O's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>
5th Royal Irish Lancers	1/3	1/15	8/22	/	/	10/40
6th Inniskilling Dragoons	/	0/1	/	/	/	0/1
8th Hussars	0/1	0/12	0/2	/	0/2	0/17
1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	6/88	3/22	16/222	1/5	0/12	26/349
1st Royal Irish Fusiliers	2/32	0/19	9/88	14/518	/	25/657
2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers	1/16	0/8	8/95	/	0/19	9/138
1st Connaught Rangers	0/48	0/20	10/228	1/7	0/5	11/308
1st Leinster Regiment	/	0/1	1/0	/	/	1/1
2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers	0/2	0/2	1/0	/	/	1/4
1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers	3/70	0/27	8/219	/	0/18	11/334
2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	3/41	0/17	10/151	1/0	0/116	14/325

<sup>30</sup> Figures obtained from Maurice Harold Grant, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, iv (London, 1910) pp 681-685.

**Appendix 6: Title: Return of casualties which occurred in the Cape, Orange River and Transvaal Colonies during the war<sup>31</sup>**

<b>Regiment</b>	<b>Killed or died from wounds</b>	<b>Died of disease</b>	<b>Wounded</b>	<b>Captured</b>	<b>Missing</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>Officers/NC O's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>	<b>Officers/N CO's and men</b>
5th Royal Irish Lancers	0/16	0/12	1/52	0/44	0/12	1/126
6th Inniskilling Dragoons	4/31	1/42	10/81	2/17	/	17/171
8th Hussars	3/12	0/19	8/40	0/2	/	11/73
1st Irish Guards	1/4	/	1/1	/	/	2/5
1st Royal Irish Regiment	5/39	1/39	8/87	0/32	0/4	14/201
2nd Royal Irish Rifles	3/31	0/23	11/106	12/673	/	26/833
1st Royal Irish Fusiliers	0/8	1/25	2/8	2/44	/	5/85
2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers	3/20	1/33	1/53	0/10	0/81	5/197
1st Connaught Rangers	0/10	0/26	6/24	0/11	/	6/71
1st Leinster Regiment	1/3	4/64	0/31	0/21	0/1	5/120
2nd Leinster Regiment	/	0/6	1/9	/	/	1/15
1st Royal Munster Fusiliers	5/3	0/43	4/70	0/2	/	9/128
2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers	/	0/1	/	/	/	0/1
1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers	1/13	0/10	5/38	/	/	6/61
2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	/	1/31	1/0	/	/	2/31

<sup>31</sup> Figures obtained from Maurice Harold Grant, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, iv (London, 1910) pp 686-691.

**Appendix 7: List of Irish officers or officers that were attached to Irish battalions who died during the South African War<sup>32</sup>**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Regiment</b>	<b>Cause of death</b>	<b>Date</b>
Captain James Alderson	1st Royal Irish Regiment	Died of wounds at Bethlehem	7 July 1900
Lieutenant-Colonel William Aldworth*	Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry	Killed in action near Paardeberg	18 Feb. 1900
Lieutenant Cyril Arkwright	5th Royal Irish Lancers	Enteric fever at Ladysmith	9 Mar. 1900
Captain Arthur Bacon	1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Killed in action at Colenso	15 Dec. 1899
Captain Charles Biddulph*	3rd Leinster Regiment	Enteric fever at Queenstown, SA	26 Apr. 1902
2nd Lieutenant Hubert Bird*	9th Battery, Royal Field Artillery	Enteric fever at Winburg	28 July 1900
Lieutenant Arthur Bull	3rd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died of wounds received at Rooival	11 Apr. 1902
Lieutenant Richard Chaloner	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died of wounds received at Middlebult	21 Apr. 1902
Major John Charley*	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died of wounds received at Colenso	15 Dec. 1899
Captain Frederick Coates*	1st Northumberland Fusiliers	Killed in action at Elandslaagte	25 Feb. 1902
Captain Frederick Connor	Royal Irish Fusiliers	Died of wounds received at Talana	20 Oct. 1899
Major Francis Cooper*	Royal Field Artillery	Enteric Fever at Mooi Hospital	26 May 1900
2nd Lieutenant William Croker*	1st Royal Munster Fusiliers	Killed in action at Boshof	23 Feb. 1902
2nd Lieutenant Cornelius Daly	Royal Irish Fusiliers	Killed in action at Pieter's Hill	27 Feb. 1900
2nd Lieutenant John Dennis	2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Enteric fever at Aliwal North	2 May 1900
Brevet-Major Colin Dick	Royal Irish Fusiliers	Died of wounds received at Vryheid	29 Sep. 1901
Captain Wilfred Dimsdale	2nd Royal Irish Rifles	Died of wounds received near Reddersburg	9 Apr. 1900
Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Eager	2nd Royal Irish Rifles	Died of wounds received at Stormberg (10 Dec 1899)	13 Feb. 1900
Lieutenant Thomas Ely	2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Enteric Fever on board SS Orcana	15 Apr. 1900
2nd Lieutenant Francis Finlay	1st Leinster Regiment	Died of dysentery at Vrede	11 Dec. 1900
2nd Lieutenant Arthur	1st Royal Irish	Died of enteric at Bloemfontein	24 May

<sup>32</sup>Mildred G. Dooner, *The 'Last Post': a roll of all officers (naval, military or colonial) who gave their lives for their queen, king and country, in the South African War* (London, 1903). Where there is an asterix placed beside a name, it indicates that this researcher can establish that the officer was either Irish or had Irish connections.

Fletcher	Regiment		1900
Captain Francis Fosbery	Royal Irish Regiment	Killed in action near Belfast	7 Jan. 1901
Major Alexander Foulerton	1st Leinster Regiment	Died at Vrede	5 Jan. 1901
Captain Alexander Fraser*	19th Imperial Yeomanry	Died of enteric fever at Kimberly	28 Apr. 1901
Captain Gough French	Royal Irish Regiment	Killed in action at Gaberones	12 Feb. 1900
2nd Lieutenant Henry French-Brewster*	King's Royal Rifle Corps	Killed in action at Spion Kop	24 Jan. 1900
2nd Lieutenant Charles Genge	2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Died of wounds received at Talana	20 Oct. 1900
Captain Lionel William Gibton*	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died of dysentery at Ladysmith	19 Mar. 1900
Captain William Gloster	Royal Irish Regiment	Killed in action at Stabbert's Nek	23 July 1900
Lieutenant William Goodwin*	Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Died of pneumonia and heart failure at Pretoria	8 July 1902
Major Edward Gray*	Royal Army Medical Corps	Killed in action at Farquhar's Farm near Ladysmith	30 Oct. 1899
Lieutenant Colonel Eustace Guinness*	Royal Field Artillery	Killed in action near Brakenlaagte	31 Oct. 1901
Lieutenant Eustace Harris	Royal Irish Fusiliers	Killed in action at Machadodorp	8 Jan. 1901
Lieutenant Robert Henry	2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Killed in action at Colenso	15 Dec. 1899
Captain Charles Hensley	2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Died of wounds received near Venter's Spruit, Upper Tugela	20 Jan. 1900
2nd Lieutenant Arthur Hill	1st Royal Irish Fusiliers	Killed in action at Talana	20 Oct. 1899
2nd Lieutenant William Hill	5th Royal Irish Lancers	Killed in action at Wagon Hill, Ladysmith	6 Jan. 1900
Major George Hilliard*	Royal Army Medical Corps	Died of wounds received at Ingogo	7 Sep. 1900
Lieutenant Albert Hughes	2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers	Died of enteric fever at Pretoria	18 Feb. 1901
2nd Lieutenant Stamford Hutton*	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died of enteric fever at Ladysmith	15 Apr. 1900
Captain Lord Kensington*	2nd Life Guards	Died from wounds received at Houtnek	24 June 1900
Lieutenant Henry Leicester	1st Leinster Regiment	Died at Vrede	13 Mar. 1901
Lieutenant Theodore Leslie*	3rd Grenadier Guards	Died of wounds received at Belmont	4 Dec. 1899
Lieutenant Noel Lincoln	2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Killed in action at Boschbult	31 Mar. 1902
Captain Thomas Lloyd*	2nd Coldstream Guards	Died of wounds received near Brakenlaagte	31 Oct. 1901
Captain Francis Loftus*	1st Royal	Killed in action at Colenso	15 Dec.

	Inniskilling Fusiliers		1899
Lieutenant Harry Low	M.I. Royal Irish Rifles	Killed at Vaal Bosh Pan	10 Mar. 1902
Lieutenant James Lowry*	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died from blood poisoning	19 Sep. 1900
Brevet-Major John MacBean	Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Killed in action at Nooitgedacht	13 Dec. 1900
Captain Donald Maclachlan	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died from wounds received at Venter's Spruit, Upper Tugela	1 Feb. 1900
Lieutenant Charles Martin	1st Leinster Regiment	Died of pneumonia at sea on board SS Dilwara	1 May 1900
Lieutenant Colonel William McCarthy-O'Leary*	1st South Lancashire Regiment	Killed in action at Pieter's Hill	27 Feb. 1900
Lieutenant William McClintock-Bunbury*	2nd Dragoons	Died of wounds near Kimberly	14-16 Feb. 1900
Lieutenant John Meek	6th Inniskilling Dragoons	Died of wounds at Pretoria	7 June 1900
Lieutenant Alexander Miller*	3rd Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died of dysentery at Kaffir Kop	15 May 1902
2nd Lieutenant Charles Moore	Royal Munster Fusiliers	Killed in action at Mooifontein	25 May 1901
Major Stephen Moore*	Imperial Yeomanry	Died of enteric fever at Wynberg Hospital	4 June 1901
Lieutenant Walter Moore*	Gorrings's Flying Column	Died of pneumonia at Burghersdorp	6 Nov. 1901
Captain George Morley	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died of enteric fever at Mooi River	10 Apr. 1900
2nd Lieutenant Hill Motum	Donegal Artillery	Died suddenly at Lindley	14 Jan. 1901
Major Frederick Munn	1st Royal Irish Fusiliers	Died of measles and pneumonia at Springfontein	31 Aug., 1901
Major the Earl of Munster*	3rd Royal Scots	Accidentally killed at Lace Miles	2 Feb., 1902
Lieutenant Lord O'Hagan*	3rd Grenadier Guards	Died of enteric fever at Springfontein	13 Dec. 1900
Major Arthur Pack-Beresford*	Royal Artillery	Died from enteric at Bloemfontein	5 Mar. 1902
Captain Sir Elliott Power*	1st Rifle Brigade	Died of enteric fever at Standerton	20 Jan. 1902
Captain Sir John Power*	46th Imperial Yeomanry	Died of wounds received at Lindley	1 June 1900
Lieutenant Robert Reade*	1st King's Royal Rifle Corps	Died of wounds received at Boshman's Pan	4 Feb. 1901
Lieutenant Frederick Roberts*	King's Royal Rifle Corps	Died of wounds received at Colenso	17 Dec. 1899
Lieutenant Frank Russell-Brown	1st Munster Fusiliers	Died of wounds in action at near Bloemfontein	4 Apr. 1900
Major Francis Sanders	Royal Inniskilling	Killed in action at Tugela	24 Feb.

	Fusiliers	Operations	1900
Captain Llewellyn Saunderson*	Rifle Brigade	Died of wounds received at Standerton	24 Apr. 1902
Captain James Seeds*	5th Royal Irish Rifles	Died of dysentery and heart failure at Kroonstad	1 June 1901
Lieutenant Percy Shaw	3rd Royal Munster Fusiliers	Died of enteric fever at Bloemfontein	28 May. 1900
2nd Lieutenant Geoffrey Shea	1st Royal Munster Fusiliers	Killed at Schotland West, Kroonstad District	20 Apr. 1902
Brevet-Lieutenant-Colonel Claude Sitwell	Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Killed in action at Tugela Operations	23-24 Feb. 1900
Lieutenant H. Spratt*	23rd Imperial Yeomanry	Died of wounds received at Watervel	3 June 1900
Sir William Stokes*	Surgeon	Died at Base Hospital, Pietermaritzburg	18 Aug. 1900
Lieutenant Walter Stuart*	1st Inniskilling Fusiliers	Killed in action at Upper Tugela	23 Feb. 1900
Lieutenant Arthur Swanston	6th Royal Inniskilling Dragoons	Killed in action near Ermelo	16 Oct. 1900
Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Thackeray	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Killed in operations on Upper Tugela	23-24 Feb. 1900
Lieutenant Charles Walker	1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	Died of wounds near Lietgat	19 Feb. 1902
2nd Lieutenant Clifton Wallis	2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers	Killed in action at Jaskraal	28 Aug. 1901
Lieutenant William Waudby	Leinster Regiment	Died of enteric fever	3 Apr. 1901
Captain George Weldon	2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers	Killed in action at Talana Hill	20 Oct. 1899
Major Edward Whitehead	1st Munster Fusiliers	Killed in action at Doornfontein	13 Jan. 1902
Lieutenant Frederick Wylam	Royal Irish 8th Hussars	Killed in action between Machadodorp and Heidelberg	13 Oct. 1899

**Appendix 8: Total casualties for Irish line regiments in Natal and Cape, Orange River, and Transvaal Colonies<sup>33</sup>**

Officers	218
NCOS and men	3,984
Total	4,202

The figure would be substantially more had the tables included the casualties attached to the Irish militia and Imperial Yeomanry; data acquired from various sources detail further casualty lists attached to Irish units:<sup>34</sup>

Units include, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Munster Fusiliers, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Dublin Fusiliers, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Leinster Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish regiment, and 45<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup>, 54<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 61<sup>st</sup>, 74<sup>th</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup>.<sup>35</sup>

Casualties of militia = 234

Imperial Yeomanry: 45<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup>=345

60<sup>th</sup>=34

61<sup>st</sup>=25

74<sup>th</sup>=36

99<sup>th</sup>= 1

Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital= 2

**Estimated total casualties of Irish units = 4,879 officers and men.**

<sup>33</sup> Figures obtained from Maurice Harold Grant, *History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902*, iv (London, 1910) pp 681-691.

<sup>34</sup> Lists of casualties in the South African Field Force, 1899-1902 (T.N.A., WO 108/338); *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, [CD 1792], H.C. xlii.1; Colonel F. Luttman-Johnson, *Records of services of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) in the South African War, 1900, 1901, 1902* (London, 1913), p 119.

<sup>35</sup> At this point time, the author is unable to establish casualty lists for the 29<sup>th</sup> Irish Horse Battalion: 131<sup>st</sup>, 132<sup>nd</sup>, 133<sup>rd</sup>, 134<sup>th</sup>, 175<sup>th</sup>, and 176<sup>th</sup>.

**Appendix 9: South African War Diary of Trooper James Clarke, 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry**<sup>36</sup>

**Fig. 70: Trooper James Clarke, 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry**



**Source, Boer War diary of James John Clarke, 1900 (MS in the possession of Michael Steemson, New Zealand).**

Name: 9651 Trooper James John Clarke

Parish: Belclare, County Galway

Age: 26

Previous Occupation: Nil

Religion: Roman Catholic

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<sup>36</sup> Boer War diary of James John Clarke, 1900 (MS in the possession of Michael Steemson, Wellington, New Zealand).

**Fig. 71: Attestation forms of Trooper James John Clarke, 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry**

22

Army Form B. 267.

**SHORT SERVICE (All Arms except Cavalry).**  
(18 years with the Colours.)

**ATTESTATION OF** *Imperial Yeomanry*

No. *967* Name *James John Clarke* Corps *Volunteers (Hunt)*

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment

1. What is your Name? *James John Clarke*
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? *in the Parish of ... near the Town of ... in the County of ...*
3. Are you a British Subject? *Yes*
4. What is your Age? *26* years *1* Month.
5. What is your Trade or Calling? *Rel*
6. Have you resided out of your Father's house for three years continuously in the same place, or occupied a house or land of the yearly value of £10 for one year, and paid rates for the same, and, in either case, if so, state where? *Yes*

You are hereby warned that if after enlistment it is found that you have given a wilfully false answer to any of the following seven questions, you will be liable to a punishment of two years' imprisonment with hard labour.

7. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? if so, where? *No*
8. Are you Married? *No*
9. Have you ever been sentenced to Imprisonment by the Civil Power? *No*
10. Do you now belong to Her Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Royal Navy, the Volunteers, the Yeomanry, the Army Reserve, or the Naval Reserve Force? If so, to what Corps? *No*
11. Have you ever served in Her Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, or the Royal Navy? If so, state which and cause of discharge *No*
12. Have you truly stated the whole, if any, of your previous Service? *Yes*
13. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for Her Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds? *No*
14. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated? *Yes*
15. For what Corps are you willing to be enlisted, or are you willing to be enlisted for General Service? *Imperial Yeomanry Volunteers*  
Name *James John Clarke*  
Corps *21st Lancers*
16. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you? *Yes*
17. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided Her Majesty should so long require your services:
  - (a) For a term of *12* years *unless the war is over, in which case Africa last longer than 12 years*
  - (b) If the above-mentioned term of 12 years expires while you are on service with the Regular Forces beyond the sea, or while a state of war exists with Foreign Power, or while Soldiers in the Reserves are required by proclamation to continue in or re-enter upon Army Service, then to serve for a further *12* months *until the war is over*

I, *James J Clarke* do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

*James J Clarke* SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.  
*R. E. Cecil* Signature of Witness.

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

I, *James J Clarke* do make Oath, that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty, Her Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend Her Majesty, Her Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all laws of Her Majesty, Her Heirs, and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.

The Recruit above-named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.

The above questions were then read to the recruit in my presence.

I have taken care that he understands each question and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as required, and the said recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at *Jewbridge* on this *25th* day of *January* 189*0*

*Jewbridge* Signature of the Justice *Jewbridge*

\* If so, the Recruit is to be asked the particulars of his former Service, and to produce, if possible, his Discharge Certificate and Certificate of Character, which should be returned to him accompanied by the Discharge Certificate of Character, which should be returned to him accompanied by the Discharge Certificate of Character.

28/08/2012

Source, War Office: Imperial Yeomanry, soldiers' documents, South African War (T.N.A., WO 128/32

Fig. 72: Boer War diary of Trooper James John Clarke, 45<sup>th</sup> Dublin Company, Imperial Yeomanry

Diary. 9651, 45 J.Y.

~ . ~ . ~ . ~ . ~ . ~ .

1900. Jan. 5<sup>th</sup>. Tested and sworn-in at Newbridge.  
" 13<sup>th</sup>. Assembled at Royal Barracks Dublin.  
March 12<sup>th</sup>. Left Curragh for Liverpool  
" 14<sup>th</sup>. Sailed in "Montrose" for South Africa.  
April. 8<sup>th</sup>. Landed in Capetown & marched to Maitland.  
" 18<sup>th</sup>. Left for Matziesfontein.  
May. 13<sup>th</sup>. " " Bloemfontein.  
" 15<sup>th</sup>. Arrived at " "  
" 18<sup>th</sup>. Left for Thaba 'Nchu to escort prisoners.  
Bivouaced Sanna's Post.  
" 19<sup>th</sup>. Arrived at Thaba 'Nchu.  
" 21<sup>st</sup>. Started back to Bloemfontein.  
" 22<sup>nd</sup>. Arrived " at "  
" 23<sup>rd</sup>. Left by train for Proonstad.  
" 25<sup>th</sup>. Arrived there & started march towards  
Lindley. Bivouaced five miles out.  
" 26<sup>th</sup>. Marching  
" 27<sup>th</sup>. Reached Lindley & were attacked in the  
town. Retreated about three miles & took up a

position.

28<sup>th</sup> Heavy sniping all day. Six or eight casualties.  
Two killed. No 2 troops (Stannus) out with Colt gun.

Very hot fire.

29<sup>th</sup> No 2 out with Longford & part of nos. 4 & 1. Very hot  
fire going out. One man wounded.

30<sup>th</sup> No 2 out holding stone kraal. Heavy sniping.

31<sup>st</sup> Charged kopje at daylight & drove Boers off. Guns  
brought to bear on us. Retired to Lord Ennismore.  
Completely surrounded about 2 p.m. & had to  
surrender. Marched about a mile the opposite  
side of Lindley & bivouaced.

June 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Marching.

3<sup>rd</sup> Reached Reitz.

5<sup>th</sup> Left " "

9<sup>th</sup> Arrived outside Vrede.

13<sup>th</sup> " at Standerton.

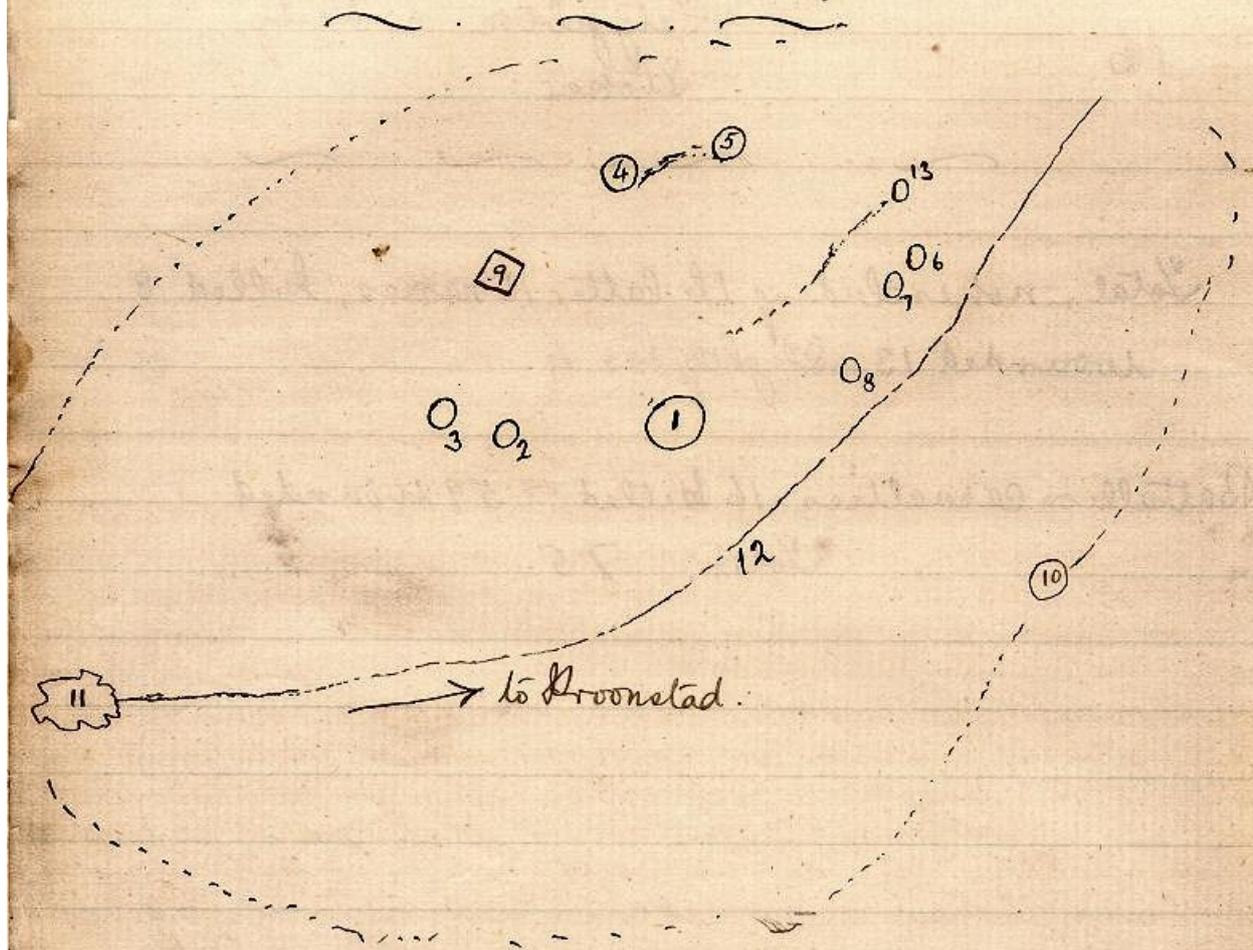
14<sup>th</sup> Left " "

18<sup>th</sup> Arrived at Ermelo.

20<sup>th</sup> Left " "

21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> Very wet & cold

Plan of Positions at Lindley.



1. Main Laager
- 2 & 3. Koppes held by D B O's. 47<sup>th</sup> Co.
4. " " " Belfasts.
- 6, 7 & 8. Stone kraals in which 45<sup>th</sup> surrendered.
9. Farm House.
10. Boer gun. Only one we could locate. Three were used.
11. Lindley town.
12. Road to Droonstad.
13. Highest point of koppe. We used as observation post.
- 4 & 5. Two terminal points of a ridge charged by 45<sup>th</sup> on May 31<sup>st</sup>.

----- Represent Hills.

Casualties at Lindley May 1900 45<sup>th</sup> Co. I.Y.

Killed: Loopers.

8

B W Power  
A M Porter  
J E Byrne  
— Smith  
A Blake  
— Robinson (No 4 Troop)  
H Fenner  
— Chetwode.

Wounded:

3

Capt. Ld. Longford  
Lieut. Villiers Stuart  
" Benson

Loopers:

10

A M Hickey.  
Laing  
Murphy  
Robinson  
J F Ogilvy  
Winyard  
Dooley  
Hutchinson

Trooper : Holmes.

Sergeant: J A Gaynor.

Slightly Hit: M H Thunders

J F Wright (3 Troop)

E Bowen

F Kennedy.

Sick + Left Behind.

before going up country.

F Gorgan (dead)

Colthurst

Russell

De Roebuck

Odium

Phipps

Diwan (at Reitz.)

Smithwick. " "

Wilson " Vrede.

Fenner " Reitz

Inc. Corp. Blake " Lindley

Carrier Sgt. Garraway " Vrede

" Coppertwaite " Reitz.

16      Hooper. Martin      at Lindley  
                 Fitzgibbon      "      Reitz  
                 Stoker.

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Total, not including the latter 16 names, killed 8.  
wounded 13. Slightly hit 4.

Battalion casualties 16 killed + 59 wounded  
Total: 75.

Appendix 10: Fig. 73: Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Hamilton Doake, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers

**INFORMAL WILL.**

W.O. No.: E/24081/9      DOMICILE. Irish

Record No. 8765001/02

Name Hamilton Doake      The enclosed document dated January 21st 1900 and signed

Regtl. No. and Rank } 5296 L/Cpl.      Hamilton

Regt. 2nd Bn., R. Irish Fus.      appears to have been written or executed by the person named in the margin while he was "in actual military service" within the meaning of the Wills Act, 1837, and has been recognised by the War Department as constituting a valid will.

Died at Blood River Post

Date of Death 17. 9. 1901

**WAR OFFICE.**

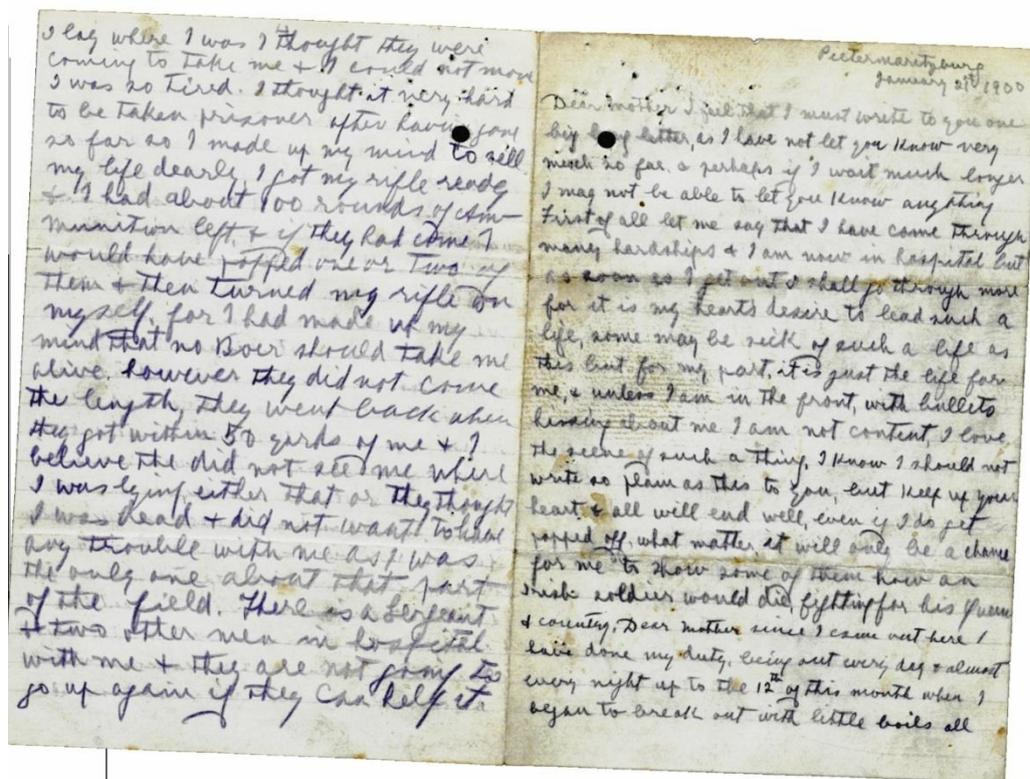
Date 13. 1. 1922      M. J. O'Sullivan  
for the Assistant Financial Secretary.  
(Finance.)

H. 16/1905.

NAI/2002/119

Source, Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Hamilton Doake, 21 Jan., 1900 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119).

**Fig. 74: Image of page one and four of Lance-Corporal Doake's letter home**



Source, Informal Will of Lance-Corporal Hamilton Doake, 21 Jan., 1900 (N.A.I., Irish Soldiers' Wills, 2002/119).

**Extracts from the letter on the battle of Colenso, 15 December 1899.**

**Page One:**

...First of all let me say that I have gone through many hardships + I am now in hospital but as soon as I get out I shall go through more of it is my hearts desire to lead such a life, some may be sick of such a life as this for my part, it is just the life for me + unless I am in the front, with bullets firing about me I am not content. I love the scene of such a thing, I know I should not write so plain as this to you, but keep up your heart + all will end up well even if I do get popped off, but what matter it will only be a chance for me to show some of them how

Irish soldiers would die fighting for Queen and country. Dear mother since I came out here I have done my duty being out every day + almost every night...

**Page Two:**

I shall go to the front again as soon as possible. I know that I would even get home for a month, if I liked, but I do not wish for that ... I am hoping that they should not have another fight until I get up to the front again, as I wish to take part in all that is in this part. I was in the big fight on the 15<sup>th</sup> December + all the bullets were whirling like wasps around me, but we paid no attention to them, our battalion, marched up with their pipes lit+ smoking + and G Company were in the very front, how we got off with as little killed + wounded I cannot tell but we only had two killed. When we got word off command to retire the bullets were coming around us like a hail storm but we paid no attention to them some of us boys lighten their pipes + turning around + shaking our fists at the position the Boers were in.

**Page Three:**

You must know that although we were out for I may say 10 hours, we did not see a single boer as they kept well behind the rocks and it was very hard on us to be there firing + not knowing whether we were doing any harm or not. I got hit on the heel of the boot by a bullet, but it did not put me much about. It was hard to see the horses + men getting killed and wounded, one battery of artillery which were not 50 yards from me + it was hard to see the horses getting knocked over by the shells from the enemy + then the day was so hot ... I would have drank anything. I lay down ... until I saw the Boers came down out of the hills on their horses they came out in the shape of a half moon + closed in on all around the wounded + cut off some the men that was attending to them.

**Page Four:**

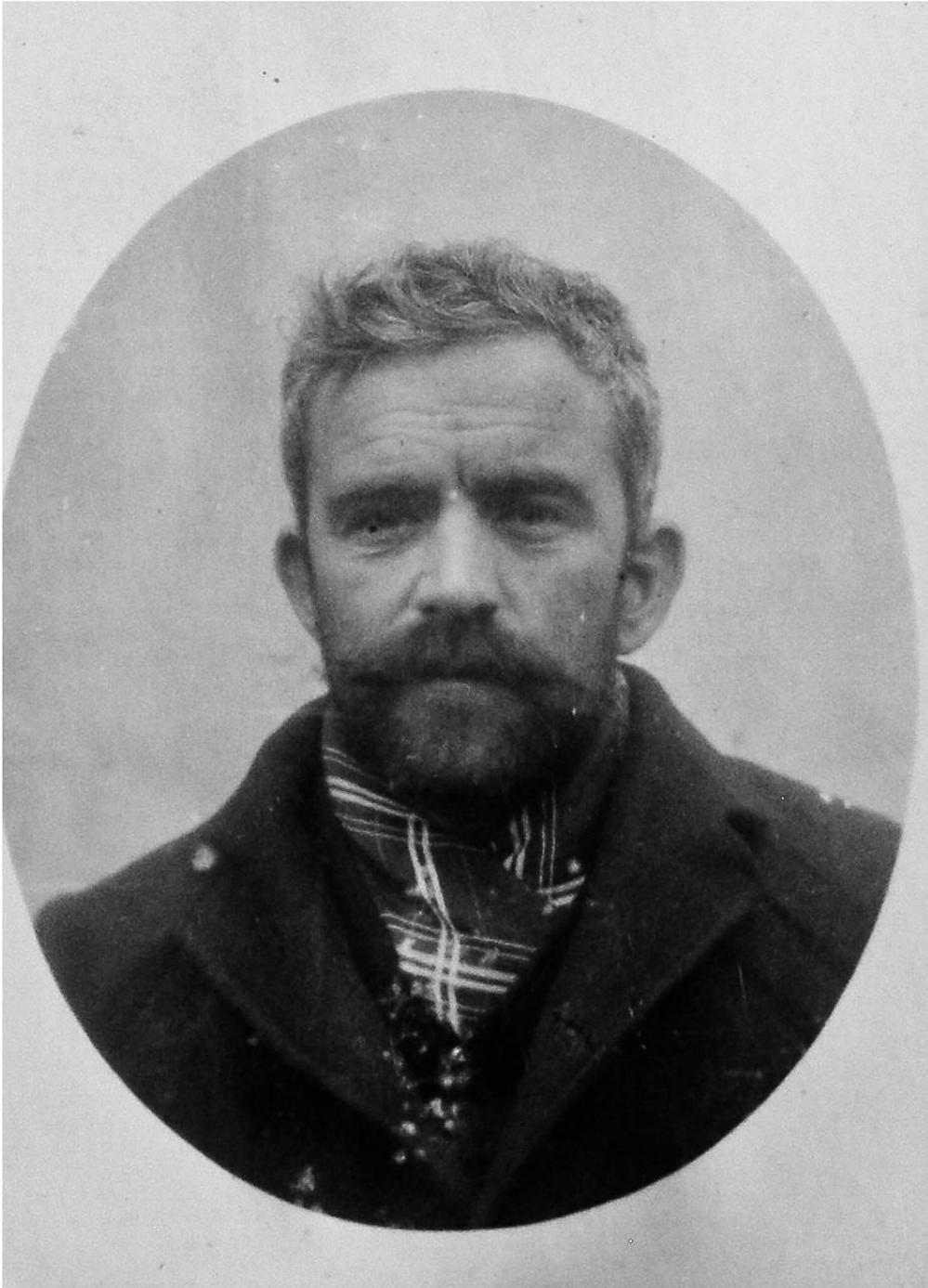
As I lay where I was I thought they were coming to take me + I could not move I was so tired. I thought it very hard to be taken prisoner after having gone so far so I made up my mind that to sell my life dearly. I got my rifle ready + I had about 100 rounds of ammunition left + if they had come I would have popped one or two of them + then turned my rifle on myself for I made up mind that no Boers should take me alive, however they did not come the length, they went back when they got within 50 yards of me + I believe they did not see me where I was lying, either that or they thought I was dead + did not want to have any trouble with me as I was the only one about that part of the field. There is a sergeant + two other men in hospital with me + they are not going to up again if they can help it...

**Appendix 11: Photographs of South African War veterans on their day of admission to the Richmond Asylum, Grangegorman, Dublin.**

**Fig. 75: Private William McConnell, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, aged twenty-eight**



**Fig. 76: Sergeant John Joseph Doherty, Royal Irish Regiment, aged thirty-seven**



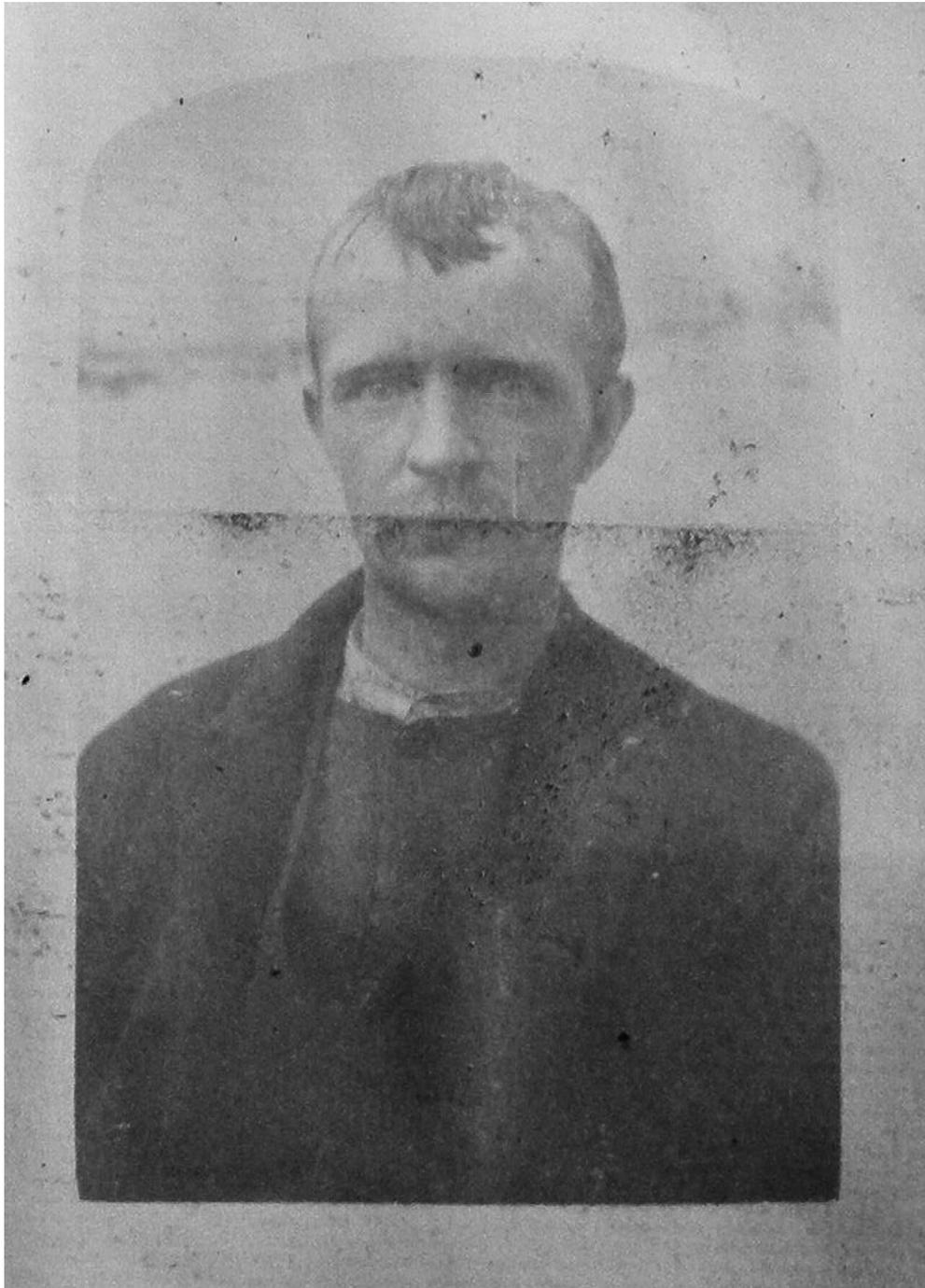
**Fig 77: Sergeant Laurence Bradley, Royal Irish Fusiliers, aged twenty-nine**



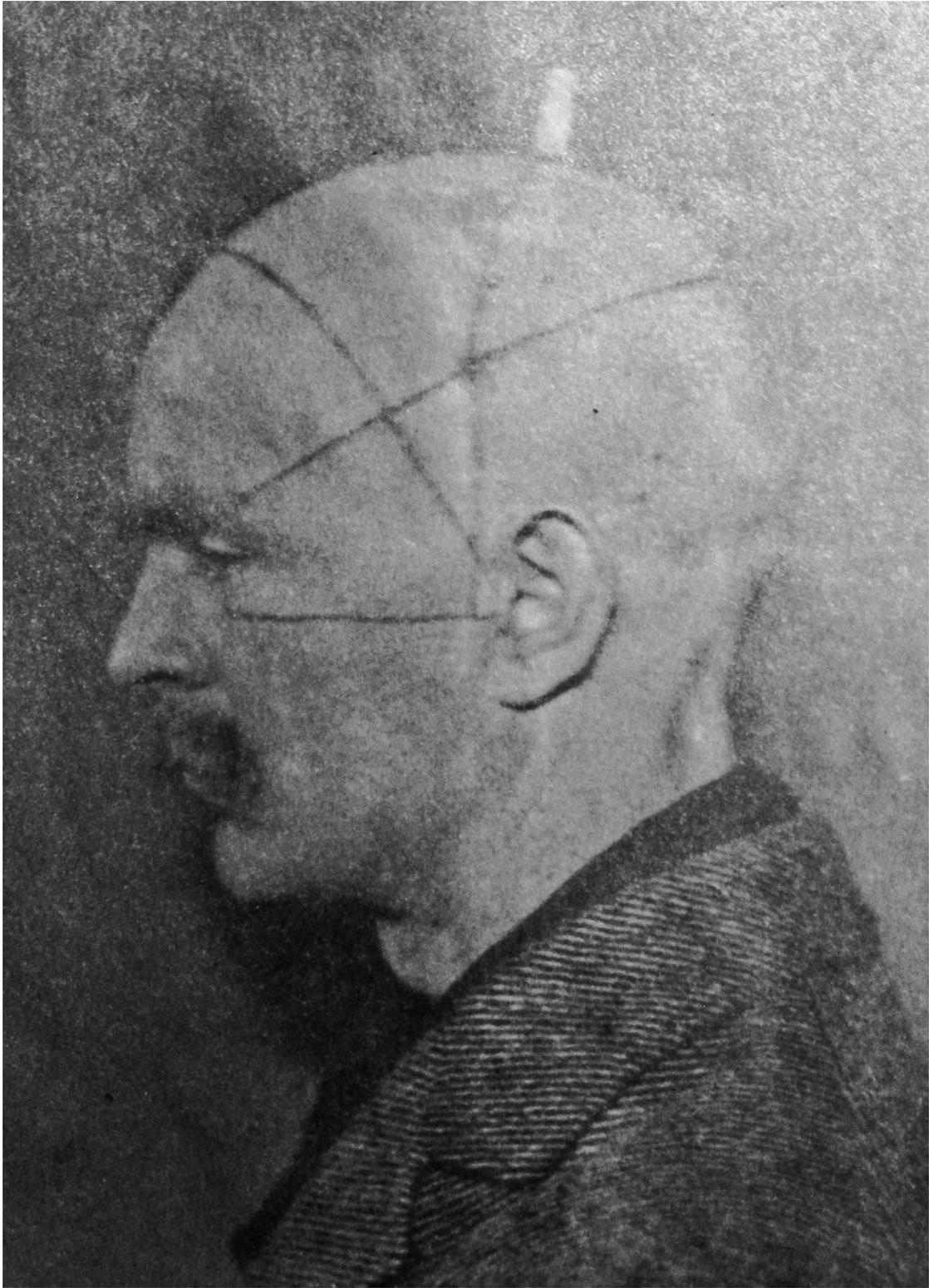
**Fig. 78: Private Patrick Brennan, 4<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers, aged thirty-two.**



**Fig. 79: Private Thomas McCarthy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, aged twenty-six**



**Fig. 80: Private Thomas McCarthy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, aged twenty-six, with head injury sustained at the battle of Colenso (15 December 1899)**



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- 1) Collection of private papers (manuscript)
- 2) Newspapers and contemporary periodicals
- 3) Memoirs and histories written by contemporaries
- 4) Parliamentary publications and debates

## **B: Secondary Sources**

- 1) Works of reference
- 2) General histories
- 3) Journal Articles
- 4) Unpublished theses
- 5) Electronic sources
- 6) Documentaries

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*Freeman's Journal*

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