

# THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ENROLLED PENSIONER FORCE MAN?

A goodly number of the 1200 or more Enrolled Pensioner Force who arrived in WA the 1850s and 1860s did well for themselves and their families, whether as serving EPF members, convict guards, men of business or office holders. Life was not so kind to many others, but that is a separate issue.

It is very likely that the EPF member who had the most successful public career, and who rose to the highest official rank of all, was Inspector Daniel O'Connell of our colonial Police Force. Daniel was the son of John O'Connell and his wife Brigid. He was born in Scotland, almost certainly in 1836. The year can be deduced from his known career moves and date of retirement from the Force (1). Why his parents moved to Scotland from Ireland is not known.

Daniel O'Connell joined the British Army at an early age and served in the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Dragoons. As a teenager he took part in the Crimean campaign of 1854-1855 and then went on to fight in the Indian Mutiny. During the siege of Delhi Daniel was wounded –

badly enough for him to earn a military pension (2).

Later he was made a member of the Enrolled Pensioner Force and arrived in WA on the 'Burlington' in April 1863. Daniel was stationed at Albany. He married Mary Mooney there – she was the daughter of retired army veteran and police officer Laurence Mooney. The couple had six children (3).

Daniel joined the Police Force as a constable in 1865 and served all over the colony, but in the south to start with. He was the first police officer based at Mount Barker when the station opened in 1868. During the controversial escape of Fenian political prisoners from WA on the 'Catalpa' in 1876, police corporal O'Connell went to Rockingham to find and seize the vehicles and horses used by them during the episode (4).

Officer O'Connell rose steadily through the ranks by merit and received a number of solid commendations for the way he conducted himself and for his efficiency in carrying out policing duties. He was the sergeant in charge of

York police station during a tragic episode in April 1887, when his 18-year old son Constable Joseph O'Connell was shot and mortally wounded by a criminal named Thomas Hughes (5). Sadly, the killer was a son of an Enrolled Pensioner Force man of the same name (6).



The high points of Daniel O'Connell's career seem to have been a result of the difficult Gold Rush years. Promotion to the commissioned rank of sub-inspector came in 1893, with placement as senior officer in charge of the Eastern District, soon to be based on Northam.

A year later he demonstrated his abilities very well when the Rush began. For a while, the Police Force tried to manage the goldfields from O'Connell's Avon valley headquarters, but it proved to be a logistical nightmare and the base of operations was moved east to Coolgardie in 1894. Working conditions were very rough indeed, but Daniel O'Connell and his men succeeded in establishing efficient law enforcement in what could have become a disaster area. Separate police districts were created for the goldfields in 1895 and he was then able to

move back to Northam (7).

Daniel O'Connell retired in glory as an Acting Inspector on 13 December, 1901 and returned to Perth, dying there in 1922.

#### References

- (1) Western Australia Police: record of service of Daniel O'Connell; *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, Vol 3, K-Q, p2349
- (2) Broomhall, F.H. *The Veterans*, Hesperian Press (1989), B219 – some details of his military life are summarised in Blackburn, G. *Conquest and Settlement*, Hesperian Press (1999), p158
- (3) References as in note 2
- (4) Pashley, A.R. *Policing our State*, Educant (2000), pp335-336; Bentley, M. *Grandfather was a Policeman*, Hesperian Press (1993), p115
- (5) Conole, P. 'Divided Loyalties' in *Irish Scene*, Vol.10, No.6 (September-October 2008), pp48-49
- (6) *The West Australian*, April 18, 1887; Broomhall (1989), B141-142
- (7) Western Australia Police: record of service of Daniel O'Connell; Conole P., unpublished notes on the Wheatbelt Police District (2008), p2

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