

CORPORAL JAMES GORMAN

James Gorman was born in 1820 – or just possibly 1819 - in what is now the old Dublin suburb of St Thomas. To date, no information is available in regard to his parentage (1).

James enlisted in the 13th Regiment of Light infantry of the British Army in Dublin in December 1838. The 18-year old Irishman had formerly been a hairdresser. His future life experiences were a far cry from quiet civil pursuits in Ireland.

Private Gorman's unit was commanded by Colonel **William Dennie**. The 13th Regiment was already notable. It was raised by the Earl of Huntington in 1685, switched briefly to dragoon service in 1706, changed back into an infantry outfit in 1706 and became the 13th Regiment of Foot in 1751. The 'light infantry' conversion occurred in 1822.

Regimental battle and campaign experiences to then included the capture and defence of Gibraltar (early 1700s), Dettingen (1743), the Caribbean operations of the Napoleonic Wars and the 1st Burma War of the 1820s (2).

The 13th Regiment won renown in the course of an Afghan conflict which involved a disaster. Some amazing local military and diplomatic incompetence led to an ill-conceived retreat from Kabul in the winter of 1841-1842. The one all-British infantry regiment (the 44th) involved in that unusual fiasco was destroyed.

On the other hand, the more fortunate 13th played a key role in a long sequence of British successes in the war and became famous as the 'illustrious garrison' in the defence of Jellalabad (3). One historian describes an earlier exploit – the storming of Ghazni in July 1839 – as unusually brilliant and questions "why

(it)...is not assigned a more exalted station in the annals of British military victories" (4).

James Gorman was in the middle of these dramatic events, which gained his regiment several more battle honours and an additional title – Prince Albert's Light Infantry Regiment. Gorman was a good soldier and, besides three medals for his share in the regiment's Afghan struggles, he received two good conduct badges and was promoted to Corporal in June of 1847 (5).

After more than thirteen years of service Corporal Gorman was discharged at Chatham in February 1852. His pension was set at eight pence per day. Later in the year he was accepted into the Enrolled Pensioner Force and was soon on his way to Western Australia, accompanied by his wife **Ellen** (*nee* **Fields** or **Friels**) and two children. They arrived in Fremantle on February 7, 1853 (6).

In the following April **James Gorman** was appointed a Night Warder in the Convict Establishment without the sanction of a superior officer. His conduct as a warder was not without some 'ups and downs'. He was dismissed after three offences in August 1853, but was re-employed a month later. Warder Gorman's later activities included guard duty on various road parties and at Convict Depots around the colony.

Unfortunately, disputation with his superiors, squabbles with other guards and a string of minor disciplinary offences marred his record. He was noted as being "a very captious and irritable man". Yet **James Gorman** endured until March 1871, by which time his health had deteriorated to the extent that he retired from the Convict Establishment after 18 years service.

James Gorman requested his pension be paid at Albany, where he chose to settle. He resurfaced briefly in March 1873 when a temporary job as a Special

Constable in charge of a convict street party at Albany came to an abrupt end. The old soldier died at Albany in December 1882 (7).

James and **Ellen Gorman** were the parents of a large family – seven sons and five daughters. Among the latter were **Ellen** (the Younger) who married **Patrick O'Connor**, a constable in the WA Police Force, in Fremantle in 1888. Another was Rose Anna, who preceded her sister in marrying a police officer, Constable **Arthur Robinson** of Albany, in August 1879 (8).

The police linkages were to increase, but it is also necessary to mention another common marriage trend – between the children of army personnel. One son of James and Ellen, **Peter John Gorman** (born in Perth, 1864), married **Eileen Matilda Wellstead**. She was the daughter of **John Wellstead**, formerly a private in the 51st Regiment of Foot, then a military pensioner in WA from 1845. **Peter John Gorman** served briefly at Beverley from January 1884 until May 1885 as a constable in the WA Police Force (9).

Peter's older brother **Lawrence Gorman**, born in Ireland in September 1852, had already devoted some time to policing work. He married **Margaret Cowden** at Albany in 1875 and moved north to Roebourne soon afterwards. Lawrence was recruited directly into the Police Force there in 1876 and served for two periods over the next five years. He left the Force finally in April 1881, while working in Perth.

Until about the year 1889, Lawrence was a member of the crew of a whaling vessel operating out of Albany. He and Margaret had several children, one of the younger ones being **Cecil Claude Gorman** (born 1890), who served as a private in the 28th Battalion of the 1st AIF in World War I and was killed in Flanders in September 1917 (10).

It is sad to relate that one of Cecil Gorman's cousins had already fallen in the same fearful conflict. **Christopher Gorman** (born in Fremantle, 1861), third son of the Enrolled Pensioner Force man **James Gorman**, married **Bridget Rosanna (or Rose) Sullivan** at Albany in 1882. Bridget was the daughter of yet another police officer, **John Sullivan** (born 1819/1820 in County Tipperary, the son of **John** and **Elizabeth Sullivan**, died in WA in 1901) and **Ellen Ryan**. The exploits and tribulations of Constable Sullivan have been the subject of a fine article by Thelma Stonehouse (11).

John Christopher Gorman (born 1893), the offspring of **Christopher Gorman** and **Bridget nee Sullivan**, joined the 11th Battalion. He lost his life at Gallipoli in May 1915 (12).

In this Gorman family, we have again an example of a strong culture of service from one generation to another, one which was reinforced by social links and marital patterns. The service traditions were either in the military or in the WA law enforcement agency, with its purely local point of origin being the work of James Gorman as a guard and warder during our Convict Era.

A number of **James Gorman's** descendants carried on these service traditions in the military or the police throughout the 20th Century (13). Besides the young men who gave their lives in World War I, others have served the community in either category. Three built careers in the Western Australia Police and one has carried the family tradition forward into the present century.

References

- (1) Broomhall, F.H. *The Veterans*, (Hesperian Press, 1989), B114
- (2) Brereton, J.M. *A Guide to the Regiments and Corps of the British Army on the Regular Establishment*, (The Bodley Head, London, 1985), pp142-143
- (3) Ascoli, D. *A Companion to the British Army 1660-1983* (Book Club Associates, London, 1983), p207

(4) Stewart, J. *Crimson Snow* (Sutton Publishing, 2008), p58. One positive outcome of that regrettable war was a generation of relative peace along the north-west frontier of British India; the Afghan princes noticed what comparatively well-led redcoats could do and had no desire to relive the experience

(5) Brereton (1985), pp142-143; Ascoli (1983), p81; Erickson, R.(ed) *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, (University of WA Press, 1988), Vol.2, D-J, p1231; Broomhall, (1989), B114

(6) *Bicentennial Dictionary*, ibid; Broomhall, ibld

(7) Barker, D.J. *Warders and Gaolers* (Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc, 2000), pp83-84; Broomhall, B114-115

(8) *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol. 2, D-J, p1231; Vol. 3, K-Q, p2353; Vol.4, R-Z, p2647

(9) *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol.2, D-J. p1233; Vol. 4, R-Z, p3259; WA Police Record of Service of Peter John Gorman

(10) *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol.2, D-H, p1232; WA Marriage Certificate 3929 of 1875; WA Police Record of Service of Lawrence Gorman; Australian War Memorial site Roll of Honour for the death of Private Cecil Claude Gorman, Service No. 6323b

(11) *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol.2, D-J, p1231; Stonehouse,T., 'A Forlorn Character', in Moreley, L.A. *Family Reflections* (Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc, 2004), pp132-137

(12) Australian War Memorial site Roll of Honour for the death of Private John Christopher Gorman, Service No.177

(13) One who did not - James Gorman the Younger (1855-1935) - became a successful man of business around Albany and Mt Barker. See *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol.2, D-J, p1232

Jean McDonald, Enrolled Pensioner Guards Special Interest Group; and Peter Conole, Police Historian