

AN OPERATION DELAYED

JOHN STOKES, a young Irishman, had an adventurous spirit. As a boy aged 14 he left his home in Newton, Mount Kennedy, County Wicklow, Ireland and went to sea. John was born in 1835, the son of Henry Stokes, a cabinetmaker of County Wicklow, and his wife Mary (nee Hopkins). After his experiences as a young mariner, he returned to Ireland just as the trumpets sounded for Britain's direct involvement in the Crimean War from early 1854 (1).

John enlisted in the 63rd Regiment of Foot, probably at Dublin, the units' chief recruiting ground. The lower ranks were virtually devoid of military experience and included many teenagers, just like John Stokes: the 63rd "*owed its main strength to lads newly and hastily recruited in Dublin...and thus rawly constituted had never executed so much as even one march*" (2)

The 63rd had originally been raised as a second battalion of the 8th Regiment of Foot, but was given a different number and a separate identity under Colonel Robert Armiger in 1758. It received the additional designation West Suffolk Regiment in 1782 and distinguished itself in

campaigns against the French in Flanders and the West Indies during the period 1793-1815. The Crimea meant additional honours, especially for Inkerman and Sevastopol (3).

The 63rd was not heavily engaged at the Alma, but played a solid role around Sevastopol and won glory at the hellish battle of Inkerman in November, 1854 when (combined with the 21st Regiment), it repulsed a massive Russian attack in a crucial stage of the fighting - and lost a quarter of its available personnel in the process.

The young soldiers suffered terribly from illness during the war. It is commonly known that cholera was a big issue for all armies, but the winter of 1854-1855 was very bad because of extreme chills, colds and pneumonia. Observers noted that the poor 63rd men and boys endured the worst. The regiment started the war at full strength – about 1080 officers and other ranks. Sickness and trench warfare knocked out half of them by the time of Inkerman. In January 1855 a shocked senior officer reported only seven soldiers as fit for duty (4).

But they were tough and resilient - the great majority recovered, returned to the ranks and fought bravely in the trenches and during an expedition leading to the capture of Kinburn (west of Sevastopol) in October 1855. As one proud officer noted after that victory: *"the fact remains that the Queen's Colour of the 63rd Regiment was the first British flag on the soil of Russia proper"*: (5)

At some stage during the turmoil and horrors of this war, the first truly great international conflict of the Industrial Age, Private John Stokes of the 63rd was badly wounded. He survived, of course and was awarded the Crimea Medal with various clasps and the Turkish Crimea Medal. He returned to Ireland and was made a military pensioner, his pension of 1 shilling *per diem* being paid in the 2nd Dublin district.

A perfectly credible family legend records that the bullet from the wound John Stokes sustained in the Crimea remained in his body until removed many years later. One issue at question is: who removed it and how many operations did it take?

One granddaughter, Mrs E.Godfrey, believed a Dr.W.P. Birmingham may have done the job. Another version suggests a bullet was removed from John's head in the 1880s - some thirty years after the injury - by a Dr. Dermer at Fremantle (6).

John Stokes converted to the Catholic faith in 1856 and married Elizabeth Pyman at Howth, County Dublin in 1857. In 1865 he signed up to serve as an Enrolled Pensioner Guard. Stokes and his wife and two children left Britain on May 26, 1865 on the "Racehorse", arriving in Fremantle on August 13 (7).

For his service as a guard, John Stokes was obliged as per usual to remain in Western Australia for seven years, be available for duty as needed and attend Parade each Sunday. The service also eventually entitled him to a grant of land. Broomhall records John Stokes as having purchased Fremantle Location S40 of 5 acres for one pound per acre in December 1867. In October of 1881

Stokes applied for North Fremantle Location 50, next to his own property. Four years later, in 1885, Stokes was granted Fremantle Location S41 of 5 acres. At some stage he built a cottage in what was later to become South Street, Beaconsfield. It is still standing (8).

John Stokes probably attended the review of Pensioners and Volunteers arranged by Governor Weld on the Old Cricket Ground, East Perth, in 1869. He was literate, had held the rank of lance corporal by August 1880 and was well regarded by the WA commandant, Lieutenant Colonel E.D.Harvest (9).

There was one last hour of glory In June 1897, when John Stokes of Fremantle, along with other surviving members of the Enrolled Pensioner Force, was invited to a Banquet held in St. George's Hall, Perth as part of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. He died at Fremantle on March 13, 1900 (10).

John and Elizabeth had a large family, including two sons who were born in Ireland – Henry (born 1857 or 1858) and James (born 1862). The other children of the union were all born in Fremantle, in order: William (1865), Elizabeth (1868), Mary (1870), Joseph (1873) and, lastly, Rose Ann in 1878 (11).

The first son, Henry Stokes, had a full and interesting life, to say the least. He worked as a farm labourer after leaving school in Fremantle and was appointed a constable in the WA Police Force on August 1, 1879. Henry served at Guildford, Victoria Plains (police station at Newcastle, now Toodyay) and Bridgetown. He was promoted to corporal in 1892, then to sergeant in 1894.

Officer Stokes had a couple of problems early in his career, such as when prisoners escaped from his custody at Victoria Plains. He did not exercise his legal right to use major force in stopping their flight and had to accept a reprimand and fine. The incident did no serious harm to his reputation – he had been 'patted on the back' for earlier successful cases involving Sunday trading and unlicensed wood logging.

Promotion to sergeant came in February, along with a transfer to Coolgardie, where he was officer in charge of the police station there. A difficult position at a difficult time in Goldfields history and a sure sign his abilities were highly respected (12).



Henry Stokes

Sadly, things did not go all that well for Sergeant Stokes. He received a severe reprimand for accidentally leaving a box of gold behind at Southern Cross during Gold Escort duty (the box was recovered), then another for being 'disrespectful' to a very important man in March 1895. The VIP was none other than the Lord of the Goldfields, the famous Warden and Resident Magistrate, John Michael Finnerty.

Soon afterward Finnerty had his revenge. Henry Stokes and four other police officers attended a boxing night at the Coolgardie Athletic Club, on official policing duty. They were ejected after what may have been a minor 'donnybrook'. Sergeant Stokes brought the matter to court, but Finnerty dismissed matters on an apparent legal technicality.

There is evidence to suggest Henry Stokes tended to be tactless and quarrelsome – he was chided by another

officer for arguing directly with the Commissioner of Police about the quality of his horse. He was based at Albany for many years and for a prolonged period (1898-1901) was in charge not just of the police station but the whole Plantagenet (or Southern) District based on the town. However, he remained Sergeant Stokes and other squabbles at Albany seem to have put an end to any hope of him reaching inspector rank (13).

Henry Stokes had married Mary Agnes Taylor at Perth in 1882. The couple became the parents of six children. He left Albany in 1902 and spent the rest of his policing years on the Goldfields, at Carnarvon and then in Perth. He served in his home town of Fremantle only for the last few months of his career from January 1918.

Sergeant Stokes was placed on the police retired list on June 30, 1918 – probably earlier than he would have liked, but he received a handsome gratuity of 737 pounds. Henry Stokes seems to have left WA afterwards – whether before or after the death of his wife Mary Agnes in 1928 is not certain. According to family tradition he died in England in about 1949 (14).

Numerous descendants of Enrolled Pensioner Force man John Stokes and his sons and daughters – including Henry Stokes - are members of the WA community today.

References

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7. Erickson, R. *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians 1829-1888*, Vol.IV, R-Z, p2953
8. Broomhall (1989), B265; Healy, Folios 2-3 and the attached photograph in the possession of J.McDonald
9. Broomhall (1989), pp148-149 and B265; Healy, Folio 3
10. Broomhall (1989), pp129-130, B265; *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol.IV, R-Z, p2953
11. *Enrolled Pensioner Guard Profile – John Stokes* (2007), pp5-6
12. WA Police Record of Service of Henry Stokes, Reg. no 7, pp1-2
13. *Ibid*, pp2-3; Moran, K. *Sand and Stone* (Frickers international Publishing, 2000), Vol.I, p284; Vol.II, pp152-157. On the power and influence of Warden Finnerty, see Whittington, V. *Gold and Typhoid* (University of Western Australia Press, 1988), pp59-60
14. *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol.IV, R-Z, p2952; WA Police Record of Service of Henry Stokes, Reg.no 7, p2; Healy, Folios 5-6 and personal communication from Mr T.Stokes, October 12, 2004

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