

EARLY MILITARY HISTORY.

Address by Colonel Collett.

Addressing the Press sub-branch of the Returned Soldiers' League yesterday, the president of the League (Col. Collett) gave some interesting facts about the early military affairs of Western Australia. He said:— "The first regular troops to appear in Western Australia landed at King George's Sound on Christmas Day, 1826, and formed part of an expedition, despatched from Sydney, to found a settlement. The detachment belonged to the 39th Foot (now the 1st Battalion of the Dorset Regiment) and was commanded by Major Lockyer, of the 57th Regiment (now the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment). Major Lockyer's descendants included Sir Nicholas Lockyer, who did such good work for soldiers during and after the war. During 1828 a further expedition to form a settlement at the Swan River was organised by the British Government. A request was made to the War Office to furnish troops not exceeding 100 in number. This was agreed to and the details were announced as follow: — A captain lieutenant, 2 ensigns, an assistant surgeon, 3 sergeants, 3 corporals, a bugler, 56 privates and 32 women and children. These were drawn from the No. 2 or Light Company of the 63rd Regiment of Foot — afterwards called the West Suffolk Regiment and now known as the 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment. The numbers that actually embarked revealed a shortage of two privates and an excess of one woman or child. The War Office also notified that the officers had no families with the exception of the assistant surgeon, who would require accommodation for five ladies. The doctor was drowned in Table Bay during the voyage. The troops embarked on H.M.S. Sulphur, which arrived in Cockburn Sound on June 8, 1829. They disembarked on June 17 and remained in the colony for four years. Of the officers it is interesting to note that 18 years later Captain Irwin became Governor of the colony: The Irwin River and Irwin Street, are named after him. The life of the troops in the new country may be easily imagined. While a large proportion of them were in, the

possession of a knowledge of some trade, they were mostly employed on public works fatigues, and there is something familiar in the, civil engineer's complaint to the Governor that he could not get satisfactory work out of them. His Excellency, was pleased to direct the O.C. Troops to take immediate action by detailing a non-commissioned officer to superintend each fatigue.

'Soldiers' Rations.'

In the way of rations I have been able to gather that they were allowed, daily, 1 1/2lb. of bread or 1 lb of biscuit. 1lb of fresh meat, and, one pint of wine or a third of a pint of spirits. But on arrival here Captain Irwin recommended an addition of cocoa or coffee, rice, curry stuff — in all sufficient to give a breakfast and supper. Women were allowed half rations and children under twelve quarter rations - except that extra bread was to be issued in lieu of wine or spirits. From evidences I am a little dubious about the fresh meat: because, later, Captain Irwin asked that the Assistant Surgeon be given authority, on account of an out-break of scurvy, to issue, or authorise to be issued, fresh or preserved meat to those who he thought needed it. There was also a complaint in regard to the difficulty in securing green vegetables, and I cannot conceive that the wine and spirit issue stood the strain for long. The pay of the troops was as follows: — The captain, 11/7 a day, less certain minor stoppages for provisions supplied; a lieutenant 6/6; an ensign, 5/3: a sergeant, 1/10; a corporal, 11d.; a bugler; 7 3/4d: a private, after 14 years' service, 8d. from 7 to 14 years service, 7d., under 7 years service, 6d. In 1833 the (company of the 63rd Regiment was relieved by two companies of the 21st (Royal Scots Fusiliers), which, in turn, were replaced in 1840 by a similar force of the 51st Regiment (King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry). Later reliefs consisted of one company only, and were supplied firstly by the 99th Regiment (Duke of Edinburgh's Lankashire Regiment, disbanded during the penultimate decade of the 19th century), and secondly and lastly by the 12th Regiment (Suffolk Regiment). Royal Engineer officers and detachments of the Royal Sappers and

Miners arrived at various dates, the total of the latter corps at one time exceeding 100 rank and file. These artificers were principally engaged in directing and superintending the work of the convict gangs on the public works of the colony. The whole of the regular troops while stationed in Western Australia formed portion of the garrison of the Australian colonies, the headquarters being at various times situated in Sydney, Melbourne, and New Zealand.

Military Pensioners.

The last of the Queen's troops left Fremantle for Hobart on March 8, 1863. But Western Australia was not left defenceless. As a part of its emigration policy the Home Government in 1850 commenced to send out parties of military pensioners. Those were of the type of, which we are strong advocates at the present day. These pensioners, who brought their wives and families with them, made the voyage on convict ships, of which they formed the guards. On arrival they either took up land or entered into the service of the settlers. This policy was continued for many years and by 1864 something over 2,000 persons had thus been added to the population. Representations made by the Governor as to the weak state of the garrison of the colony; elicited a reply (1854) from the Duke of Newcastle that in view of the disturbed state of politics in, Europe, the Government was not prepared to increase the number of troops, but suggesting that advantage should be taken of the influx of military pensioners to enrol them as an auxiliary force to the regulars. Action was accordingly taken, and Captain John Bruce, who had arrived in the colony with the first detachment, was appointed staff-officer to the enrolled pensioner force. This unit, which at one time showed a strength of over 600, assisted the line companies in the various garrison; duties, and finally assumed all responsibilities. At one time about 300 rank and file were thus continuously employed. Captain Finnerty succeeded Captain Bruce. In November, 1880; the Enrolled Pensioner Force was abolished and a new unit, the Enrolled Guard was formed from amongst its members. March 31, 1887, witnessed the last parade of this body of old soldiers. To

accommodate the troops small guard houses were built wherever detachments were permanently stationed. Barracks were erected in Perth in 1832 and were situated between the present Town Hall and the Treasury buildings. Hence the name of that street. Barracks for the Enrolled Pensioner Force were commenced in South-terrace. Fremantle, in 1852, and still stand. In 1863 the building which marks the western end of St. George's terrace. Perth, was begun. It was designed to accommodate the increased pensioner force necessitated by the withdrawal of the regular troops. It contained 120 rooms, hospital, magazine, and other annexes. A rifle range was opened on Mt. Eliza in 1863. The remains of the stop-butt are still there, and the 1,000 yards firing point was somewhere near where the Observatory now stands. I fired my recruits course over it. It was closed about the end of 1895.

The Volunteer Movement.

But the Enrolled Pensioner Force in its task of defending the colony was not without supports. The volunteer movement revived in Great Britain in 1859, spread to these shores and was taken up by the inhabitants with considerable energy. Naturally Perth was the centre of activity, and it is in connection with the formation of our premier regiment and its period of adolescence that I want to relate one or two interesting facts. The proceedings of a meeting held in Strickland's Hotel (now the United Service) September 11, 1861, the Hon. Lieut.-Colonel Bruce presiding, gave birth to the following resolutions: — Proposed by T. N. Yule, and seconded by F. Griskin: — 'That it is desirable that a volunteer rifle corps should be formed in Perth, to be styled the Metropolitan Volunteer Rifles.' — Carried unanimously. Proposed by C. King, and seconded by A. O'G. Lefroy: — 'That a deputation, consisting of the chairman, Messrs. Dyett, G. Shenton. W. J. Clifton, J. G. Carr, be requested to wait upon his Excellency to solicit his approval and co-operation. — Carried unanimously. Proposed by Mr. Carr, and seconded by Mr. Farmaner: — 'That this meeting be adjourned until Friday, the 13th instant, at the same place and hour, when the committee will report his Excellency's decision ' —

Carried unanimously. Proposed by the Attorney-General, and second- ed by A. Shenton: — 'That the thanks of this meeting be given to R. Sholl, for his exertions in settling up this movement.' — Carried unanimously. Proposed by Mr. Lefroy and seconded by Mr W. J. Clifton:— 'That Mr. Mark Dyett be appointed honorary secretary to the corps.' — Carried unanimously. Proposed by Mr. Dyett and seconded by Mr. Ba? — 'That the thanks of this meeting be given to Colonel Bruce, for the kind and willing manner in which he has come forward to promote the object of the meeting and for his able conduct in the chair. — Carried unanimously. After the above resolutions were passed, it was announced that the names of persons willing to join the proposed corps should be received, and in short time sixty-four names were put down. The meeting having given three cheers for the Colonel, and one for the volunteer movement, adjourned. Within a few days the Governor gave his sanction to the formation of the corps, which, seven days later, had increased its strength to 94. Colonel Bruce acted as chief instructor, Lieutenant Thorold, R.E., performed the duties of adjutant; and N.C.O.'s of the 12th Regiment were the drill instructors. For a while drills commenced at 5.30 a.m. and 6 p.m. daily and no fault could be found with an, average attendance of 80. The 'Perth Gazette' of October 11, 1861, says: — We have little, local intelligence this week other than as relating to the Volunteers and the display of yesterday. Drill has lately taken, the place of our usual avocations but such a success as the field day, on Wednesday will make up to the public for shortcomings in either journalising or other business. Regulations were approved and these provided for the election of officers and N.C.O.'s by a general meeting of the company. The first officers were Captain L. S. Leake, Lieutenants M. Dyett and W. J Clifton, and Ensign J.B. Roe. All went well, until 1872. Captain Leake appears to have been popular and also to have possessed political, ambitions. It is suggested that, by these means he came into conflict with the Governor and his Executive. In any event, when he was informed that no money for volunteers would be provided in the forthcoming estimates, he promptly resigned

his commission. Ensign Roe was offered he vacant command, but he declined it, and Captain Burke, an Imperial officer, was appointed to control. When these proceedings came to the ears of the volunteers a general meeting was convened and much indignation was expressed at the action of the Governor in withholding funds and in foisting Captain Burke upon them without first consulting their wishes. Private Loftie? took the floor and enlarged upon the law and constitutional methods that; his Excellency appeared to be ignorant of. He was eloquently supported by Sergeant Hillman, who wound up his oration by moving, amidst immense cheering, that the corps be disbanded. This was carried and disbanded it was by a decision of the Executive Council hurriedly called together for that purpose. A few months later the unit was reformed by a forgiving Governor, but none of the former officers was reappointed and some trouble was experienced by Mr, Hillman in securing the acceptance of his offer to again serve in the ranks. Eventually; this gentleman, as a major, commanded the Metropolitan Rifle Volunteers and two of his sons served with distinction in the recent war.

With this short account of rather dubious incident in the history of the famous 11th Battalion; I conclude my talk with you to-day. Colonel Collett, on the motion of the president of the sub-branch, was accorded a hearty vote of thanks.

*(Note: Found by Gillian O'Mara on the **Trove Newspaper** internet site while looking for another item). The item is nearly indecipherable in parts and I have used a ? when unsure of the spelling of names etc. This item can also be viewed by any interested person at State Library of Western Australia [Battye Library] 3rd floor Alexander Building microfilm room – The West Australian Thursday, 20 December 1928, page 24) E&OE transcription.*