

By Friends Remember'd...

(Part One)

By Peter Conole

The words above are from a poem by Mr Pratt (whoever he was) published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of April 1810. The piece honoured the in-pensioners of Chelsea Hospital, a place the poet celebrated as a '*palace of their own*' for battered old army veterans. As was the case right up to the time when the Enrolled Pensioner Force arrived in Western Australia, the vast majority of veterans who received some support were out-pensioners. All told over 60,000 pensioners were on the books when the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815. The number rose to 85,000 by 1828 in the aftermath of a number of imperial conflicts in India, West and South Africa and South-East Asia (1).

This piece is aimed at shedding some extra light on both the origins and development of the British Army's pensioner system and the important roles many men, specifically the out-pensioners, continued to play within the military establishment.

From the year 1661 Britain had a regular army at its disposal, one more or less stable and closely bound to the monarchy. Elaborate and sometimes bizarre administrative structures were created to administer the gradually expanding collection of regiments. It would take a dissertation to explain the system (2) but for present purposes it is necessary to consider just one aspect.

The monarch of the day – King Charles II – got the idea that aged, worn out, infirm or crippled soldiers were entitled to care and consideration. Officers were eligible

for pensions from a contingency fund established in 1661, which meant they could go on 'half pay' whilst not in actual service. Common soldiers were left out, though some veterans were retained on the muster rolls without being required to perform duties. Lump sums were paid as a 'Kings Bounty' to widows and orphans. The King decided it was not good enough and was persuaded by his illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, to build a hospital and refuge for deserving old warriors on the same lines as Les Invalides, the Paris hospital opened for aged, wounded and disabled soldiers in 1674.

In October 1679 King Charles issued a royal warrant to the Duke of Ormonde (Lord Lieutenant of Ireland) for the building of a '*Hospital for such aged and maimed officers and soldiers as might be discharged as unserviceable and to make a deduction of six pence in the pound from all military pay towards that project*'(3).

Building began at Kilmainham near Dublin in April 1680 and in March 1684 the first pensioners were admitted – ten officers and 100 soldiers. The wars of the 1690s made it impossible to include all deserving cases in the system. In 1698 most of the men on the rolls were being paid 18 pence per week as out-pensioners instead of being maintained in the hospital itself.

The more famous establishment in England was soon to open its doors. King Charles ran into resistance from Parliament in 1679 which, because of a combination of fear of 'tyranny' and what can only be described as sheer stupidity, declared all military forces to be illegal. He then dissolved Parliament and on September 1681 ordered Sir Stephen Fox, Paymaster of the Forces, to build an appropriate institution close to the capital. There is a persistent tradition that the Nell Gwynn, the King's popular and kindly favourite mistress, came up with the idea

and donated land for the project. She certainly emerged as a benefactor of the Hospital and pensioners drank toasts to her memory for centuries. Fox found means to finance the project on Royal Society property or purchased land at Chelsea. The King generously endowed the project and laid the foundation stone in early 1682.

From 1684 Chelsea Hospital was supported by a tax on the purchase price of army commissions and a 5% deduction from all military pay. Sir Christopher Wren's work on the building and grounds was not completed until 1690. The first in-pensioners, soldiers disabled by wounds or age, were admitted from February 1692. They numbered 476 and were balanced by out-pensioners: four companies of invalids still capable of serving in some capacity and who were armed and quartered as garrison troops at Windsor, Hampton Court, Teignmouth and Chester (4).

The out-pensioners, for obvious reasons, are at the centre of most of what follows. Even back then they were called enrolled pensioners, a familiar term to all readers. Their use as a vital factor in fortress defence continued for generations. Although not fully fit for general service in the field, they were valued in times of crisis because there were frequent problems in recruiting sufficient new soldiers for regiments of the line, whether horse or foot. Such pensioners were not organised in regiments but rather in companies, often simply named after their captains. Another oddity is that they shared facilities with master gunners and gunners of the Royal Artillery who, strangely, were not actually part of the army as such. They were controlled by the Board of Ordnance (5).

During the first half of the 1700s Britain was involved in two major conflicts – the Spanish Succession War (1702-1713) and

the Austrian Succession War (1740-1748) - which stretched financial and manpower resources and perhaps convinced the political elites of the need for a solid military establishment. That was pegged to a maximum of 30,000 in 1749, but the outbreak and course of the vast and indeed global Seven Years War (1756-1763) put an end to much penny-pinching. Before the conflict broke out a very capable *de facto* Army chief-of-staff took office, Lord Jean-Louis Ligonier, a general of Huguenot descent. He entered the picture at a critical moment in 1755.

After war began Ligonier presided over a massive increase in army numbers, including the raising of an additional 12 independent companies of Chelsea out-pensioners for garrison duties in the homeland from 1756. As the war expanded and intensified the Royal Navy was able to fend off all invasion attempts, but recruitment problems remained dire because of the need to send many soldiers overseas. The out-pensioners were called into service in ever greater numbers, a total of nearly 4000 men in at least 36 companies by the year 1759. They served as garrison men at numerous strongholds both during and after the conflict.

Their usage does not take into account veterans who should have been pensioned off, but who stayed in those regular regiments assigned only to home defence. There was some consolation after the victorious end of the war. A royal warrant of February 1766 provided additional subsistence money to men discharged as invalids fit for admission to Chelsea. This helped out-patients a lot, as not all could enter the hospital at once and many never did (6).

Also in the aftermath one additional benefit arising from the existence of companies of enrolled pensioners must have become obvious to some members

of the officer corps. Those aging lieutenants and captains who could not afford to retire after the war ended in 1763, or who lacked the money to buy their way up the ranks, realised that solid service with out-pensioner companies had certain advantages.

One revealing case is that of Captain John Knox, late of the 99th Regiment of Foot, a Scots-Irish officer who did very well in the American campaigns from 1757 onwards ending in the conquest of Canada. After the peace treaties of 1763 yet another downsizing of the Army resulted in him spending a dozen years on half-pay. The outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1775 generated the usual difficult recruiting problems and the use of dozens of enrolled pensioner companies for garrison work. John Knox was called into service and given command of a company of invalids based at Berwick in northern England during 1775.

Captain Knox did his duty, but he was now in his mid-50s and rather bitter. Quarrels with both superior and junior officers followed. One lieutenant complained about him and Knox was rejected when he begged for further promotion, though he was told in the nicest way: *'Officers of Invalids are not promoted in the service, but enjoy the honourable ease they have so well merited'*. Squabbles at Berwick continued until 1777, including problems with pay, the specific duties of pensioners and personality clashes among officers. Members of the EPG Special Interest Group may be familiar with such matters as some officers of the Pensioner Force in WA also engaged in quarrels.

Poor Knox was under a lot of strain and in declining health. He died in February 1778, leaving his wife Jane (nee Clare) of County Cork with an income of 26 pounds a year. The War Office told her that extra

funding *'was confined to officer's widows and orphans who have no other provision'* (7).

During the time those petty dramas were resolved in Berwick Britain was about to reach the critical stages of a losing war against not just the rebellious American colonies but also France, Spain and the Netherlands. In 1774 recruiting difficulties were already apparent and never enough troops were available to both fight in the colonies and defend the homeland as well. Only a third of an establishment of 120,000 was available to fight overseas during the most dangerous period, when even more garrison troops than usual were needed. The Government had from quite early on been forced to recruit German mercenaries. The Royal Navy saved the day but some sections of the British political elite had still not learned their lesson, for the usual trimming down and neglect of the Army began again in 1783 (8).

Fortunately for Britain Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger had the foresight to push through a build-up over the next few years. By 1790 41,000 effective troops were in peace time service, about a quarter of them in England. Some Independent companies of foot were also raised, while by 1793 the usual array of companies of invalids (out-pensioners) were scattered about, no less than 39 of them in various forts and posts. In passing it is worth noting that about 20, 000 military pensioners were receiving subsistence by 1792. Pensions were not given freely (they had to be applied for) and could be forfeited in cases of bad conduct. In 1814 a scale of payments for out-pensioners was published, ranging from 18 pounds per annum down to three or four shillings a week (9).

The outbreak of war with Revolutionary France in 1793 plunged Britain into the direst series of crises in its national history up until 1940 and the nation was

transformed over the next 22 years into what amounted to a kind of 'fiscal-military' State. Drastic reforms were needed to maximise recruiting, starting with a new Catholic Relief Act in 1793. Catholic Irish were now allowed to join the Army or militia on the same basis as everybody else. Furthermore, educated and ambitious young Irishmen could obtain commissions as officers and largish numbers of them stepped forward to serve, particularly after the end of the sectional revolt of 1798 (10).

The war years also saw a major change of direction in the use of Chelsea out-pensioners. During a brief lull in hostilities, in December 1802 seven garrison battalions were formed by uniting various garrison companies of invalids and additional Chelsea out-pensioners willing to serve but unfit for the rigours of normal campaigning. The military authorities were impressed by the results and they were all re-titled Royal Veteran Battalions in July 1804. Over the next few years these military pensioner battalions increased in number to 13, with a probable total strength of over 10,000 officers and men. As per usual they served mostly on garrison duty around the British Isles.

However something very different happened for some, a reflection of the dire necessities of the war against Napoleonic France. Four battalions went to serve overseas. The 1st Battalion was based at Gibraltar from 1805-1810 when the fortress was under siege or blockade by the Spaniards and France in turn. A campaign in the Netherlands followed in 1813-1814 as part of an army under Lord Lynedoch, during which the battalion held the port of Willemstad. The 2nd Battalion garrisoned the Portuguese island of Madiera from 1809 to 1814 – the place was an important Atlantic base for Britain. The 10th Battalion served in Canada from December 1806 and was actually thrown into battle when war broke out with the United States in 1812. The unit fought

with distinction in three victorious engagements before being relegated to garrison duty. The 13th Battalion served in the Netherlands during 1815, although it was not present at Waterloo (11).

The successful deployment of such large numbers of military pensioners outside Britain was a precursor of things to come in far corners of the world, culminating in the arrival of the Enrolled Pensioner Force in WA.

Notes

- (1) Haythornthwaite, P.J. *The Armies of Wellington* (Arms and Armour Press, 1994), p74.
- (2) See Ascoli, D. *A Companion to the British Army*, Book Club Associates (1984), pp14-45 for an excellent overview of arrangements from 1660 to the Cardwell reforms of 1871.
- (3) Walton, C.E. *History of the British Standing Army, 1660-1700* (London, 1894), pp595-597.
- (4) Williams, N. *St John, Redcoats and Courtesans* (Brassey's, UK, 1994), pp106-108 and Fraser, A. *King Charles II* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1979), pp432-433.
- (5) Rogers, H. C. B., *The British Army of the Eighteenth Century* (George Allen and Unwin, 1977), p18.
- (6) Rogers, op.cit, pp25-26, 47-48 and Whitworth, R. *Field Marshal Lord Ligonier* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1958), pp209, 233, 282.
- (7) Knox, J., with introduction by Connell, B. *The Siege of Quebec* (Folio Society, 1976), pp10-11.
- (8) Rogers, op cit, pp30-31.
- (9) Knight, R. *Britain Against Napoleon* (Allen Lane, 2013), pp49-51 and Haythornthwaite, op cit, p 74.
- (10) Knight, op cit, Foreword-pXXII, with Bartlett, T. and Jeffery, K. A. *Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp332-333.
- (11) Haythornthwaite, op cit, p177, Malcolmson, R. *Historical Dictionary of the War of 1812* (The Scarecrow Press, Maryland, 2006), p552 and Bamford, A. *A Bold and Ambitious Enterprise* (Frontline Books, 2013), pp105-106.

By Friends Remember'd...

(Part Two)

by Peter Conole and Diane Oldman

As discussed in Part One, during the Napoleonic Wars thousands of relatively fit and able military pensioners were formed into 13 Royal Veteran Battalions for largely garrison service in Britain or overseas. They were disbanded between the years 1814 to 1816 as a premature cost-cutting measure. Times were changing and internal turbulence emerged in Britain (1).

The subsequent use of military pensioners played out in various ways around the Empire during the following decades. Four key areas are discussed separately, for developments elsewhere shed light on WA's experience with the Enrolled Pensioner Force.

Britain. Over 61000 veterans were receiving pensions by 1819. Potentially unruly or discontented former servicemen presented both a problem and a partial solution when arrangements for preserving public peace were inadequate. The 'Peterloo Massacre' in Manchester in 1819 caused a public outcry when poorly trained mounted yeomanry assaulted a crowd. British governments eventually decided that men with solid military experience were better options for law enforcement than enthusiastic amateurs.

Continuing economic distress and political agitation resulting in, for example, the Luddite and Rebecca riots and the Chartist disturbances, led to the conscription of many army veterans as special constables. Thousands were sworn in during the Chartist riots of May 1839 to assist the regular police, guard key buildings, patrol streets and disperse

mobs. The Manchester outbreak of August 1842 was something of a fiasco for the ill-equipped veterans. The Government finally pushed through an 1843 Act allowing the raising of companies of out-pensioners to aid the civil power. Nearly 3000 enrolled pensioners were issued with arms and uniforms in 13 cities during 1844.

About 1300 of them were deployed in London during the Chartist demonstrations of 1848. Other pensioners distinguished themselves at Leicester during May of that year, when they moved forward with fixed bayonets to aid the police. The rioters dispersed without any loss of life. There was a similar incident at Manchester in the same month. The role of the pensioners expanded to include, for example, special duty in the Tower of London in 1852 during the Duke of Wellington's funeral.

To sum up, the pensioners had been of much greater use operating in armed, disciplined, and uniformed companies than as special constables. They foreshadowed the creation of a more highly developed Police Force (2).

Canada. The Canadian provinces benefitted from the presence of Royal Veteran Battalions in the War of 1812 against the USA, even if one of their officers (after a victory!) wryly observed they were "*worn down by unconquerable drunkenness*". Imperial authorities thought better of their 1816 decision to withdraw them: companies of pensioners were formed again and sent to garrison Newfoundland from 1824 onwards. Financial problems led to more radical steps in the 1850s. Lord Henry Grey (Secretary of State for War and the Colonies) informed Governor General Lord Elgin that regular British Army units based in Canada would be reduced in number and that the locals needed to raise, arm and train more militia.

Companies of enrolled pensioners could be used to help out in the period of transition as garrison troops and as a quasi-police establishment.

Captain James Tulloch visited Canada in April 1849 to assess the feasibility of the scheme and make recommendations. He suggested the despatch of pensioners to 12 locations in the west of Canada, with the proviso that the men should be given land grants near townships. All was agreed and a warrant authorised the recruiting of 1000 veterans for service in Canada. With the arrival of the first draft in July 1851 the gradual withdrawal of British regulars began. By 1855 nearly two thirds of the regulars had left: pensioners' companies were on permanent duty as special guards, garrison men, police and guards of honour on ceremonial occasions. At the same time the Canadians were in the process of raising and training large numbers of local militia.

A report of April 1857 indicated all was going well. The provinces were moving towards a high degree of military self-reliance. On June 30, 1858 the permanent duty pensioners ceased operations. The companies were disbanded on October 31 of the same year. They were not forgotten. Their years of solid, efficient duty have been described as "*a turning point in Canada's military evolution from colony to nation*" (3).

Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania). Army pensioners in a reasonable state of health or who had finished their terms of service arrived in Tasmania as convict guards. They obtained small land grants in return for 12 days military service a year. They were also required to turn out in force to defend the colony in the event of invasion or rebellions. The first group of 63 men plus their families arrived in 1826-1827 and were placed among five settlements. A larger batch of 109 (along with 107 wives and children) turned up in 1832.

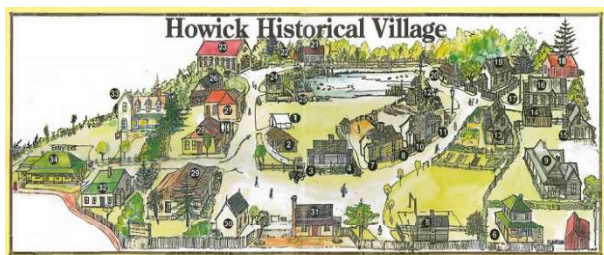
The final contingent of 527 men (with 1094 women and children) arrived in penny packets from 1850 to 1856.

The Tasmanian pensioners oversaw public works, supervised convicts and acted as mounted police on occasion. From 1851 onwards groups of them did duty on rotation on the Victorian Goldfields and some were involved in the Eureka Stockade business. Their land grants sometimes fell on infertile ground. By the late 1850s about 103 men had left the colony (roughly one in seven) and more drifted away in the following years.

There is no need to draw particularly negative conclusions about the tendency to seek greener pastures. Enrolled pensioners were able to lead quite varied lives and, as the West Australian experience shows, were not strictly tied to their land allocations and had no trouble in moving into occupations outside the confines of military life. They were free agents when they chose to be and could move from one colony to another with ease and continue to draw their pensions in the process. As one British newspaper noted in regard to those veterans: "*The Australian colonies offer a temperate climate to the wife and ultimately useful employment to the husband*" (4).

New Zealand. After the First Maori War ended Governor George Grey asked the London authorities to provide troops for long-term protection of settlers. The Government approved the forming of a corps consisting of army veterans – the Royal New Zealand Fencibles. The latter were raised for specific local defence and garrison duty and could not be transferred elsewhere. The Corps was to consist of veterans in good health and of decent character. Most of them had families to support. A total of 721 fencibles (plus about 1800 family members) arrived between the years 1847-1852.

They were settled in four villages just south of the main administrative centre of the colony, Auckland. They were Howick,



<http://www.fencible.org.nz/>

Onehunga, Otahuhu and Panmure. Apart from purely military duties the men built small forts and redoubts around Auckland and several roads. Their officers served under generous conditions whereas the lower ranks received a cottage, an acre of cleared land and farm equipment. Then and later they had to turn out for drill 12 days a year and attend an inspection parade every Sunday. On the plus side they could earn extra money as farm labourers and after serving seven years they got to keep their land, cottage etc. As an early and reliable authority on the fencibles wrote *"the discipline and drill of these old soldiers were excellent"*.

So was their performance in times of crisis. On April 23, 1851 they gathered under arms to help regulars fend off an attack on Auckland by Maoris who arrived in Mechanics Bay via a large fleet of canoes. The Maoris thought better of it and retreated after an exchange of gifts. The vast majority of the fencibles - including their commanding officer Major William Kenny - remained in New Zealand as permanent settlers after the last period of their service expired in 1859.

When a major war broke out again Auckland was once more under direct threat. All able-bodied teenagers and adult males (up to the age of 65) in the town and surrounding settlements were mustered for service in the militia on June

23, 1863. At least 75 former fencibles joined up, along with scores of their sons. Maori raids reached the area just south of Auckland and the militia were active in repelling them in several small engagements between July and September, 1863. During November of that year and January 1864 the militia helped build some defensive blockhouses in the Waikato district, but by February most of them were released from service.

The arrival of various British regiments and thousands of volunteers from the Australian colonies ended the crisis after months of hard fighting later in 1864, although lower scale conflict continued for years. Veterans of the New Zealand Fencibles had done well by an emerging nation and the Corps is honoured to this day.

Their various roles and conditions of service resembled those of veteran counterparts in Canada and Tasmania and of the Enrolled Pensioner Force in WA. The social gulf between officers and men, the obligation to muster regularly for drill, the Sunday parades, the cottages, the small plots of land, the opportunity to start new lives and so on reveal that the various colonial military pensioner establishments had much in common. Western Australia received the largest number. Their value as defenders of the colony was evident in 1865: pensioners at Camden Harbour deterred an attack by Asian maritime visitors engaged in slave raiding as well as lawful fishing activity.

Notes

(1) Haythornthwaite, P.J. *The Armies of Wellington*, Arms and Armour Press (1994), p177; Brown, S. 'British Regiments and the men who led them: Royal Veteran reserve and garrison battalions' www.napoleon-series.org/military/organization/Britain

(2) Mather, F.C. 'Army pensioners and the maintenance of civil order in early nineteenth century England', *Journal of the Society for*

Army Historical Research, Vol.36, 1958, pp110-124; Stepler, G.A. *Amateurs to Arms!* Budding Books, Gloucestershire, 1997, p86

(3) Reilly, R. *The British at the Gates* (G.A.Putnam's Sons, New York), p69; Dube, T.D. 'A Force too small to imply constraint but sufficient to proclaim a principle. *The Enrolled Pensioner Scheme in Canada West 1851-1858*', pp1-6: an online article (now no longer available) based on a 1982 Master-of-Arts thesis.

(4) Ring, M. 'Military Pensioners' in *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, ed. by Alexander, A. Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania (online version, 2006); *The Argus*, December 7, 1849 - 'Military Pensioners' (reprinted from the *United Services Gazette*, July 28, 1849)

(5) Cowan, J. *The New Zealand Wars and the pioneering period* (Government Printer, Wellington, 1922), Vol I, pp258-259, 289-290, 450-451; Gibson, T. *The Maori Wars* (A.H. and A.W.Reed, Wellington, 1974), pp108, 129; *Royal New Zealand Fencible Corps* <https://en.wikipedia.org>; Taylor, N.E. *Withnell Yeera-Muck-A-Doo* (Hesperian Press, Western Australia, 1987), pp67-68