

George Pingle

Lt. Col. C.F.H. Spencer, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, left the service in about 1893, or so, not without certain feelings of regret at not having gotten command of his regiment. At that time, one assumes, Frank was a school-boy at Dover College, but he was soon to enter the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, and which he was to leave in 1900, to enter the Royal Artillery as a 2nd Lieutenant. Aside from memories of those he knew while there, two recollections of this period remained clear and sharp to the end of his life; one was the visit to the R.M.A. by Queen Victoria, who rode about in a little pony phaeton, attended by an honor-guard of the tallest cadets. The other was an event of the South African period: "MAFEKING NIGHT" -- when Britain celebrated as never before or since, at learning of the "Relief of Mafeking."

On April 30th 1900, he was commissioned as a "2nd Lieut. in the Land Forces" -- the name and style being that above: "Francis Elmhirst Spencer, Gentleman." At the bottom is the signature of the Marquis of Lansdowne, and at the top, that of the Queen. Later, King Edward discontinued the practice of signing army commissions -- those of the Royal Navy had ceased to bear the Royal signature long before. The Revenue stamp affixed is in the amount of One Pound, ten Shillings -- a not inconsiderable sum in those days! And, as his first commission was in the Victorian Age, so, too, would be his first campaign medal, and the last medal of her long and splendid reign: He was on the way to China, to serve in an all-mounted battery of Royal Horse Artillery, equipped with the one-pounder Vickers gun.

Those desirous of details concerning the next campaign for which Lt. Spencer received a medal are referred to Brig-Gen. C.A.L. Graham's HISTORY OF THE INDIAN MOUNTED ARTILLERY (Aldershot, Gale & Polden, 1957.) In the Preface appear names of those "without whose help" the book could not have been written, one being that of Brig. Frank Spencer. Lt. Spencer had a camera, and took many photos on that campaign. I have enlargements of some of them, from the Curator of the Army Museum, even one which Lt. Spencer did not take, since he appears in it. One notes, as a reflection of the time interval and increasingly cold weather, the lengthening beards, the raffish appearance of several styles of head-gear, and of course, terrain, guns, buildings and walls. It was on this campaign that he witnessed for the only time the act for which a Victoria Cross was awarded: to Lieutenant John Grant, 10th Gurkhas (later Col. J.D. Grant, V.C., C.B., D.S.O.) It was at Gyantse Jong, when the wall was breached at a distance (range) of about 200 yards, and Captain Grant led his company of Gurkhas into the breach. In 1906, at the Trocadero, Lt. Spencer was among some 45 officers present -- a reunion dinner -- of those who had served in Tibet, Captain Grant among them. Of those officers who had served in Tibet, and also in China in 1900, the last to "go" in March, 1972 was Brig. Spencer. Attempts were made in later years, by the friends of #7 Mountain Battery, (6 guns) to obtain the Honour Title "LHASSA", but without success. It was well-deserved, one thinks, but not granted.

A few years later, still serving with a Mountain Battery, Lieutenant Spencer, interested as are some of us, in events for which awards are given, asked a Subadar-Major how he had gotten the I.O.M. (Indian Order of Merit). The story told was an event of the Tirah campaign, in 1897 -- one of many such episodes of frontier warfare. All of the officers had been wounded, as well as others, and, then a Havildar, he organized bearer parties to carry the wounded to safety, while he slowly retired the battery from action, stage by stage, until, out of real ammunition, they were firing a few blanks which were on hand, for the value of the noise in maintaining the aspect of

resistance. For this, he was promoted to Jemadar and given the I.O.M.

Like others, Brig. Spencer recalled the high esteem and respect in which the V.C.O.'s were held. (Viceroy's Commissioned Officer, there being three grades: Jemadar, Subadar and Subadar-Major). Later on, they met in London, where the old soldier served for a time as orderly officer to King George V, and he remembered the Subadar-Major's strongest term of contempt for a gunner guilty of some lapse: "Bhail Admi! --meaning, "Bullock man".

In 1911, there was serious concern about the quantity of arms being run into Afghanistan. The Naval forces engaged in the suppression of this trade received the Naval General Service Medal, with bar PERSIAN GULF. The Army might have gotten something too, but the Mekran Field Force proved too great a political embarrassment. The force occupied part of the Persian Coast, and was effective in suppressing the forbidden trade, but questions were raised in Parliament as to the operations of British forces on the soil of Persia, and it was hurriedly withdrawn. After service with the Mekran Field Force (no medal), Lt. Spencer served in the Malay States (Guides Mountain Battery) until 1914.

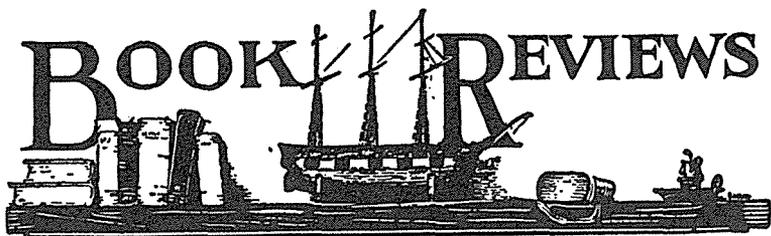
This brings us to the Great War, which must be passed over all too briefly. During this period, Brigadier Spencer received the D.S.O., as an "immediate award," published as such in a Special Army Order. He also received the Military Cross and the 1914 Star and Bar Trio. I have not seen the documents for his five "Mentions in Despatches," but as they all bear the name of Winston Churchill as Secretary of State for War, they were probably issued in 1919, irrespective of, probably, much earlier dates for some of the "mentions."

One instance of an award may be included here: Capt. Spencer was then serving with Battery C, 186th R.F.A., when one of the guns was hit, and 5 of the 6 horses killed. As others ran or took cover, one man cut the traces, and mounted and rode away on the one unwounded horse, "Old Wally" as it was called. His name was put in for the "Military Medal for Bravery in the Field" and he later received it.

From 1921 to 1925, Brig. Spencer served in the Straits Settlements, and thereafter in Britain, until retirement in 1938. He received the Jubilee Medal of 1935 and the Coronations Medal of 1937. With the advent of WWII, he desired to return to active service, but was refused. Working for two years as Regional Officer, London Civil Defence, as a civil servant, he did not qualify for the Defence Medal, but Mrs. Spencer, as a volunteer, did receive it. However, he did receive one more campaign medal -- from the Royal Navy, for his service with the Admiralty Service S.V.P. -- the 1939-45 War Medal, thus completing his "group of Ten". Retired now at 65 "for good" (for the next 25 years) he traveled to Canada, Rhodesia, Malta, Malaya and other places. He sustained a very active, extensive and most interesting correspondence.

It was a pleasure to have known him as one who grew to manhood in almost exactly the last 21 years of Queen Victoria's reign, days of Britain's Greatness, and to have served with the older officers who were the very embodiment of its splendid traditions. And, to sound a final nostalgic note, he was the last of those who marched to Peking in 1900, and to have crossed the Himalayas, with Youngusband and Macdonald, in the Tibet Campaign, when men fought in bitter-cold, oxygen-poor air, at the highest altitude that men fighting on the ground have ever fought battles. As the words of a song phrase it, and as he himself might well have told the story: "those were the days, my friend!"

# BOOK REVIEWS



THE DAMNED DIE HARD - Hugh McLeave - Saturday Review Press - New York- 1973  
300 pp., 36 illustrations - \$9.95

"Between March 9, 1831, when the Foreign Legion was formed, and October 24, 1962, when it quit Algeria, 902 officers, 3,375 NCOs, and 31,467 legionnaires of more than forty nationalities died for their regiments and the country of their adoption - To them this book is dedicated."

This book is not just another book on the French Foreign Legion, but a interesting passage of time with Legionnaires of other years and many wars. The battle credits for the Legion covers four continents and thirty countries, embracing such battles as Barbastro...Zaatcha...Sebastopol...Magenta... Puebla...Tuyen Quang...Dahomy...Vimy Ridge...Djebel Badou...Narvik...Bir Hakeim...Dien Bien Phu...Algiers.

In Spain in May of 1837 Carlist faced Cristinist in a civil war which welcomed foreigners to fight on either side. The French Foreign Legion under Colonel Conrad (with the future Marshal Bazaine leaving his trade in the Legion) mustering some 800 were sided with the Cristinist force, while another Foreign Legion served in the Carlist cause, and they numbered some 875 men. These two Legions met head-on during the Battle of Barbastro and nearly annihilated each other, the French Legion mustering only 130 after the battle while the Carlists lost all but 160 men. The commander of the Legion Colonel Joseph Conrad also fell in this battle. It is interesting to note here that a British Legion under the command of Gen. De Lacey Evans also served the Cristinist cause in Spain at the same time.

The Medaille Militaire was awarded often to many Legionnaires who had to decline the Legion of Honor because to receive it a Legionnaire had to accept it with his real name. One such man won the Medaille Militaire in the Crimea -- a Sergeant Mori -- and when the time came for the award of the Cross of the Legion of Honor he hesitated between anonymity and the Cross. His papers showed he was Prince Mori-Ubaldini, a former priest and member of one of the oldest and richest nobility in Florence.

John F. Elkington joined the Legion in October 1914, as a second-class legionnaire # 29274. In many of the actions of the legion he fought in this capacity until finally wounded. For nearly a year he lay in a Paris hospital recovering from a wound that would cause a limp for the rest of his days. In the summer of 1916 the French Official Journal stated: "The Military Medal and the Croix de Guerre are conferred upon John Ford Elkington, Legionnaire in Company B 3 of the First Foreign Regiment. Although fifty years old, he has given proof during the campaign of remarkable courage and ardor, setting everyone the best example. He was gravely wounded on September 28, 1915, rushing forward to assault enemy trenches. He has lost the use of his right leg."