

The Boer War veteran who never forgot his pension

GUARDIAN 9-11-92

Martin Linton

GEORGE Ives, last remaining veteran of the Boer War, stole the show when he joined the Remembrance Day parade in Whitehall yesterday just nine days short of his 111th birthday.

But if the army thought he had flown over from his home in Canada just to sing its praises, it was sorely mistaken. He was complaining about his non-existent pension.

"I've worn this for 88 years," he said, fingering the Royal Victoria South Africa medal which he is the last man entitled to wear, "and I'm still waiting for them to give me a pension."

Canadian Boer War veterans, now all dead, were paid war pensions by the Canadian government but George Ives had received nothing because he fought for a British regiment — the 1st Wiltshire battalion of the Imperial Yeomanry.

"He's been complaining about it for years," said his daughter, Victoria, who lives near him in Aldegrove, British Columbia, "but we've never



George Ives . . . too old to fight in first world war

thought about complaining to the British government."

He left the army 90 years ago, too old to fight in the first world war, and became a pensioner soon after the second world war. He was married for 76 years, gave up smoking after 75

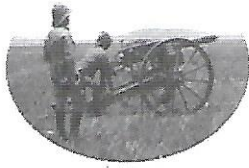
years and is a great-great-grandfather.

He is still reticent about his part in the war. He went behind enemy lines as a scout, helped put Boer mothers and children in compounds (the first concentration camps) and caught and shot a few Boer men.

The massed bands of the Brigade of Guards played every nationalist anthem in the book, Rule Britannia, Hearts of Oak, Men of Harlech, but broke into Funeral March No 1 in B flat minor by Beethoven, Bonn's greatest son, as the Queen and the party leaders laid their wreaths.

● Heavy security in Enniskillen yesterday marked the fifth anniversary of the IRA's Poppy Day bombing at the Fermanagh town's cenotaph which left 11 dead and 63 injured.

At yesterday's Remembrance Day ceremony Keith Gault, whose father, Samuel, was killed in the bombing, laid a wreath on behalf of the eight families of the victims. Michael Mates, the minister responsible for Northern Ireland security, laid a wreath on behalf of the Government.



Mobile: 07710 000964

Email: meurig@casus-belli.co.uk

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH
* THURSDAY, APRIL 15, 1993 21s

NEWS

OBITUARIES

George Ives

GEORGE IVES, who has died at Aldergrove, British Columbia, aged 111, was believed to be the last survivor of the Boer War.

Determined to surrender to old age only by inches, Ives retained vivid memories of his service in South Africa as a mounted infantryman — notably of chasing enemy commandos. The Boers never tarried for a pitched battle, and were generally content to shoot from the hills, killing more oxen than men. Nevertheless, Ives had a scar from a Boer bullet that had ricocheted off a rock to graze his cheek.

"My job was to get over there and kill Boers," Ives would recall in his soft Gloucestershire accent. "You went to war to kill someone, and they tried to kill you back."

Like most soldiers, he had mixed feelings about his service. He expressed little enthusiasm for the British cause, felt a deep sympathy for the enemy, and remembered uneasily his time guarding their womenfolk in ill-run concentration camps.

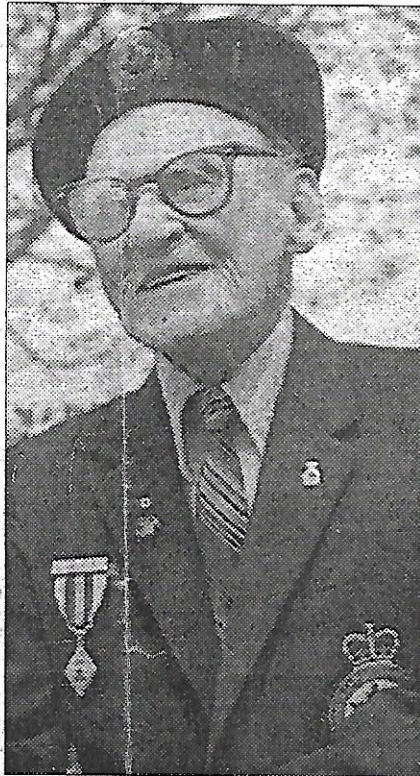
Ives was happier to remember the humanity displayed by both sides. On one occasion Christiaan de Wet, the great Boer general, was allowed to enter a British camp during a lull in the fighting to obtain medical supplies for his wounded men. He also remembered the ceaseless quest for beer.

The son of a coachman and a lady's maid, George Frederick Ives was born in France and taken to England to have his birth registered as Nov 17 1881, to ensure that he would not be called up for French military service. He was brought up largely in France, where his parents worked for the Tidmarsh family. He hoped to become a jockey until he grew too heavy.

Young George was working in his father's grocery shop in Bristol when news of the British defeats at Colenso, Magersfontein and Stormberg arrived in Black Week, December 1899.

In a burst of patriotism, he and thousands of others volunteered to join the Imperial Yeomanry. MPs, barristers, blacksmiths and butchers, few of them with any military experience, poured into half a dozen recruiting centres determined to do their duty.

Ives was one of the 123 who joined the 1st Imperial Yeomanry at Cheltenham.



Ives: mixed feelings about war

ham. As mounted infantry, they had no sabres and were intended to match the fitness of the Boers' cavalry, but were usually employed in aid of other units. Even so, by their return home only 17 of the original volunteers remained.

Like most of his comrades, he was not inclined to become a settler on the veld after the war, despite government encouragement, but on his return to Britain he found widespread unemployment.

Ives sent off for literature about emigration to the Dominions, and decided on his destination by the toss of a florin; heads for Canada, tails for New Zealand.

It came up heads, and Ives joined a group of 2,000 colonists, including a large number of Boer War veterans, to open up a new wheat belt in the unpopulated Northwest Territories. Under the leadership of two Anglican clergymen, the party muddled its way west to

found Lloydminster on what would become the Saskatchewan-Alberta border.

Ives and his father arrived in 1903 and purchased a quarter-section of 160 acres for \$10 (£2). Under the preferential rules of purchase they had to break at least 15 acres and build their own shack, made of logs with a sod roof. Their major problem was to find a well.

Ives proved a hard-working and methodical farmer, and at the outbreak of the First World War was surprised to be rejected for service because of a heart murmur.

In 1910 he felt prosperous enough to marry his wife of the next 76 years, Kay Nelson ("I used to call her Cayenne"); they had three sons and three daughters. But his wife disliked the hard life of the prairies, where the washing always froze on the line during the winter. So in 1919 they moved to White Rock, British Columbia, where Ives took a dairy farm until retiring at 60.

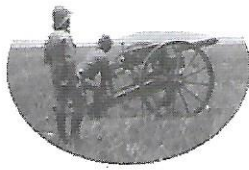
This proved merely an excuse to change jobs, and for the next 15 years he worked in a shipyard, building wooden scows, before retiring for the last time.

He and his wife continued to live in their house until 1984, when they moved to an old people's home. Ives proved a genial, if critical resident.

He pulled his chin up to a parallel bar by the arms until he was well past 100, and remained critical of his children's generation, complaining that youngsters in their eighties and nineties were apt to let themselves go.

After a story about him in the Peterborough column last year he said that he would like to attend the Albert Hall service on Remembrance Day 1992. Within a week he found himself brought over by a television producer. Afterwards he greatly enjoyed meeting Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Lady Thatcher and John Major.

Right to the end Ives liked to talk about going down to the Legion for "a couple of pints". He maintained the ethical standards of his youth, and when a writer more than 60 years his junior, who was interviewing him, suggested that they retire to the quiet of his room, he was concerned for her reputation lest it became known she had been to a man's bedroom.



Mobile: 07710 000964

Email: meurig@casus-belli.co.uk

THE TIMES, THURSDAY GEORGE IVES APRIL 15, 1993

George Ives, believed to have been the last surviving veteran of the Boer War, died in his sleep on April 12 aged 111. He was born on November 17, 1881.

GLADSTONE was prime minister and Queen Victoria's reign had still 20 years to run when George Ives was born at Brighton, the son of a coachman who doubled as a jockey. But his extraordinarily long life, with its rich story-book flavour, was lived mostly in Canada.

Ives's father owned a small stable of race horses which he raced at Epsom, among other places. He also competed in the Grand National, but never won anything. In his turn Ives too became a jockey, competing in both England and at St Malo in France (on a race-course laid out on a hard-packed sandy beach). However, he began to put on too much weight to continue racing, and having no other trade, decided to join the Army.

As a soldier with a mounted unit of the Imperial Yeomanry, he was in South Africa for the brutal, hard-fought final year of the Boer conflict in which he went behind enemy lines as a scout and suffered a face wound during combat. Later he recalled how his unit took vengeance on a captured Boer officer known to have mistreated English prisoners. To teach him a lesson, they forced the captive to lie on an anthill with his hands tied behind his back and syrup spread across his belly.

"We left him there to suffer a thousand ant bites, but we didn't like doing it. Anyway the man survived. And when the armistice was called, we all became friendly. We often got together."

That was Ives's last spell in the army: when the first world war broke out he was six years

heads. And that's how I got into Canada."

He homesteaded in Saskatchewan, deep in the heart of the Canadian Prairie, and also worked on the railroad.

In 1910, in a church at Streamstown, Alberta (next door to Saskatchewan), he married a Bristol woman,

"She didn't like hanging clothes out to dry and seeing them freeze at once", Ives recalled. So they decided to try their luck in balmy British Columbia, on Canada's west coast.

In BC they settled on land in the Fraser River Valley, living in various small towns and, in 1944, moved to Vancouver where Ives went to work in a shipyard. He continued working there until his retirement in 1958, aged 77.

Ninety years after having left England he returned, this time for a much more celebrated homecoming. On November 7, 1992, proudly wearing his Queen Victoria South Africa Medal, he laid a wreath at the Cenotaph in London in honour of his comrades who died fighting the Boers.

That night he was the guest of the Royal British Legion at a remembrance festival in the Royal Albert Hall. Meetings with the Queen Mother, the Princess of Wales, Lady Thatcher and Mrs John Major topped off an event-filled few days.

Once, after he had turned 111, it was suggested to him that he must have lived a good, clean life to have endured so long. He chuckled and said: "That's a joke. I smoked lots of cigarettes in my day and drank lots of beer."

Of his six children, only three — daughters Audrey Davidson and Victoria Conn, and son Jack Ives — are still living, in British Columbia. There are also 44 grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.



too old — at 34 — for military service.

Home from the South African war in 1902, Ives made up his mind to emigrate but could not decide between Canada and New Zealand. "So I took a two shilling piece and said heads it's Canada and tails it's New Zealand. I flipped it and it came up

Kate Nelson, who shared his life for the next 76 years until her death at the age of 98.

The couple lived in Saskatchewan until 1919, by which time three of their six children had been born — and Kate had had enough of the extreme prairie winter cold, with temperatures down to 45 below zero.