



'Who Do You Think You Are' Comes West

By Diane Oldman Member #25



In early March 2011 I received an email from a researcher from Artemis International and Serendipity Productions aka WDYTYA (SBS TV) production team. Former WAGS President Liana Fitzpatrick had suggested that I could help in the research of a Crimean War veteran -cum-enrolled pensioner guard Patrick Sullivan. I responded with 'there were plenty of Patrick Sullivans serving in the Crimea - the English had a habit of utilising the services of the Scots and Irish to fight their Wars! The Private Patrick Sullivan I am acquainted with was with the 95th Regiment of Foot (the Derbyshires).' Apparently this was the same man they were researching, an ancestor of a 'well known Australian'. The email exchange was followed by a telephone call where we discussed generalities about the War and about the role of the pensioner guards. I was not asked to do any research and without some recompense I wouldn't have been willing to offer any! I sent a list of Crimean War record sources that I had generated for my talks on the topic. I must admit I was intrigued but of course was not told who the 'well known Australian' was, nor was there any certainty that the programme would ever go to air.

So what did I already know about Patrick Sullivan? Marjorie Burton and I had found his name in F H Broomhall's definitive work 'The Veterans' wherein it stated that Sullivan had arrived with his wife and three children on 15 Feb 1863 on *Merchantman*. He had served in the 95th Regiment and was the holder of Crimean medals with clasps for Alma, Inkerman and Sebastopol. There were a number of other details with sources listed.

My next stop was to check the Perth Dead Persons Society's shipping transcriptions for that voyage which confirmed the Broomhall information but added the fact that Sullivan was 30 years old. *Merchantman* left England on 12 Oct 1862 and sailed for Bermuda where her convict shipment embarked. She arrived in WA after a voyage of 125 days with 192 convicts and 50 convict guards and their families.

Now to the Crimean War records. The Casualty Lists indicated that Sullivan had received a 'slight wound' at the second battle of Inkerman on 5 Nov 1854. The casualty listing was the first mention of his army service number—1947. A second Patrick Sullivan from the 95th was recorded 'killed in action' at the battle at River Alma on 20 Sep 1854; a dead cert (excuse the pun) that THIS Patrick Sullivan didn't come to Western Australia.

Now for the tricky bit: the Crimean War Medal Rolls recorded that FOUR privates by the name of Patrick Sullivan were in the 95th Regiment. The first two digits of the service numbers were illegible because of the centre fold of the pages. The last two digits were: 27, 36, 47, 80. Which of these was the pensioner guard? I ruled out ??80—he was the one killed in action. Obviously ??47 related to the Patrick Sullivan wounded at Inkerman, so at that point I assumed one dead, one wounded and two continued on to serve in the Army.

I reckoned the wounded one was my best bet for the pensioner guard. No. ??47 received the Crimean medal with clasps for Alma and Inkerman—thus he was probably sent home because of his injury, unfit to serve at Sebastopol. This is contradicted by the medal information in Broomhall, but for the time being, #1947 looked like my man.

I next visited the online WA GRO indexes. The death index confirmed Broomhall's information that Sullivan died in 1900 aged 76. This meant his birth year would have been 1824, contradicting the shipping record that showed him to be 30 in 1862 (born 1832). But we know death certificates can be notoriously inaccurate. The index gave his place of birth as Kilkenny, Ireland.

Broomhall's details of death came not from GRO records but from East Perth Cemetery records. When I looked at a transcript it showed that Patrick, his wife Johanna and two sons (born in WA) were buried in the same plot.

I was fortunate that findmypast.com had recently completed the indexing of over a million Chelsea Pensioner British Army records from National Archives (Kew) Class WO97. I discovered there were 339 Patrick Sullivans; 261 of them were born in Ireland; 26 were born in Kilkenny; I had already discovered four in the 95th. After a few false starts I found that Patrick Sullivan, #1947 had enlisted in Killarney in Sep 1846 when he was 17 years 9 months old (born 1829) and on the last page was the notation 'service in Enrolled Force, Western Australia.' Got him.

I reckon that after accessing *The Veterans* book, shipping lists, casualty lists, medal rolls, BMD indexes, cemetery transcriptions and army service records, I could write a reasonable biography of Patrick Sullivan #1947 of the 95th. In June—three months after our initial telephone conversation—Kirrilly Brentnall the researcher met me in Perth for coffee. Apparently someone in London had taken care of the army research (it would have been cheaper to do it in our library!) She thinks that the programme WILL go to air and they are considering taking a film crew to the Crimea. Thus I won't spoil the television show by writing my own story of Patrick Sullivan. But I do wonder if anyone from WDYTYA managed to find his precise birth year in Kilkenny or Killarney, and cleared up the problem of his wife's name—was it Anna, Hannah or Johanna. And was she his first wife or second wife. And when did they get married anyway?

The episode of 'Who Do You Think You Are' finally aired on SBS Television on 2nd March 2012. The 'celebrity' had been worried that his ancestors would be boring and dull. Not so. He discovered that they were players in some of the most extraordinary moments in history. So who was this celebrity?



Shaun Micallef