

Originally a Justice of the peace and a Sheriff of the County, de Lacy revolted against English rule and was one of the most hated and feared of the the soldiers who fought with Desmond. With Owny O'More of Leix, he led an army into Limerick in order to make James Fitzthomas Earl of Desmond, but the President, Sir Thomas Norris, declined battle and retreated out of reach of the Irish Army. de Lacy, having devastated the country and driven the undertakers from their ill-gotten lands, restored the old proprietors and garrisoned his castle at Bruff. However, on the approach of a tremendous army, under the able commander, Carew, in the following year, he abandoned the castle and took to the woods. A month later we find him, together with the Knight of Glin, attacking Castleisland and liberating the Earl of Desmond, who had been imprisoned there.

When the power of the Desmonds was broken and the Earl had gone into hiding, Sir Pierce maintained himself against all the force of the English Army in his castle at Bruff for a considerable time. After the betrayal and death of the Earl, he went to Ulster on a mission to Hugh O'Neill, but fell into an ambush set by the English soldiers, and with many of his followers was slain. Fynes Morrison, the English historian, describes the event: — "And after these our men had given them a volley in the teeth, they drew away and we heard no more of their drums or bag-pipes, but only mournful cries, for many of their best men were slain, and among the rest, one horseman of great accompt, Pierce de Lacy, an arch-rebel of Munster." The Lord Deputy wrote to Sir Robert Cecil: — "I dare undertake we have rid my Lord President of the most dangerous rebell of Mounster and the most likely to have renewed the rebellion."

COLONEL PIERCE DE LACY

Colonel Pierce de Lacy, last of that renowned Anglo-Irish family to achieve fame in his own country, was born in the first quarter of the 17th century. As a young man he defended Limerick against the attacks of Cromwell and Ireton; as a middle-aged man he fought for the Jacobite cause on the Continent, and in old age he returned to Ireland and lost his life defending the city against William of Orange.

During the first siege de Lacy, who was a Lieutenant-Colonel in Sir John Hamilton's Regiment, was totally opposed to surrender, and yet, when the city yielded, the citizens so trusted him that he was one of the emissaries sent out to discuss terms with the victors. In the final terms he was one of the few denied pardon by name, but the death sentence was later remitted to exile for life. With 1,000 others he was sent by sea to Spain, but when the boat was on the high seas the exiles mutinied, took control of the ship, and landed in France. Here they joined up with the exiled King of England, Charles II.

On the restoration of King Charles, Pierce de Lacy returned to Ireland, married the widow of Nicholas Comyn, Mayor of Limerick in 1648, and recovered part of his own and his wife's estates. For a time he lived at Curragh Chase, later the home of the de Vere family, as a lessee of the Duke of York, who became James II. In 1682, he was implicated in a supposed plot to annex Ireland to France, but his reputation and service as a Royalist withstood the accusation and saved him.

When the Jacobite wars began in Ireland, the old soldier again took up arms, and, although then nearing 70, distinguished himself by putting Colonel Odell to flight near Athlacca. He commanded a battalion inside the city during the siege of 1691 and was involved in the disastrous affair of Thomond Bridge. About 600 Irishmen, led by de Lacy, were returning from a skirmish into Clare, hotly pursued by the Williamites, when the French Governor of the city lifted the drawbridge before the Irish could get into the city. Whether this was done by accident, design, or crass stupidity was never determined, but the result was that nearly all the 600 Irish soldiers were either drowned trying to get into the city or slaughtered on the bridge. Pierce de Lacy died with the rest, the true death of a soldier and a peculiarly fitting one for the last member of a family which had already achieved such fame in Ireland and were yet to gain an even more famous name on the different battlefields of Europe.

SIR ROBERT LAFFAN

Sir Robert Michael Laffan, Governor of Bermuda, was the son of John Laffan, of Skehana, County Clare, and was born there on 21st September, 1821. He was educated at the French College of Pont Levoy, and the Royal Military College at Woolwich, after which he became a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers.

In 1839, he went to South Africa on frontier service and was appointed engineer-in-charge of an expedition for the relief of the British Army under Colonel Smith at Natal. The expedition was successful and Laffan won great praise for his part in it. From here he went to Mauritius, where he again distinguished himself, and, on his return to Great Britain, he was appointed in command of the Engineers at Belfast, and an Inspector of the Irish Railways, then in their infancy.

In 1852, he was sent to report to General Sir John Burgoyne on the state of the defences of Paris and Antwerp, and in 1860, he completely renewed the defences of Malta. He performed a similar work in Ceylon shortly afterwards. Laffan was now the recognised Army authority on engineering and he was deputed to examine and report on the famous Suez Canal, the opening of which he witnessed in 1869.