



MILITARY TRANSACTIONS IN LIMERICK, 1690

BY ROBERT PARKER

INTRODUCTION

Robert Parker was born near Kilkenny between 1665 and 1668, the son of a farmer, and was educated there. He joined a company of the Protestant schoolboys formed by James Butler, afterwards second Duke of Ormond, and with them learned military exercises. In October, 1683, he enlisted in Captain Frederick Hamilton's independent company, which was afterwards drafted into Lord Mountjoy's regiment and ordered to Charlemont in Co. Armagh in April, 1684. In 1687, he was disbanded by Tyrconnell on account of his religion, and returned home. In April, 1689, he again enlisted under Hamilton, who was a major in the Earl of Meath's regiment of foot, (the 18th foot, the Royal Regiment of Foot in Ireland) and fought throughout the Williamite campaign in Ireland.

In 1694, he was serving in Flanders. He received a commission for his gallantry in action at the breach of Terra Nova on 20 August, 1695, where he was badly wounded and invalided for 30 weeks. He next served under the Earl of Athlone, and, in 1702, under Marlborough. A captain-lieutenant and adjutant at the storming of Menin in 1706, he was wounded in the head, after which he was made captain of grenadiers. When his colonel, Lieutenant-general Ingoldsby, was made commander-in-chief in Ireland in 1707, he

requested Parker to be sent to Dublin to introduce discipline among the raw Irish recruits. On the termination of this engagement two years later, the government presented him with a gratuity of £200, and he returned to Flanders. At the close of the war in 1713, Parker was chosen by his fellow officers to go to London to lay the claims of the regiment before the general officers. He found it impossible to get justice, despite the friendly assurances of the Duke of Ormond, who remembered him, but for whose conduct as a soldier Parker had great contempt. He rejoined his regiment, garrisoned at Ghent. In April, 1718, he resigned his commission to a nephew of his benefactor, Hamilton, and settled near Cork.

Parker's journal, *Military Transactions in Ireland and Flanders 1683-1718*, was published in Dublin by his son in 1746, the year after the death of the Duke of Ormond, who was vigorously denounced in the book, while Marlborough was the hero. Another edition was published in London the following year. The description of the siege of Limerick is brief, and, curiously, he seems to have been unaware of the penetration through the breach. Perhaps being engaged towards St. John's Gate, he did not see it. He had a high regard for Sarsfield, and absolved him from any guilt for the death of women and children at Ballyneety.

It was the first of August when the king sat down before Limerick; and finding that the enemy had taken up the ground on the other side of the Shannon, and that it was a difficult matter to dislodge them, he resolved to carry on the siege against that part of the town which lay on our side of the river. We carried on our approaches to the foot of the glacis, and took an advanced fort in our way, and so proceeded to raise our batteries, and have them in readiness at such time as our battering train should arrive, which was then on the road from Kilkenny. But the enemy having had a particular account of their route, detached Sarsfield with a good body of horse and dragoons to intercept it; and he passing the Shannon at Killaloe, came up with the train in the night between the 11th and 12th of August, as they lay encamped at Cullen, about eleven miles from our camp; and falling suddenly on them when all were asleep, they burned and destroyed everything that could be of any use to us. They burst the cannon by overloading them, and putting their muzzles in ground, then setting fire to them, they went off without the loss of a man. This was certainly a well conducted affair, and much to Sarsfield's honour, had there not been so much cruelty in the execution of it; for they put man, woman and child to the sword, though there was not the least opposition made. However, we cannot suppose that so gallant a man as Sarsfield certainly was, could be guilty of giving such orders; it is rather to be presumed that, at such a juncture, it was not in his power to restrain the natural barbarity of his men.

The king had some information of Sarsfield's going abroad; and, suspecting that his design was on the train, had ordered Count Solms to send away forthwith a good body of horse to join the train by the time they should reach Cullen. Upon which the count, who commanded immediately under the king, ordered Sir John Lanier to march with a body of horse on that service: But whether the count delivered his orders with that pressing instance which the affair required, or whether Sir John

mistook the count, as he pretended; so it was that he did not set out till four hours after he had received his orders. And as it was, had he pursued his march as expeditiously as he ought, he might have saved the train: But he spent his time in making unnecessary halts, till he saw the flash in the air, and heard the bursting of the cannon; then indeed he hastened his march; but before he came up, Sarsfield had done the work, and was gone. Sir John was shrewdly suspected of treachery in this affair, and the more as he had once been a great favourite of King James.

Notwithstanding this unfortunate accident, the king having ordered a few cannon from Waterford, pushed on the siege with them, and the field train. With these we beat down one of the towers, and made a breach in the wall close by it, large enough to be stormed: And as we had carried our approaches to the foot of the glacis, the king ordered a general assault to be made on the 27th by half the grenadiers of the army, and seven battalions, our regiment being one. The Lord Cutts led on the grenadiers, who instead of mounting the breach, pursued the enemy that were in the covert-way, and made towards St. John's Gate, thinking to have entered with them: But the gate being kept close shut, they, and the battalions that followed them, were stopped there; so the breach was neglected, and the affair miscarried. It was thought we lost more men in this attack than we should, had we mounted the breach, and taken that part of the town.

Our regiment on this occasion had our lieutenant-colonel, one captain, and four subalterns killed: One captain, and seven subalterns wounded; and about 100 private men killed and wounded. Major Hamilton was made lieutenant-colonel on this occasion.

His majesty meeting with these disappointments at Limerick, broke up the siege, and drew off the army on the 30th, and the day after went to Waterford, where he embarked for England the day following. He left the command of the army to Count Solms, but he soon followed the king, on which Lieutenant-General Ginkle was appointed to command.