

Captain John Francis Wyse 1832-1885

Crimean War - Siege of Sebastopol - India - Gibraltar

34th (Cumberland) Regiment of Foot - 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot



Captain John F Wyse circa 1865

John Francis Wyse was born at Waterford, Ireland, 21st October 1832, the youngest son of Francis Wyse 1796-1855, and Mary Catherine Wyse (nee Hay) 1796-1865.

John had four siblings, Thomas 1824-1886, Mary Gertrude 1827-1885, Eleanor Catherine 1831-1892, and Francis Maria 1832-1870.

John's father Francis was the 3rd son of Thomas Wyse, of the Manor of St John, in the County and City of Waterford, Ireland. At the age of 17, Francis Wyse joined the 47th (Lancashire) Regiment of Foot as Ensign 22nd October 1813, replacing an Ensign Campbell who was killed in action. While serving with the 47th Regiment, Francis was wounded and taken prisoner while fighting in the Peninsular War. In February 1818, Francis exchanged into the 2nd Queen's Royal Regiment, promoted to Lieutenant 23rd December 1820, and after 16 years' service retired from the army in 1829.

By the mid-19th century, a significant part of the British Army was made up of regionally recruited line regiments of foot soldiers. These regiments totalling over 100, were key to Britain's defence and expansion around the world, especially during the height of the British Empire. In addition to the regiments of foot, other specialised army regiments included Cavalry, Artillery, and Engineers.

Regiments of foot often carried the name of the city, county, or region they were raised in, such as the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot or the 86th (Royal County Down) Regiment of Foot. These regiments were often seen as representing their local communities, and soldiers were usually recruited from those areas. The regimental system fostered strong loyalty and esprit de corps among the soldiers, as regiments maintained distinct traditions, uniforms, and customs that reinforced their identity. Soldiers often stayed with the same regiment throughout their career, forming tight-knit groups with a strong sense of camaraderie. Although it was common practice for regiments to recruit the rank and file from local communities, this was not always true for their officers.

Up until 1871, the British Army recruited its officers primarily through patronage and purchase. The system of purchase allowed wealthy individuals to buy a commission in the army with a specific

regiment, often with little or no military experience. Many officers came from the aristocracy and gentry, with family connections being a significant advantage. Officers could purchase higher ranks by paying larger sums, which was sometimes used as a form of investment for securing status or further opportunities.

Those wealthy enough to afford a commission, typically joined a regiment as an Ensign, the lowest ranked officer. The cost of an ensigncy in 1854 was £450, equivalent to approximately £65,000 today. Having joined a regiment, officers could buy a promotion as and when more senior positions became available. It was also common practice for officers to exchange into different regiments when opportunities arose, exchanging with an officer of the same rank, either to improve the chance of promotion or as a way of being posted to a new or more desirable location.

Having studied at the Military Academy at 39 Great Brunswick Street, Dublin, in early May 1854 John Francis Wyse passed his army entrance examinations at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. On 6th June 1854, John was commissioned Ensign without purchase with the 34th (Cumberland) Regiment of Foot. In March 1854, Britain had declared war on Russia, which undoubtedly increased the urgency for new officer recruitment, and may account for John's appointment "without purchase".

The 34th (Cumberland) Regiment of Foot was originally formed by Lord Robert Lucas in 1702, with men from East Anglia. The new unit's first overseas deployment was to Spain during the War of the Spanish Succession 1702-13, where it served in the Siege of Barcelona 1705. In 1710, it joined the Duke of Marlborough's army in Flanders. The regiment was disbanded in 1713, but re-formed two years later, maintaining its position within the British Army's order of precedence. After being garrisoned in Ireland, the re-formed regiment took part in raids along the coast of Spain near Vigo in 1719. Eight years later, it helped withstand the Spanish siege of Gibraltar. It was subsequently moved to the West Indies, where it was involved in the early stages of the War of Jenkins' Ear 1739-42, fighting at Cartagena (now in Colombia) and Cuba, before being recalled to Britain in 1742.

In October 1853, the Ottoman Empire had declared war on Russia. The resulting Crimean War 1853–1856 was primarily caused by long-standing tensions between major European powers over influence in the declining Ottoman Empire. At its heart, the war stemmed from a power struggle between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, with Britain and France becoming involved to counterbalance Russian ambitions.

One immediate cause was a religious dispute over the rights of Christian minorities in the Holy Land, then under Ottoman control. Russia claimed to protect Orthodox Christians, while France supported Catholic interests. This dispute escalated diplomatic tensions and highlighted broader strategic concerns.

Russia, under Tsar Nicholas I, sought to expand its influence over the Balkans and gain control of access to the Mediterranean through the Turkish Straits. This was part of a wider ambition to increase Russian power in southeastern Europe as the Ottoman Empire weakened. In July 1853, Russia occupied the Danubian Principalities (modern-day Romania), prompting the Ottomans to declare war in October.

Britain and France, wary of Russian expansion and the threat to the balance of power in Europe, allied with the Ottoman Empire. They feared Russian control of Constantinople would give it dominance over Mediterranean trade routes and threaten British interests in India.

The war eventually centred on the Crimean Peninsula, where key battles occurred, particularly the Battle of Alma 20th September 1854, Battle of Inkerman 5th November 1854, and Siege of Sebastopol 17th October 1854 - 9th September 1855.

In June 1854, John Wyse joined the depot companies of the 34th Regiment at Leeds, Yorkshire. A regiment's depot companies played a crucial role in supporting the main body of the regiment. The depot companies were typically based in Britain or Ireland while the main forces were deployed abroad. Their primary purpose was to recruit, train, and equip new soldiers before they joined their respective regiments at home or overseas.

By 1854, the 34th Regiment was quartered at Chichester, West Sussex, having returned to England from the West Indies in June 1853. The regiment had been stationed at Barbados and Trinidad for the last three years. In July 1854, the regiment was joined in Portsmouth by its depot companies, in preparation for embarkation for Corfu. On 21st August 1854, the 22 Officers and 650 strong rank and file of the 34th regiment, left Portsmouth aboard the SS Mauritius, bound for Corfu. One Company of the 34th were kept back, to make way for 79 Sappers and Miners of 5th Regiment.

The SS Mauritius arrived at Corfu 6th September 1854, but with smallpox being onboard, the troops were landed in quarantine at Vido, and the ship fumigated before travelling on to Constantinople.

Having spent two months in Malta, the 34th Regiment was ordered to Turkey. Since returning from the West Indies, the regiment had been so depleted of its best men, giving up many volunteers to other corps going to Turkey, that at this time it mainly consisted of young soldiers. For this reason, some two hundred of its number were left at Corfu, being considered unfit to bare the hardships of the looming Crimean winter. During November, a further 200 reinforcements were ordered up from the 34th Regiment depot companies, now based at Plymouth.

On 22nd November, 21 officers, 35 Sergeants, 11 drummers, and 554 rank and file, under the command of Major Goodenough, embarked its transport, and landed at Balaclava on 9th December 1854. Despite his young age and lack of experience, included in this number was Ensign John Francis Wyse.



Allied Ships at Cossack Bay, Balaclava, Crimea 1855

On arrival at the front, the 34th Regiment joined the 1st brigade of the light division, and at once took up their share of trench and other duties.

As early as October 1854, the allied forces now fighting the Russians in the Crimea, had laid siege to the city of Sebastopol, home to the Tsar's Black Sea Fleet, and capital of the Crimea.

Moving from their base at Balaklava at the start of October, French and British engineers began to direct the building of siege lines along the Chersonese uplands to the south of Sebastopol. The troops prepared redoubts, gun batteries, and trenches, so that by mid-October the Allies had 120 guns prepared to fire on the surrounded city.

In a letter from the front, "*Camp in front of Sebastopol 22nd November 1854*", a corporal of the 4th (King's Own) Regiment of Foot, described to his wife some of the conditions now faced by the British troops in trenches before the city walls:

"I am writing this letter on my knee in the trenches, it is raining heavily, and I have my blanket over my head and my Brown Bess by my side. I look at the town through a telescope, and such destruction my eyes never beheld. A large barracks has been knocked to pieces, and the houses are riddled and knocked down. On 28th September we sat down in front of the town, on the 20th day after we opened fire, and are not yet in. The winter is settling in severe." (Mat Hogan Corporal 4th King's Own Regiment)

By 11th December, the King's Own were in trenches 250-300 yards from the Russian defences. In another letter from the front, a soldier from the 4th Regiment complained:

"I cannot boast any longer of buoyant hopes and cheerful prospects for the future, neither can I say a word of my good health, for the winter is set in with extreme severity, and we are neither clothed, nor housed, nor fed for it. We are in tents off duty, but they are afloat, and we have to lay down in mud with nothing but a blanket." (Robert Leeder Corporal 4th King's Own Regiment)

Within weeks of writing this letter Robert Leeder died from dysentery, he was 40 years old.

At a time when the military might of Britain, with its modern weapons and tactics, was far superior to many of its adversaries, deaths in the British army from disease far exceeded any that occurred on the battlefield. The Crimean War not only highlighted the British army's failure to adequately supply warm clothing and food, but also their inability to treat soldiers who suffered from disease or the conditions. Of the 22,000 deaths suffered by the British army in Crimea, only 5,000 were due to battlefield injuries, while the rest, 17,000 were due to illness from diseases, and the effects of the harsh winter conditions.

It was in one of the forward trenches before Sebastopol, that Ensign John Wyse found himself on the night of 20th December 1854, he had been in the army 6 months. All was quiet, and save for



Officers of the 57th Regiment outside an underground shelter Crimea 1855

those on guard duty, thousands of troops along the front were trying to get some sleep in the freezing conditions.

A correspondent of the Daily News, describes the events of what happened next:

"On the morning of the 21st, a little before three o'clock, the whole camp before Sebastopol was suddenly aroused by bugles sounding the alarm. As the stirring notes ran from regiment to regiment, in many instances followed by the 'double,' the troops started up from their sleep and were quickly under arms.

The cause of the alarm and turn out proved to be a sortie made by the Russians against the advanced works, both of the English and French batteries. Neither men nor officers were on the alert, and all were taken by surprise. There were eight companies in the advanced work of Captain Gordon's battery, taken from the 7th, 23rd, 33rd, and 34th Regiments; and this force, properly prepared and organised, was sufficient to hold it against double the number of the enemy who attacked it. As it was, however, the sentries posted only a few yards in front of the work must have been utterly careless, and in all probability were lying down, if not asleep: for the first intimation of the attack to the men and officers lying within the work was given by the shouts of the Russians themselves, who had mounted the parapet, and were already committing havoc among the sleepers. The consequence was there was a panic, scarcely any resistance was made, and the covering party hastily fell back upon the battery.

Five men were killed, and were all stripped, even to their boots. One body was found with eight bayonet wounds; another was mangled and thrown into the well. Fifteen were wounded; some so badly, that they were left for dead in the work by the Russians. These had been most barbarously treated, having been repeatedly wounded after they had fallen, and in three or four instances had also been kicked and beaten over the head by the butt of the musket, to ensure destruction of life. About 27 are missing, no doubt having received wounds which did not disable them from marching and being carried away as prisoners. Among these latter is Lieut. J. Byron, of the 34th Regiment. In the advanced works of Greenhill there appears to have been the same want of caution and alertness. A covering party of the 50th Regiment were protecting the work, having relieved a corresponding force from the 20th Regiment. The Russians advanced up the ravine, which divides the French extreme right from our extreme left, and thus attacked the advanced work in flank. The men of the 50th Regiment were taken by surprise, but succeeded, after an obstinate resistance, in driving the enemy back. They suffered, however, considerable loss, 17 being killed and about 35 men wounded.

Captain Frampton and Lieutenant Clarke are reported missing, and it is presumed were made prisoners."

Having survived the Russian attack in the early hours of 21st December, John Wyse together with Ensign's Henry Daniel Alt and Francis Peel were all promoted in the field to Lieutenant without purchase 29th December 1854. Of the three vacancies now filled by Wyse, Alt and Peel, one at least resulted from the capture of Lieutenant John Byron on the morning of the 21st. Coincidentally, Henry Alt had replaced John Byron as Ensign, when he had joined the 34th Regiment only 5 months before.

Over the next five months, John Wyse, and the rest of the 34th Regiment endured the constant threat of death, harsh winter conditions, and trench warfare that had become a stalemate, with the British and French forces failing to break through the Russian defences.

Living with the fear of death or injury on the frontline, a soldier in a letter to his brother, gives an insight into the type of dangers present in the trenches. In the letter, he offers a candid view of his immediate prospects and a willingness to accept that he may have to make the ultimate sacrifice.

In the letter he wrote:

"Camp before Sebastopol, May 19th, 1855.

In the early part of this afternoon I was sitting in the flat, having a smoke along with my comrades, when a thirty-two pound shot came within thirty yards of our flat and ploughed up the ground, and of course we ran out to see what was the matter: this is the first time that the shot of the enemy have reached our camp, a distance of a mile and a half, so I will leave you to judge what the force of the shot must be coming against our parapets a distance of not more than fifty yards.



Officers and men of the 8th (The King's Royal Irish) Light Dragoons (Hussars), 1855

May 20th: Nothing of any consequence has occurred to-day; there is much talk about a portion of the army going away to some place or other, where I cannot tell. May 21st: The first company of ours has just got the order to be in readiness at a moment's notice. May 22nd: The company I told you of has just left for Balaklava. Even while I am now writing to you the Russians are sending shot and shell into the camp of the 34th Regiment, who are lying 400 yards in advance of us, so that I can hear the shells bursting quite plainly. My arm is now quite well, and I am going to my duty to-morrow. I think the closer we get to the enemy, the more deadly becomes the struggle; they make a most desperate resistance, but I have not any doubt but that we shall take the place before many weeks are over, and I hope to have a finger in the pie; if I should come out of the struggle without being hurt, so much the better, but if not, why I shall know that I die in the defence of my Queen and country, but I always hope for the best."

As winter turned to spring, the 34th Regiment had been in the trenches in front of Sebastopol for over six months.

During this time, the regiment had suffered significant losses from illness brought on by exposure and the inadequate provision of supplies, more so than losses in battle. In the spring of 1855, with improving weather conditions, the 34th resumed its operations in the trenches, undertaking working parties, manning forward positions, and helping to keep up a continual artillery bombardment of the city and its defences. Of all the cities defences, the "Great Redan" and the "Malakoff Tower" were two of the most important Russian defensive positions, and as such needed to be taken if the city were to be captured.

The Great Redan was a huge, triangular earthwork fortification forming part of Sebastopol's defensive line on the south side of the city. It was heavily armed with artillery and manned by

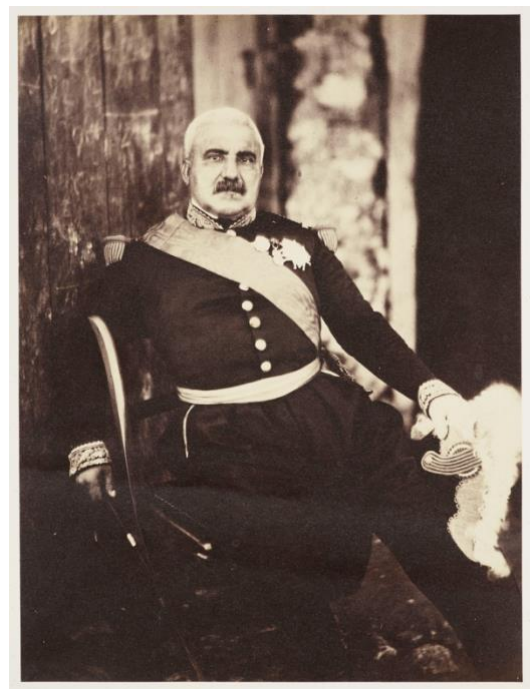
Russian troops and had become a major target of repeated assaults by the British forces in 1855. The Malakoff Tower was a fortified strongpoint on high ground (the Malakhov Kurgan hill), dominating the eastern part of Sebastopol's defences. It was the key to the defence of the city, and whoever controlled it dominated the battlefield.

By the end of May, with new gun batteries erected against the Redan and Malakoff, the British trenches had been pushed up to within four hundred yards of the Redan. At this distance, the daily list of casualties was growing.

After much preparation, it was finally decided to attack both the Great Redan and Malakoff Tower on 18th June, but not simultaneously. The assault was to be preceded by a heavy bombardment during the whole of 17th and resume for the three hours after dawn on the 18th. This additional bombardment was intended to destroy any new works the enemy might have erected during the night, silence their guns, and prevent any large accumulation of troops within the Redan and Malakoff to repel the allied attack. It had also been agreed that as the guns of the Malakoff Tower completely commanded the Great Redan, that the British would not advance, until the French had captured the Malakoff and silenced the Russian guns.



Lord Raglan 1788–1855



General Pelissier 1794-1864

On the evening of 17th General Pelissier, Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, requested Lord Raglan, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, that the hour of attack should be changed to 3.00am instead of six o'clock, and to dispense with the planned bombardment. Lord Raglan reluctantly agreed.

Shortly before the agreed hour, while it was still dark, and before the signal for the French to advance was given, one of their columns, led by General Mayran, attacked the batteries on the extreme right. The Russians now alerted to the attack were soon able to concentrate their fire on the French column, who were repulsed in extreme disorder. General Pelissier, as soon as possible, gave the signal for the advance of the other columns, but the Russians were now fully prepared for an attack. So heavy was the Russian shot, shell, grape, and musketry fire, that the French columns were unable to make any real headway, and after repeated attempts, the survivors were forced to retire to their trenches.

On seeing the predicament of the French, Lord Raglan gave the order for 2 British flanking columns to be made against the Great Redan. Immediately, parties of rifles began leaving the British trenches and running up towards the abattis (defensive ditch) around the Redan. These were followed directly by a number of sailors carrying scaling ladders, led by Captain Peel, R.N, and the soldiers

carrying woolsacks. Then came artillery men to spike the guns, who also rushed forward, but of these, scarcely one-third returned untouched, the rest being killed or wounded.

Waiting in the trenches behind these advanced troops, was the newly promoted Lieutenant John Wyse and 400 other men of the 34th Regiment, who formed storming parties under the command of Captain Gwilt. For John Wyse, who only had joined the army 12 months ago, this moment must have been terrifying.

The British troops moved out of the trench in anything but good order, arranged along the trench 3 deep. Immediately the signal was given, they clambered over the parapet, starting out in some sort of confusion. The Russians were prepared for their appearance, for they instantly opened a most tremendous fire of grape shot and musketry. Colonel Johnstone, commanding the 33rd Regiment was almost immediately struck down, his arm shattered, and Captain Gwilt was also severely wounded. Seeing their leaders fall, the men naturally got dispirited, and with the torrent of grape shot which swept through them, significantly diminished the thin line of British troops.

With so many officers now killed and wounded, no orders were given. The men became completely disheartened and commenced firing against the Russians, who swarmed in hundreds on the parapet of the Redan.

The fire from the Russians, if anything, increased, and the British troops who had tried in vain to make any further advance, were forced to retire to their trenches. Of the members of the 34th Regiment that left the trenches that day, some three quarters were either killed or wounded. John Wyse had managed to survive and was one of only two officers who made it back to the British trenches. Captains Shiffner and Robinson, Lieutenants Hart and fifty men were killed. Lieutenant Alt, who had been promoted with John Wyse only six months before, was also killed that day. Captains Gwilt, Warry, and J. Jordan, Lieutenants Clayton, Harman, and Peel, and 264 men were wounded, making a total of 10 officers and 314 non-commissioned officers and men who fell before the ramparts of the Great Redan 18th June 1855.

As soon as the British troops were back in their trenches, the whole of the Allied batteries opened fire upon the Russian positions, and with such good effect, that in less than an hour the Russian guns were almost silenced. Only then, was seen the error of not having had the bombardment before the main assault.

Seeing the Russian guns quietened, the British wanted to try another assault with fresh troops, but with the French troops being so dispirited, General Pelissier considered the risk too great, and so any plans to attack were abandoned.

British losses for the 18th of June attack on the Great Redan, were 1,553 killed and wounded, including 100 officers. The French lost 3,051, attacking the Malakoff Tower, whilst the Russian losses were reportedly 5,776 men. (Historical Account of the 34th and 55th Regiments, 1875). Of the many 34th Regiment men who distinguished themselves by their gallant conduct that day, were Lieutenants Boyce and Peel, Peel having been promoted with John Wyse in December 1854.

Lieutenant Boyce's gallant conduct that day earned him the Sardinian Crimean War Medal. The Sardinian Crimean War Medal was a gallantry medal awarded by King Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia for bravery during the Crimean War (1853-1856) against the Russian Empire.

Lieutenant Boyce was one of 450 men selected to receive the medal, his citation read:

"For having at the assault on the Redan on the 18th June 1855, after the troops had retired to the Trenches, gone out in front of the advanced Trench under a heavy fire of grape, and rendered great assistance in bringing in Lieutenant and Adjutant Hobson, 7th Fusiliers, who was lying outside, severely wounded."



A French attack on The Malakoff Tower

With so many officers of the 34th Regiment killed or wounded in the attack, on 18th June 1855, Irishmen Lieutenants Boyce and Wyse, both now being “in charge of companies”, were allowed to draw “field allowance and forage as Captains”. A company was typically 90 to 100 men, commanded by a Captain, consisting of three officers, six non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and about 80 privates, although under battlefield conditions, these numbers may have differed out of necessity.

On 25th July 1855, John Wyse was injured while in charge of the “Rifle Pits”, receiving a contusion most likely from an exploding shell. A rifle pit was a small, dug-out defensive position, often in front of the main trench line, designed for a few riflemen to provide advanced sniper cover while remaining partially or fully concealed from enemy fire.

Almost three months after the Allied attacks on the Great Redan and Malakoff Tower on 18th June, the British and French had extended their trenches to within 200 yards of the Redan and only 30 yards from the ditch that surrounded the Malakoff.

With daily casualties rising on all sides, it was now the time to make a final push. A plan was agreed, so that on 8th September 1855, at precisely 12.00 midday, French troops rushed from their advanced trenches, and catching the Russian by surprise, were within the Malakoff within just a few minutes. Several other French columns were not so fortunate and after stiff Russian resistance, were all forced to return to their trenches.

At 12.10, upon the agreed signal, the British, under General Simpson, launched their attack against the Great Redan. The stormers consisting of one thousand men, taken in equal numbers from the 2nd and light divisions, preceded by a covering party of two hundred men, and a party of three hundred and twenty men carrying scaling ladders, the whole to be supported by two regiments of each division with the remainder in reserve in the trenches. Included in this number was John Wyse and the men of the 34th Regiment still fit to fight.



Russian Gun Battery Siege of Sevastopol 1855 by Grigoryi Shukaev

After some initial success, with British Troops getting into the body of the Redan, the Russians mounted a massive counterattack and forced the British to withdraw once again. It was useless to assault again without reorganising the columns, and this from the state of the trenches, crowded as they were with dead and wounded, would be impossible to do. The French, on the left, fared little better than the British, for no sooner had they left their trenches than they were met with sustained fire that decimated their ranks.

The Russians made repeated attempts during the day to recapture the Malakoff, but all were unsuccessful. Despite being a disastrous day for the allies, five out of the six columns of attack were defeated, the capture of the Malakoff was significant, as it commanded so many of the Russians defensive works, they had now become quite untenable.

In what turned out to be the last day of battle during the siege, British losses amounted to 29 officers and 336 men killed, 124 officers and 1,762 men wounded, and 1 officer and 175 men missing, making a total loss for the single days battle of 154 officers and 2,273 men. The French lost in killed, wounded, and missing, 409 officers and 7,148 men, while that of the Russians were acknowledged to have lost 372 officers and 11,328 men.

On this last day of fighting, the 34th Regiment, under Colonel Goodenough, had 8 men killed, and Lieutenants Harris and Dyson-Laurie and 53 men wounded, of whom 4 died shortly afterwards. Both Lieutenants Boyce and Wyse survived the day unhurt.

It was planned to renew the assault the next morning, but during the night it was discovered that the Great Redan had been deserted by the Russians. A number of loud explosions, as well as several fires in the town, suggested something unusual was happening. As the sun came up on 9th September, it was found that the Russians had abandoned all their positions and evacuated the city.

Two days later, John Wyse wrote to his father back in Ireland, his letter dated 11th September 1855.

Upon hearing news of the disastrous assault on the Great Redan 18th June, followed by a first-hand account of the further bloodshed and losses on 8th September, Francis Wyse felt compelled to write to the editor of *The Journal*, then Ireland's leading nationalist newspaper. His letter was published 9th October 1855. In that letter he wrote:



The interior of the Great Redan after the fall of Sebastopol 1855

"Dear Sir – It is difficult to read through the several details of the recent repulse of the British army in the late attack and capture of Sebastopol, already recorded throughout every part of the civilised world, without a deep feeling of humiliation, mingled with the regret and sympathies of every British subject in the unnecessary sacrifice of life of so many of our brave troops on this occasion. But the public, as well as the public press, appear to me altogether astray in their estimate of this sad transaction – the object that the assault upon the Redan really contemplated – in the accomplishment of which the gallant fellows who were engaged in this last death-struggle have been inhumanly butchered, and the British army, after so many months of incessant toil and individual suffering, either through the stupidity or connivance of those to whom its direction and fortunes were committed, inconsiderately betrayed.

It required no further assurance than the evidence already before the world of the extraordinary strength of the inner as of the outer works of this formidable fortress, and which is minutely set forth in many of the maps recently published in this country. It were pure affect-at on to suppose that the same facts were not quite as well known to the commanders, as indeed to every officer of the allied army, who, with concurrent testimony, declared the Redan fort to have been utterly untenable by any assailing force that might succeed in making a lodgement within its inner defences, without the previous capture and retention of the Malakoff Tower, by which it was fully commanded, while the natural deduction that would present itself, even to the most unpretending and restricted intellect, would be that the Malakoff, being once in the possession of the Allies, it would from thenceforth become quite unnecessary and inexpedient to assail the Redan. Yet was an assault directed against this last formidable work, under the direct and flanking fire of the enemy's guns, no troops, whatever their courage and discipline, and with the remembrance of past failure, could reasonably be expected to withstand.

If this assault had been directed to take place simultaneously with the French attack upon the Malakoffe, humanity might possibly extend its indulgence to any commander whose ignorance and incapacity might betray him to the committal of so palpable an error. But, surrounded with every information that could lead to a correct judgment, we seek in vain for an excuse to palliate the

conduct of General Simpson, whom we must believe to have known, or at least to have anticipated, the sure consequence of all that he was doing with the lamentable result that ensued."

Although not mentioned by name, Francis continues his letter, quoting "an officer of the light division" someone who was "one of the leading column" in the attack on 18th June, and referring to his source as someone "who is very dear to me". This source is almost certainly to have been his son John, who was with the 34th Regiment, part of the Light Division. Francis continues his letter:

"I have received within the last few days a letter of the 11th of September from an officer of the Light Division before Sebastopol, who is very dear to me, and who was one of the leading column in the assault of the Redan on the 18th of June last, and participated with his division in the more recent attack of the 8th of September. Speaking of our gallant allies, he states, "they crossed the short distance between their advanced works and the Malakoffe," made easy to them by every device that engineering skill and artifice could accomplish, "with sloped arms and fixed bayonets, and with the same unconcern as if entering their own barracks, for the enemy had been taken by surprise and was at the time unprepared to receive them." While accounting in the same letter for the failure of our own troops, he added, "every arrangement to secure their success, as far as success under the circumstances were possible had been made by the generals and officers commanding. But the truth and fact is, that when the advanced column had been decimated, and had given way, and the reserves had been called up to their support, the men refused to obey, or to follow their officers, evidencing a demoralisation in our army to which British troops are unaccustomed, and which the writer attributed to the uncertain and lax discipline which a protracted siege, such as the army had just past through, usually engenders. But it is the more probable that the real cause of this "demoralisation" proceeds from other causes, and may be traced rather to a want of confidence—a positive disbelief in the capacity, intelligence, and individual fitness to command of the immediate and subordinate heads of the army to whom the lives of our gallant fellows have been so inconsiderately committed.

It must be borne in mind that the men selected for the assault of the 8th of September were of those led to the same indiscriminate slaughter on the 18th of June preceding, and who witnessed the death struggle of many of their comrades who in their last throes of expiring life, are stated to have called out "murder murder", as if imploring the vengeance of heaven upon the head of the individual who had hurried them onward to this wicked, senseless and unnecessary sacrifice of human life."

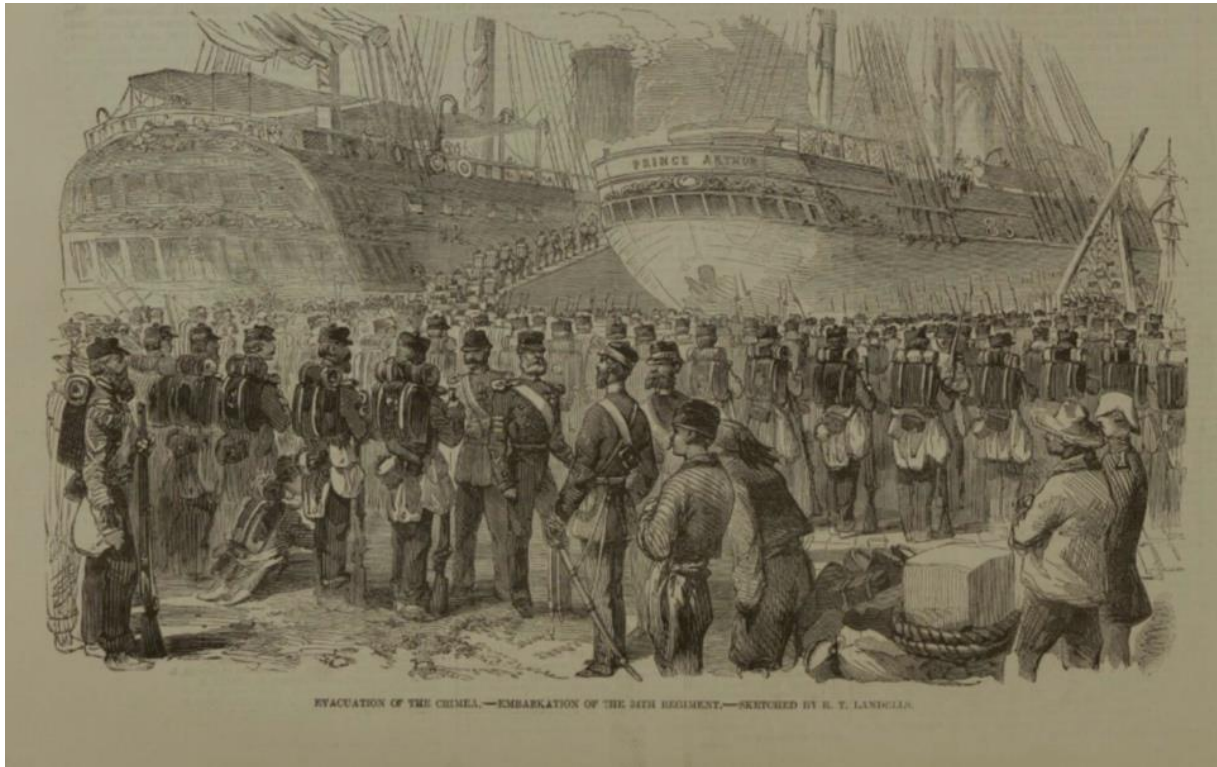
The letter continues, praising the men and the officers who led them into battle, but could not do the same for Commanding Generals. At the end of the letter, Francis concludes:

"And for this 2,500 officers and men were numbered among the killed and wounded, adding fresh laurels to those already gathered by their intrepid allies, who, with the discomfiture and humiliation of our gallant troops, claim to have been the "victors of Sebastopol", the sole conquerors of this renowned and all but impregnable fortress.

The public have in part acquiesced in this imposture, attributing the failure of the 8th to many causes apart from the real one. "Tis time it should be disabused of this delusion, and that our gallant army be assured in the belief that, though denied a fair share of the laurels to which they are entitled, they nevertheless contributed, by the outpouring of their best blood before the Redan, to the ultimate and successful capture of the Malakoffe, as if they had taken part in forcing its defences, and crossed bayonets with the powerful enemy who were there to oppose them.

*I am, dear Sir, your very faithful and obedient servant, FRANCIS WYSE.
19, Hardwicke-street, Dublin, October 3rd, 1855"*

Sadly, Francis would not live to see his son John return from the Crimea, as he died two months later, 18th December 1855 at Dublin. Francis Wyse was buried at Glasnevin Cemetery, Finglas Road, Dublin.



34th Regiment embarking SS Prince Arthur 14th June 1856

In the months following the end of the siege, John remained with his regiment at Sebastopol employed making roads and in destroying all the remaining forts, docks, and public buildings in the city. It seems, however, that at some point John may have fallen ill with one of the many diseases or illnesses that plagued the troops in Crimea at this time. John was evacuated on the SS Great Britain, embarking Constantinople 11th December 1855, and arriving Spithead 30th December. For his part in the Crimean War, John Wyse received the Turkish Crimean War Medal and Crimea Medal with Sebastopol clasp.

After 337 days, the siege of Sebastopol ended when the city finally fell 9th September 1855, but only after the Russians abandoned their positions, blowing up their powder magazines and retreating to the north. The main objective of the siege was the destruction of the Russian fleet and docks. On 28 February 1856, multiple mines blew up the five docks, the canal, and three locks at Sebastopol.

The Crimean War was finally ended by peace negotiations at the Congress of Paris, resulting in the signing of the Treaty of Paris 30th March 1856. It is estimated that out of a strength of 98,00 British troops who fought in the Crimean War, the British lost 22,000 men, 5,000 killed in action and 17,000 who died from illness due to disease and the harsh climatic conditions. Of the total deaths, it is estimated that as many as 7,000 were Irishmen.

The war now ended, the 34th (Cumberland) Regiment of Foot returned to England embarking the SS Prince Arthur 14th June 1856, and landing at Portsmouth 11th August 1856. From there they proceeded to the camp at Aldershot, and shortly afterwards to Glasgow, and then finally to Edinburgh.

Back in Ireland, The Dublin Evening Post published a story 28th August 1856, it read:

“The 34th Regiment – Irish Officers – Two officers of the 34th Regiment Lieutenants Boyce and Wyse of this city have arrived here on leave of absence to visit their friends, having undergone the damages and hardships of the Crimean Campaign. In the forlorn attack on the Redan on the 18th June they

alone escaped out of twelve engaged, ten of their brother officers having been killed or wounded. They were both present at the final assault and Capture of Sebastopol on the memorable 8th September”.

In early 1857, an uprising within the Bengal native army occurred in British ruled India. The rebellion grew quickly and with the British reacting slowly, it soon spread encouraging further Indian regiments to join the rebellion. With only 35,000 British soldiers on the whole of the Indian subcontinent widely scattered, British reinforcements were needed urgently.

Between July and November 1857, a total of 84 troopships left England bound for India, carrying a total of 32,600 troops. On one of those ships the “Golden Fleece” were 40 Officers, 51 Sergeants, 23 Drummers and 701 rank and file of the 34th Regiment bound for Alexandria, and then via the overland route to Suez before embarking for Madras.

At this time, John had remained in England with the regiment's depot companies, and in March 1858 was appointed assistant rifle instructor for the 1st Battalion 34th Regiment.

A regiment's depot companies played a crucial role in supporting the main body of the regiment. The depot companies were typically based in Britain or Ireland while the main forces were deployed abroad. Their primary purpose was to recruit, train, and equip new soldiers before they joined their respective regiments at home or overseas.



34th Regiment Officers Gwalior Indira circa 1860

Depot companies were responsible for maintaining the regimental records, handling logistics, and ensuring that reinforcements were adequately prepared for active service. They provided basic military training, including drill, marksmanship, and physical conditioning, as well as instruction in discipline and regimental traditions. Additionally, these companies managed the regimental stores, including uniforms, weapons, and other essential supplies, guaranteeing that the main regiment remained equipped and ready for combat.

The depot companies also served as a haven for wounded or sick soldiers who had returned from overseas postings, offering a place for recovery and convalescence. It could be that at this time, John was still suffering from the ill effects of his time in Crimea.

By June 1860, with the Indian Rebellion put down, John Wyse travelled to India, rejoining his regiment at Fyzabad. In December 1861, the 34th Regiment was moved from Fyzabad to Seetapore and Toy Bareilly, a wing being at each station.

On 10th April 1861, John married a Mary Jamina Jane Onslow, only daughter of the late Rev. Arthur Onslow at the Old Church, Fort William, Calcutta. Between April 1862 and March 1863, John was made acting Adjutant for the 34th Regiment. John gave up this role when he was promoted to Captain without purchase 3rd March 1863.



Captain John Francis Wyse



Mary Jamina Jane Wyse

By April 1863, John was suffering from an illness and ordered to spend some time recovering at Simla and the hills north of Deyrah. His medical certificate initially granted leave until 13th July, but this was later extended to 13th October. During this period in British military history, the health of the army in India faced significant challenges. The harsh climate often experienced in India, coupled with unsanitary living conditions, led to widespread health issues among the troops. Diseases such as cholera, dysentery, and typhus were rampant, posing a constant threat to the soldiers.

In December 1864, John Wyse was reported as “doing duty” from the date of embarkation, with a detachment of invalided troops returning to England on the Sailing Ship Trafalgar. It was further reported that he would spend “17 months on Private Affairs”. The term “Private Affairs” was often used as a euphemism for sick leave, hiding the fact that many officers needed to return home for treatment or to recover from illness.

The Trafalgar arrived at Spithead 9th March 1865, with invalid troops on board for transport to the Royal Victoria Military Hospital at Netley.

The Royal Victoria Military Hospital at Netley, near Southampton, was commissioned by Queen Victoria in the mid-19th century to provide medical care for soldiers of the British Army. Construction began in 1856, during the Crimean War, when the lack of proper military hospitals had been exposed. Designed as a vast red-brick structure overlooking Southampton Water, it was the largest hospital of its kind in the world at the time. The hospital officially opened in 1863, with Queen Victoria herself attending the ceremony. Though later criticised for its impractical design, it became an important centre for military medicine.

A report in The Sun newspaper published 10th March 1865, described the voyage of the SS Trafalgar, and highlights the great risk soldiers faced from disease, serving abroad at this time.

“She made the voyage in 86 days from the Calcutta Sandheads. Her troop list comprises Major J. H. Creagh, 27th Regiment; Capt. J. Wyse, 34th Regiment; Lieut. Lampard, 51st Regiment; Lieut. W. H. C. Smith, 101st Regiment; Lieut. C.G. Norris, 80th Regiment; Assist.-Surgeon C. Hooper, 42d R. H. B. W.; 142 invalided men from various regiments, 1 time-expired man, 12 soldiers' wives, and 12 soldiers' children. Eight invalided soldiers died during the passage home. The greatest satisfaction is expressed with the accommodation and the food and medical attendance on board. The

disembarkation of the troops will be effected from the Trafalgar, at Spithead, by a government steamer, for conveyance to Netley this morning, the state of the tide yesterday precluding the disembarkation on the ship's arrival at Spithead. With the promised new pier over the mud opposite the hospital at Netley it will be possible, however, to land a freight of troops from steamers of light draught, which are now being constructed specially for the purpose, at any time of tide, and any ship load of sick or wounded soldiers who may then arrive in England will be removed from the 'tween decks of the transport ship, so soon as her anchor is dropped at Spithead, to the wards of the hospital without having to undergo the vexatious detention of some 24 hours on board ship, as will be experienced by the majority of the troops coming home from India this spring."

The 34th Regiment remained at Seetapore and Toy Bareilly until December 1864, when they marched for Gwalior, and there remained at the cantonment of Mora until 29th January 1867. Having been ordered back to England, on 23rd February, the regiment embarked in two divisions, and on 10th July 1867 the headquarters landed at Portsmouth, being followed by the remainder of the regiment shortly afterwards.

In June 1866, it was reported that John had rejoined his regiment's depot companies based at Chatham in Kent.

After serving 13 years with the 34th Regiment, on 5th November 1867, John exchanged regiments, joining the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot vice Captain Nicholas Pennefather who now joined the 34th Regiment. In April 1867, the 83rd Regiment had begun a three-year deployment garrisoned at Gibraltar.



Captain Nicholas Pennefather 1834-1905



Captain George E Emes Blunt 1838-1921

In January 1868, John boarded the steam ship The Ceylon and travelled to Gibraltar to join his new regiment. Within 6 months, however, John Wyse retired from the army, being replaced by Lieutenant George E Emes Blunt promoted to Captain by purchase 8th July 1868.

In retirement, John and his wife Mary lived in London, and by 1871 were living at an address in Paddington. In the same year, John was Secretary of The International Club in London. In local newspaper advertisements, the club described itself as:

"The Club is instituted by a numerous body of English, American and foreign noblemen and gentlemen, who with others have long felt the want of a Club of this description in London. The Premises, which have been handsomely decorated throughout, are most central and conveniently situated. They contain Morning, Reception, Dining, Card, Billiard, Smoking-rooms, &c. Membership price five Guineas but, to be included in the list, early application is necessary. The present entrance fee to a limited number of members is Five Guineas. The Annual Subscription to Country Members, and Members resident abroad, is Three Guineas. The Entrance-fee will be shortly raised to Ten Guineas. Officers of the Army and Navy on full pay are eligible as Country Members."

In 1874, John was elected a fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society and in the following year as a fellow of the Royal Botanic Society. By 1881, John and Mary had moved to an address in Marylebone and employed one servant.

John Francis Wyse died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 52, 17th April 1885. John's wife Mary died some 15 years after John, 3rd July 1900, she was living in Broadstairs in Kent. The couple had no children.

Captain John Francis Wyse was an Irish officer, who served with distinction in the British Army during the mid-19th century. He was among the many Irishmen who took part in Britain's imperial campaigns, most notably the Crimean War 1853-1856. In that brutal conflict, marked by harsh winters, inadequate supplies, and heavy casualties, a young John Wyse endured the trench conditions, battlefield dangers, and widespread disease that claimed the lives of so many soldiers. His survival of the campaign was a testament to his resilience and fortitude, and good luck.

Following his service in Crimea, John Wyse continued his military career in India. Like many officers stationed there, he faced the difficult realities of service in a foreign climate, where tropical illnesses such as dysentery, cholera, and malaria were constant threats. Within three years of arriving in India, John Wyse was suffering from a severe illness, an affliction that left a lasting mark on his health.

His military career stands as part of the broader story of Irish participation in the British Army during the Victorian era, an era when Irish officers and soldiers played a significant role in Britain's global wars and colonial campaigns, often at great personal cost.



Hand painted 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot Emblem
Painted by Ensign George ES Cartwright circa 1867

Researched and written by Gary Hynard 2025

