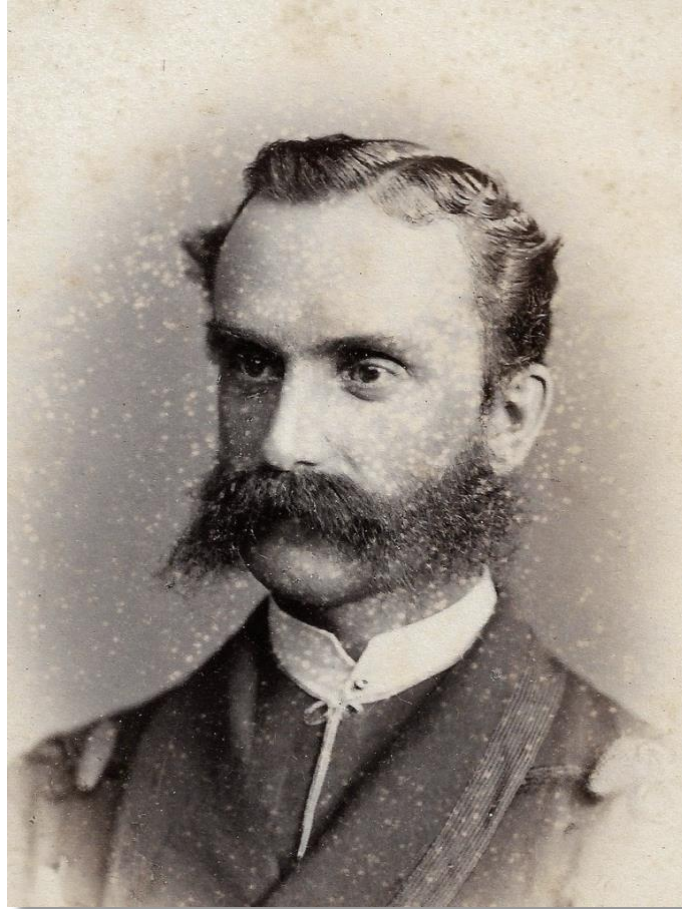


Major General Frederick Karlake 1840-1916

Indian Mutiny - First Boer War - CO 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Rifles



Captain Frederick Karlake – Bombay Circa 1874

Frederick Karlake was born 13th June 1840 at Meshaw, Devon, one of nine children born to the Reverend William Heberden Karlake 1816-1896 and his wife Mary Burgess Karlake 1813-1889.

Perhaps influenced by his elder brother Thomas, who had joined the Royal Navy and was killed during the Crimean War at Sebastopol in 1854, Frederick chose a career in the army. Attending the Royal Military School at Sandhurst, Frederick successfully completed his qualification for a commission to Ensign before a Collegiate Board held 3rd-5th June 1857.

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.

On 19th June 1857, Frederick joined the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot as Ensign "without purchase", he was just seventeen years old. It seems that Frederick must have impressed during his time at Sandhurst, for having successfully completed his qualifications for commissions, he was one of seventeen gentlemen cadets recommended by his Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge the General Commanding-in-Chief, for appointment to ensigncies in the line "without purchase."

Earlier in the same year, 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 October 1857, a total of 84 troopships left England bound for India, carrying a total of 32,600 troops. On one of those ships, the "Sedgemoor," was the newly commissioned Ensign Karslake, together with 130 other officers and men sent to reinforce the 83rd Regiment of Foot, already on active field service in India.

Arriving in India in January 1858, Frederick soon found himself in action, one of the 4,500 men that



made up the British forces sent to re-take the fortified city of Kotah, held by a formidable force of over 15,000 Indian rebels. Following a short siege and successful assault, the city was taken back into British control 30th March 1858, but not before a large force of rebel soldiers had withdrawn from the city under the cover of darkness.

The Indian Mutiny - The Capture of Delhi 1857

By August, a force of about 900 men under the personal command of General Roberts, who by a series of forced marches, had closed upon an estimated rebel force of 8,000 men near the village of Sanganeer. The regiment advanced to attack under heavy fire from the rebel artillery. Having inflicted heavy casualties on the rebels, nightfall once again allowed the rebels to withdraw.

On 14th August, the 83rd Regiment once again engaged a large enemy force, this time near the village of Kotaria. By evening, the 83rd had sustained a small loss of 22 killed and wounded, while the enemy over one thousand left dead on the field.

On 2nd September 1858 Frederick was promoted to Lieutenant by appointment.

In 1861, with the Indian Mutiny (1857-59) put down and British rule restored throughout India, Frederick and the other officers and men who had been engaged with the enemy during the mutiny, were presented with the Indian War Medal.

In the following year, the regiment returned to England where it assumed garrison duties for the next five years. Returning with the Headquarters of the regiment, Frederick together with over 400 officers and men aboard the troopship "King Lear", arrived at Plymouth 16th May 1862, having left Bombay 10 weeks earlier. On a second transport ship, the "Cospatrick," a further 200 rank and file from the 83rd and other regiments, invalids, and 8 soldiers described as "insane", arrived back in England in the same month. It was reported that 11 soldiers had died on the voyage.

The health of the British Army at this time faced significant challenges. In India the harsh climate, coupled with unsanitary living conditions, led to widespread health issues among the troops. Tropical diseases such as malaria, cholera, dysentery, and typhoid were rampant, posing a constant threat to the soldiers.

In October 1863, Frederick was promoted to Captain by purchase, and then in January 1866, returned with the regiment to Ireland.

During its stay in Ireland the regiment was distributed Headquarters at the Curragh Barracks Kildare, three companies in Armagh, one company in Monaghan, two companies in Sligo and two companies in Boyle.

In March 1867, the regimental depot companies moved to Colchester, while in April the rest of the regiment embarked at Kingstown and were conveyed by the troopship "Himalaya" to Gibraltar. Relieving the 86th Regiment in the Casemate Barracks, the 83rd Regiment would spend the next 3 years on garrison duty.

Britain had taken control of Gibraltar in 1713 and thereafter had retained a military presence on the rock. During the Napoleonic Wars, Gibraltar had become an important base for the Royal Navy and was designated as one of four British fortresses (together with Halifax, Nova Scotia, Bermuda, and Malta). During the 19th century, the peacetime military garrison in Gibraltar fluctuated between 1,100 and 5,000 troops at any one time.



83rd Reg. Guardhouse Gibraltar 1868



2nd Europa Advanced Battery Gibraltar 1868

During their time garrisoned at Gibraltar, officers of the 83rd Regiment would have engaged in a variety of activities. Officers would socialise with one another and with the local civilian population, attending formal dinners, balls, receptions, and occasional outings to scenic spots at Gibraltar and in Spain.

Sports were also a common pastime, and the officers would have played games like cricket, tennis, or racquet sports, as well as riding or hunting. Maintaining military readiness was another priority, so officers spent time leading drills and training exercises with their men, ensuring they were prepared for any potential conflict.

Having served their time at Gibraltar, the 83rd Regiment commanded by Colonel A. B. Hankey, embarked the troopship "Tamar" 11th March 1870, and proceeded to Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. From Alexandria, they travelled by train to Suez on the Red Sea and on 25th March embarked the troopship "Euphrates" for onward transport to India. Arriving at Bombay 8th April 1870, the regiment then continued to Poona where it was quartered in Wanourie Barracks.

Poona, located 120 miles southeast of Bombay in the western state of Maharashtra, was one of the most important military and administrative centres for the British in India in the 19th century. Established in the early 19th century, the Poona Cantonment (permanent military station) became a key base for British forces operating in the Bombay Presidency and the surrounding regions. The cantonment was strategically important because of its proximity to the Deccan Plateau and its distance from the coastal areas, making it a safer, less vulnerable location to potential attacks from coastal insurgents. The temperate climate of the region also made Poona an attractive location for British officers and troops, especially during the sweltering summer months in other parts of India. The Poona Cantonment housed various regiments, including the British Indian Army's artillery and infantry units. This led to the development of infrastructure such as bungalows for officers, barracks,

hospitals, roads, and a Bazaar. Over time, Poona became a major centre for British military operations in the western part of India, as well as a hub for the distribution of supplies and reinforcements.

Poona's military significance, however, extended beyond its logistical role. It was also a site of political and social importance. It was here that key military events, such as the rebellion of 1857 (known as the First War of Indian Independence), played out. While Poona itself was not the site of large-scale battles, the cantonment area saw unrest and dissent among the sepoys (Indian soldiers) stationed there.



83rd Regiment Officers Poona 1873 – Captain Frederick Karslake 2nd Row Far Right

During the 10 years that the 83rd Regiment were stationed in India, Frederick was promoted to Brevet Major in 1877 and then in October 1879 to Major.

Towards the end of 1880, the regiment was ordered to proceed to England. In January 1881, however, the regiment was diverted to Natal in South Africa, where an outbreak of hostilities with the Boers would see the 83rd Regiment on active field service. In July, the 83rd Regiment became the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, under the Childers reforms. After spending much of its time on rear-area labouring duties in South Africa, the Battalion returned to England in January 1882.

Having returned from South Africa, Frederick was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the same year, and in October 1884 took over command of the Battalion from Colonel Meurant who retired. In 1886, Frederick was promoted to Colonel before retiring in February 1887, having served 30 years with the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot, and then the Royal Irish Rifles.

Frederick retired from the army with an honorary rank of Major General.

In September 1913, Frederick's Brother Sir William Wollaston Karslake KC died aged 79 years. As a beneficiary, Frederick shared in the inheritance of his brother's estate valued at £77,000. In retirement, Frederick lived in Westminster, London, until his death in 1916 at the age of 75. Frederick was discovered dead in bed at his residence in Pall Mall. Frederick left an estate valued at £33,000.

Shortly after his death, the depot orders of the Royal Irish Rifles, Belfast, contained the following: *"The commanding officer regrets to announce the death of Major General F Karslake, who joined the 83rd Regiment in June 1857, commanding the 1st Battalion the Royal Irish Rifles from 1884 to 1887. Major General F Karslake served in the Indian Mutiny, siege and capture of Kotah, affair at Sanganeer, and defeat of Gwalior rebels at Kotaria, South African War 1881, and also with Natal Field Force".*

Frederick's funeral took place 10th April 1916 at the Kensal Green Cemetery, London, where he was laid to rest in the family grave. Attending Frederick's funeral were two former 83rd regiment officers who had served with Frederick, Lt. Colonel B H Metcalfe, and Lt. Colonel G E E Blunt.



Lt Col Booth Hay Metcalfe



Lt Col George Ernest Emes Blunt



Captain Frederick Karslake Gibraltar circa 1868 aged 28

Researched and written by Gary Hynard 2025

