

## Cecil D'Arcy, VC Frontier Light Horse.

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As an aside to the references to Cecil D'Arcy, VC. of the Frontier Light Horse in the accompanying article by Cam Simpson, curiously, his military father christened Cecil D'Arcy 'Colonel Cecil D'Arcy Neville'. This caused both annoyance and amusement to the young Cecil who, perceived by local dignitaries to be a Colonel, was often given V.I.P treatment such as red carpets and upgraded accommodation. This name was well-known to the men with whom he served and regardless of his rank he was invariably referred to as 'Colonel'.

His eventual award of the Victoria Cross followed embarrassment to both the British Army in South Africa and Queen Victoria which stemmed from public awareness that official recognition of colonial officers' bravery was lacking. This, in turn, gave rise to the belief that troops of the British Empire were 'second class'. This even extended to official standing orders, for example:

Majors and Captains of the Imperial Regiments command Lieutenant Colonels, Majors and Captains of local forces; Imperial Lieutenants ranked superior to (colonial) Captains.

These orders gave rise to confusion and perceived injustices. Following the debacle at Hlobane, Colonel Wood recommended six men for the Victoria Cross, all for gallantry. They were Buller, D'Arcy, Leet, Browne, Lysons and Fowler. All were approved with the exception of D'Arcy on the grounds that he was not from an Imperial unit. Angry public opinion resulted in a campaign to rectify this injustice in both South Africa and England.

With the war over, the campaign for recognition for D'Arcy continued with press comments and letters, usually adding the letters V.C. after his name. When Captain Lord Beresford presented himself to Queen Victoria to receive his Victoria Cross he intimated the unfairness of rejecting colonial nominations such as D'Arcy. As a result, D'Arcy was gazetted in the London Gazette of the 9 October 1879 for the Victoria Cross. The award was presented to him by Sir Garnet Wolseley at a parade in Pretoria on 28 December. During the presentation Wolseley stated:

I am sure, Mr D'Arcy, that not only in South Africa, but in every other colony of the British Empire, it will now be understood, from the gift of the decoration by Her Majesty that Her Majesty does not reserve this honour for Imperial Troops alone, but is anxious to distinguish the courage and devotion of the soldiers of her Colonial Empire.

During 1881 D'Arcy became unwell and went missing from his home. On 28 December that year his body was found among some rocks by a native searching for honey. On 3 January 1882 his remains were buried at King William's Town with full military honours. His Victoria Cross was left to his sister and on her death it passed to another family member who would later cause controversy when it was seized by a visiting nephew who pocketed it and refused its return. He claimed he was the rightful owner as Cecil D'Arcy had been his Godfather.

Moving forward to September 1992, one of D'Arcy's direct descendants learned from an article in the *Daily Telegraph* that the D'Arcy VC was to be auctioned by Sotheby's. The auction house put the relative in touch with the Royal Army Pay Corps Association who believed they had inherited the award and held it in their safe for the previous 27 years. Following amicable negotiations, the VC was handed back to the D'Arcy family for safe keeping.