

JOHN KIPLING'S PALS

By MIKE KIPLING

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The picture below from the Irish Guards Archives¹ of John Kipling with five other junior officers of the Irish Guards will be familiar to many readers of the *Kipling Journal* from its appearance, differently captioned, in Tonie and Valmai Holt's book *My Boy Jack?* (Another picture from this period showing John Kipling, Law and Christy, together with two other officers I have been unable to identify, can be seen in Andrew Lycett's masterful biography of Kipling.)² This short paper explores the background and future lives of John's five companions.



Group of Officers, Warley

Back: 2nd Lt. Law, 2nd Lt. Langrishe, 2nd Lt. Kipling, 2nd Lt. Christy
Front: 2nd Lt. Close, 2nd Lt. Keenan

HUGH FRANCIS D'ASSISI STUART LAW

Francis Law (back row, far left) was born in Dublin in 1897, the grandson of a former Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Educated at Shrewsbury, he obtained a cadetship at Sandhurst in September 1914. In January 1915

he was commissioned into the Irish Guards, joining what was then the Reserve Battalion at Warley. In his autobiography 'A Man at Arms', Law tells of high-spirited japes with 'Johnny' Kipling and Stephen Christy, all too soon over following Law's posting to the 1st Battalion in France in early July.³

Law experienced mainly trench warfare, being on a temporary intelligence posting during the 1st Battalion's major offensive action on the Somme in September 1916.⁴ He was promoted acting Captain later that year.⁵ In June 1917 he was awarded the MC and the following month was wounded in preparatory work for the 3rd Battle of Ypres. Invalided home, he had recovered sufficiently before the end of the year to be posted to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion at Warley in charge of officer training.⁶ In late April 1918, Law, now a permanent Captain, returned to France to bolster the 2nd Battalion, which had suffered many casualties during the Guards Division's heroic defensive action at Vieux-Berquin. The Battalion spent the remainder of the war in the rear, for some months acting as a training unit on the French coast.⁷ Following the Armistice, both Battalions moved into occupied territory, eventually arriving at Cologne.⁸

Law remained with the Regiment until 1931, seeing service in Constantinople and Gibraltar as well as home duties. Having moved to Cumbria, he joined the Territorial Battalion of the Border Regiment in 1935 as second-in-command. Appointed to command the Battalion, he led them in France in 1940. After seeing action, the regiment was evacuated from Dunkirk and Law was awarded the DSO. After home defence duty, Law had postings to the Lebanon and Cyprus.⁹ When *The Irish Guards in the Great War* was published, Law's mother Lota wrote to Kipling expressing thanks and reminiscing about Law's leaves with the family in Ireland.

Law's final military involvement was with the Army Cadet Force in Scotland, giving that up only in 1964, the year before he was appointed a Deputy-Lieutenant for Midlothian.¹⁰ He died in 1985.¹¹

TERENCE HUME LANGRISHE

Terence Hume Langrishe, known as 'Pingo' (back row, 2nd from left), was born in 1895, the second son of Sir Hercules Langrishe Bt. of Knocktopher Abbey in Kilkenny.¹² He was educated at Eton and was commissioned into the Irish Guards in January 1915.¹³ Langrishe was transferred from the 2nd Battalion to the 1st on 10 September 1915 and was retransferred to the 2nd Battalion to make up for casualties on 3 October 1915, fortunately avoiding the fateful advance on 27 September.¹⁴ He remained in the 2nd Battalion, although he also served for a time back in England in 1916/17 in the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion.¹⁵

Langrishe's elder brother Hercules, who was serving in the Royal Flying Corps, was killed in a training accident in February 1917.¹⁶ Later that year, Langrishe himself transferred to the RFC, beginning his flying training at Reading in November 1917. Qualifying as a pilot, he was appointed to No 106 Squadron RAF in April 1919, which was based in Ireland providing support for the ground forces attempting to quell republican activity. He returned to the Irish Guards at the end of November 1919, still a 2nd Lieutenant.

He resigned his commission in March 1920 and, in August became engaged to the society beauty Barbara Cartland, later a prolific author of romantic fiction.¹⁷ This engagement was announced in *The Times* on 2 November 1920:

MR. T. H. LANGRISHE AND MISS CARTLAND.

A marriage has been arranged between Terence Hume Langrishe, late Irish Guards and R.A.F., the only surviving son of Sir Hercules Langrishe, Bt., D.L., late commander, R.N.V.R., of Knocktopher Abbey, Co. Kilkenny, and Barbara Hamilton, only daughter of the late Major Bertram Cartland, Worcestershire Regiment, and of Mrs. Cartland, 68, Eaton-terrace, S.W.

Langrishe, along with a number of other former officers, volunteered for intelligence work in Ireland. He was temporarily re-commissioned in September 1920 as a 2nd Lieutenant 'specially employed'.¹⁸ One letter he sent to his fiancée during this period said *Just missed catching Michael Collins. The tea in the pot was still hot on the table.*¹⁹ His fellow officer Peter Ames of the Grenadier Guards, was one of a group of officers assassinated by the IRA in Dublin on 21 November 1920.²⁰ Ames was engaged to a close friend of Barbara Cartland, to whom Langrishe sent a telegram asking her to break the news to Ames' fiancée. This request was fulfilled; but Barbara Cartland, whose own father had been killed in the war, also broke off her engagement to Langrishe. As she wrote later, *I knew then I was running away but I couldn't bear being involved in death and murder, tears and unhappiness. I just wanted to dance, to forget wars and anything to do with them.*²¹ Langrishe resigned his commission in December to pursue her, but to no avail,²² and Barbara Cartland went on to break many other young men's hearts. Langrishe married Joan Stuart Grigg in 1926.²³ He served again during the Second World War, achieving promotion to Lieutenant in 1939,²⁴ and succeeded to the baronetcy in 1943. He died in 1973.

STEPHEN EDMUND FELL CHRISTY

Christy (back row, far right) was a scion of the Christy towel-making dynasty, whose fortune derived from his grandfather Richard's invention of a machine to mass-manufacture terry towelling, based on a Turkish hand-made design.²⁵ Richard Christy later settled in Sussex and Stephen Christy's father had inherited sizeable estates there.²⁶ Christy's mother was a daughter of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Geoffrey Hornby.²⁷ Educated at Eton, Christy was also at Sandhurst, where he met Law and they later became firm friends.²⁸

He was posted to the 1st Battalion, arriving in France with draft from Warley on 27 September.²⁹ Kipling tells in *History of the Irish Guards* how in December, Christy was *moved to go out with a patrol and to hurl into the German lines a printed message (was it the earliest workings of propaganda?) demanding that the Germans "should surrender"*.³⁰ Kipling and Law both relate how Christy just escaped being hit by a sniper's bullet near Ypres which passed through a loophole and grazed his ear.³¹ A few days later, he was not so lucky, as a shell splinter penetrated his helmet, killing him instantly. Law was deeply affected by the loss of his friend and later named his eldest son Stephen in his memory.³² The tragedy was magnified for the Christy family when Stephen's younger brother, Basil, of the Coldstream Guards, was killed on the Somme in October of the same year.³³



Christy's headstone (part)³⁴

Christy is buried in the Ypres Reservoir Cemetery, where his headstone bears the inscription *'They that are true of heart shall be glad. Love, Duty, Honour, Faith'*.³⁵ The first sentence is from Psalm 64, the last words of the morning prayers prescribed for the 12th day of the month, the day on which Christy died.³⁶

Christy's mother placed *In Memoriam* notices in *The Times* on the anniversaries of their deaths for many years; the last of these appeared in 1948.³⁷ That for Stephen in 1941 read *'In tenderest remembrance of Stephen E. F. Christy, Lieut., Irish Guards, killed at Ypres, July 12, 1916, fondly loved elder son of the late Henry E. and Ethel M. Christy'*.

*Love that never falters
Love that pays the price
Love that makes undaunted
The final sacrifice.*

(This verse is from the well-known hymn by Cecil Spring-Rice 'I vow to thee my country'.)

PERCY JOHN HAMILTON CLOSE

Percy Close (front row, left) was older than the others in the photograph, having been born in 1881.³⁸ He was the son of John Close, a mechanical engineer of Dringhouses near York and later an hotelier in Harrogate.³⁹ He was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Oxford, after which he settled at Wallingford, farming and running a motor business.⁴⁰

Close married actress Aimée Heath in 1906.⁴¹ In 1909, he petitioned for divorce in a case which gained some publicity, citing adultery between his wife and the novelist William J. Locke, author of *The Beloved Vagabond* and *The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne*.⁴² Aimée Close later married Locke.⁴³

He joined the Irish Guards in December 1914 and was posted to the 1st Battalion in France at the end of May 1915 (so placing a latest date on the photograph).⁴⁴ In early 1916, he was posted back home to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion, having various spells of sick leave before being deemed fit for light duties and being posted in July 1917 to the London Command Depot at Seaford in Sussex and in October 1918 to the London Lewis Gun School. He was demobilised in July 1919.⁴⁵ His younger brother, Reginald Close, a barrister, also served in the regiment, joining in December 1915; but later, suffering from deafness, he also returned from France for home duties.⁴⁶

Close married Minnie Coddington in 1918 and he and his second wife were guests at the wedding of Elsie Kipling and George Bambridge in 1924.⁴⁷ He inherited substantial wealth on the death of his father in 1928. He died in London in 1956.⁴⁸

JAMES BROWN KEENAN

James Keenan (front row, right) was born in 1895 in Rosarios, Argentina, the son of merchant Santiago Keenan and Elena Browne.⁴⁹ His paternal grandfather was from County Longford.⁵⁰ Keenan later attended Downside College near Bath and went up to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1914 where he joined the OTC.⁵¹ He was commissioned into the Irish Guards in February 1915.⁵²

He is first recorded by Kipling, and the battalion diary, as rejoining the 2nd battalion on 4 November 1915 from home, having been sick.⁵³ His medal card gives his arrival date in France as 16 August (the date the battalion left England) but I have found no record of the date he fell sick and so cannot be certain whether he was at Loos or not.⁵⁴ In March 1916, he was wounded in the hand when a grenade exploded prematurely, killing one man.⁵⁵ He was promoted Lieutenant in July 1916 and later that year was temporarily an acting Captain.⁵⁶



Capt. J. B. Keenan in France 1916⁵⁷

Kipling notes Keenan's involvement in a bombing attack at Ginchy on the Somme in September 1916. He was wounded in the thigh by a shell splinter in July 1917 near Ypres.⁵⁸ After recovery, he was posted to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion and returned to France in April 1918.⁵⁹ The following month was appointed Adjutant of the 1st Battalion, once again as acting Captain.

Keenan was wounded in the face by a piece of shell at Battalion HQ in the attack on St Python on the Selle in October 1918, an attack in which Kipling's future son-in-law George Bambridge led No. 3 Company and his cousin's son Oliver Baldwin led No. 4.⁶⁰ In March 1919, he ceased to be Adjutant and reverted to Lieutenant.⁶¹

In 1920, it was gazetted that he had been awarded the Medal of La Solidaridad, 3rd Class, by the Panamanian Government.⁶² The 1st class (gold) medal was awarded at only to Earl Haig and the 2nd class (silver) to a number of other senior officers. I have not been able to discover the criteria for the 59 bronze awards. Keenan was finally promoted permanent Captain in January 1923 but resigned his commission later that year.⁶³ He later worked for the Bank of London and South America, living in Argentina.⁶⁴ He died in 1983, having been for a time resident at Morden College, Blackheath.⁶⁵

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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NOTES

- 1 Irish Guards Archives (reproduced with the permission of the regimental adjutant, Irish Guards).
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- 5 *The London Gazette*, 6 February 1917, p. 1270.
- 6 Law, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–89.
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- 27 'Loss to Compton: Sudden Death of Mr. Henry E. Christy', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 14 December 1931, p. 12, col. 7. Henry Christy was Stephen's father.
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- 30 Kipling, IG2, p. 128.
- 31 Law, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- 32 Kipling, IG2, p. 148. Law, *op. cit.*, pp. 69–71.
- 33 Commonwealth War Graves Commission. <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/30821/CHRISTY,%20BASIL%20ROBERT%20FRANCIS>.
- 34 <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=12418158>.
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