

Obituary

SIR A. CARTON DE WIART, V.C.

A HAPPY WARRIOR

Lieutenant-General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, V.C., K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., died yesterday at his home in county Cork. He was 83.

It was to the age of chivalry that Adrian de Wiart properly belonged. He saw life as a list in which honour (when nothing much was happening) and duty (when his country was in peril) engaged him automatically as a contestant. It was once said of him that in the world of action he occupied the same sort of niche that Sir Max Beerbohm occupied in the world of letters; and this was true, for he was in all things a stylist.

De Wiart's appearance was distinguished and, thanks partly to a black eye-patch and one empty sleeve, faintly piratical. He could be fierce and was intolerant of fools; but his mind had an almost feminine perceptiveness, and he was unfailingly considerate to others. He accepted, with an air of quizzical insouciance, every challenge that life offered. He might not have agreed—for he disliked empty or pretentious language—that danger has bright eyes; but he found them irresistible.

Adrian Carton de Wiart was born in Brussels on May 5, 1880. His father was a lawyer; one of his grandmothers was Irish. After a childhood spent mostly in Egypt, he was educated in England: first at the Oratory School, in those days at Edgbaston, then at Balliol. His cricket was a great deal better, and taken much more seriously, than his scholarship; and his academic career was

in a fair way to being terminated by the examiners when the South African War broke out and de Wiart without a moment's hesitation enlisted in a yeomanry regiment, Paget's Horse, Trooper Carton—an alias was necessary lest this change in his educational programme should come to the ears of his father—was not in fact eligible for the British service, being under age and of foreign nationality; but he was soon in action and received the first of his many wounds. They were serious, and in hospital de Wiart's identity came to light. His father took the characteristic escapade well and, a further interlude at Balliol having failed to cure his son's restlessness, granted his request to be allowed to soldier on—still as a trooper—in South Africa.



When the Boer War ended de Wiart was given a commission in the 4th Dragoon Guards, then stationed in India. Polo, pig-sticking and such improbable feats as seizing a cobra by its tail as it disappeared down a hole and dispatching it with his sword alleviated but could not dispel the monotony of garrison duties, and a chance to serve as A.D.C. to the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, Sir Henry Hildyard, was seized in 1904. Four years later he rejoined his regiment in England and was seconded to the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars as adjutant. The storm-clouds gathering over Europe somehow escaped his attention, but Somaliland, where the Mad Mullah was giving trouble, seemed to offer a rendezvous with danger; three weeks before England declared war on Germany he set off to do battle with the Dervishes.

He was soon back in England, having lost an eye and gained a D.S.O. while storming a fort, and spent the rest of that war in the trenches or in hospital. As a *grand blessé* he was in a class by himself; he was severely wounded eight times and lost his left hand. He was awarded the Victoria Cross after the Battle of the Somme, when he led the 8th Battalion, The Gloucestershire Regiment, in the capture of La Boisselle. He subsequently commanded the 12th, the 105th, and the 113th Infantry Brigade.

POLISH ADVENTURES

After the Armistice he led the British Military Mission to Poland, whose forces were fighting simultaneously the Germans, the Bolsheviks, the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, and the Czechs. These minor campaigns produced many adventures—and many friends—for de Wiart. When they ended, one of the latter, Prince Charles Radziwill, lent him an estate in the Pripet Marshes, near the Russo-Polish frontier. De Wiart, who had resigned his commission after a difference of opinion with the War Office, accepted the offer with alacrity, and for most of the period between the wars made his home in a desolate but strangely beautiful region which provided some of the best shooting in Europe.

In July, 1939, he was summoned to London and appointed, once more, to lead a British Military Mission to Poland. When war broke out there was little that the mission could do save withdraw, on the heels of Marshal Smigly-Rydz, to Rumania; but de Wiart was the first senior British officer to experience the novel realities of a *blitzkrieg*, and it may be doubted whether, on his return, the General Staff paid sufficient attention to the lessons he had learnt. He was given command of the 61st Division, but when, in the following spring, the Germans invaded Norway, he was placed in charge of the allied force destined for Namsos. Arriving in Norway ahead of his troops, by seaplane, he immediately recognized the enterprise as a forlorn hope. Whitehall at first took a rosier view of its prospects, but under a hail of bombs and an almost equally disconcerting barrage of unrealistic advice from London de Wiart remained imperturbable and when the time came extricated his dazed force with light losses. He celebrated his sixtieth birthday on the cruiser that brought him home.

PRISONER OF WAR

He resumed command of his division, throughout whose ranks his popularity and prestige were exceptional. It was a blow to him to be told, early in 1941, that he was too old to continue in command; but his disappointment evaporated when he was ordered, in April, to Yugoslavia as head of a British Military Mission which was to nourish Yugoslav resistance to the invading Germans. The Wellington bomber carrying him to the Middle East came down in the sea off North Africa, and de Wiart found himself a prisoner of the Italians, perhaps the last predicament which anyone would have prophesied for him. Though straitly incarcerated, he made several bold, well-planned bids for freedom.

It had been a tribute to his reputation that the British General Staff should have sent him to Poland, to Norway and to Yugoslavia; it was perhaps an even higher tribute that the Italian General Staff should, when they wished to ask for an armistice, have sent their prisoner to London to arrange matters. Disguised (in so far as disguise was possible for that conspicuous figure) and provided with a false passport, de Wiart was flown home via Lisbon, an essential intermediary in, if not—as was popularly believed—the architect of, Italy's withdrawal from the war on September 7, 1943. Three weeks later Mr. Winston Churchill asked him to go to China as his personal representative at Marshal Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters.

He spent the rest of the war in Chungking, where he made a deep impression on the Chinese. He was at the Mena Conference and in December, 1944, made, at the instance of the Prime Minister, a personal report to the Cabinet on the situation in the Far East. He also managed, characteristically, to attend a naval bombardment of Sabang. After the general election of 1945 Mr. Attlee asked him to continue at his distant post, and it was not until 1946 that he returned to England for good—and as usual on a stretcher, for he had broken his back in Singapore.

He had married in 1908 Countess Frederica, eldest daughter of Prince Fugger Babenhausen and Nora Princess Hobenlohe, and they had two daughters. His wife died in 1949, and two years later he married Mrs. Joan Sutherland. They settled in co. Cork, where the general's tireless physical activity found ample outlets in the pursuit of snipe and salmon.