



Lance Corporal **Walter James Spencer** (044) joined the 5th Mounted Rifles (Imperial Light Horse) Regiment, although we don't know when. However, it wasn't long before he was taking part in the South-West Africa Campaign (in the area now known as Namibia) that developed soon after the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1914. SW Africa had been colonized by the Germans and the South Africans were very aware of their common border with their German enemy.

There was, of course, sympathy among the Boer population of South Africa as only 12 years before (Second Boer War) Germany had offered the Boers morale support against The British Empire. Walter may or may not have been aware of the tensions in this volatile situation.

We know that Walter died on 14th Oct 1914 and it appears that his death occurred during an uprising. The political situation was complex. General Maritz, who was commanding the British Forces, was a Boer sympathiser and he allied himself with the Germans and called for an independent South Africa, free from British control. Fierce fighting soon broke out and the 5th Mounted Rifles Regiment was despatched from Cape Town to Upington to restore order. The Middlesex Chronicle (21st Nov 1914) takes up the story...

“During a severe dust storm, a party of 7 non-coms and men, became detached from the main body of the ILH and were surprised, and captured by a rebel force. On their way to Maritz’s camp, the captured IL Horsemen, on the suggestion of a sergeant named Fletcher, made a sudden attack on their armed escorts, over powered and disarmed the rebels and the tables being turned, brought them back as prisoners to the ILH camp. There was one casualty during the struggle, Spencer being shot dead with a rifle.”

Records report that Maritz's sympathisers occupied the town of Keimoes in the Upington area and The South African War Graves Project confirms that Walter was **“killed in Keimoes whilst escaping from the enemy”**. This was how Walter lost his life. The rebellion failed.

Walter was 32, and his 1891 census record gives his birth in Ireland around 1880. His mother, Fanny Spencer (1851-1923) lived at 6 Newton Road, Isleworth, with her daughter Ethel who married James Arscott, also listed on the Isleworth Memorial. His father was Henry Charles Spencer, a baker. The Middlesex Chronicle tells us that Walter 'had previous military experience and soon obtained promotion. His civil occupation was that of a clerk'. Walter is buried in the Upington (Station) Cemetery located in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa on the banks of the Orange River. Grave Ref EA 271. He is also commemorated in St John's Church in Isleworth.

“After the last post had been sounded each of the firing party dropped a red rose upon the lowered coffin, in accordance with the ritual of the Sons of England”.



Walter's Grave in Upington (Station) Cemetery
Courtesy of the South Africa War Graves Project

