

## CHAPTER VI

### MONASH SUCCEEDS BIRDWOOD

BEFORE Birdwood, with his chief-of-staff, General White, worked out at the wish of Haig and Rawlinson the secret scheme for the offensive which Rawlinson's army might be requested to launch in the Somme region, all four knew that Birdwood and White would not be there to help in launching it. Sir Douglas Haig had decided that he required another army headquarters, to control, at first, some of the recuperating divisions in reserve but later to take command of a sector of front between the First Army and the Third and probably to carry out the offensive on the southern side of the Lys re-entrant. Birdwood, who through the retirement of older officers in the Indian Army had in October, 1917, been promoted to general, was the senior officer available—indeed he was the only full general among the army corps commanders in France—and his thoroughly successful leadership of the Australian forces had rendered it almost certain that he would be selected to fill the next vacancy in the army commands. On May 13th he was informed that he would be given the new Fifth Army.<sup>1</sup>

It is certain that Sir Douglas Haig had a second reason for considering the selection a suitable one. He would be genuinely glad to see the Australian Corps led by an Australian officer. It is true that the Australian Government in its requests to have the A.I.F. commanded and staffed by Australians<sup>2</sup> had

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<sup>1</sup> Five British Army headquarters had functioned on the Western Front from the time when Gough was placed in command of the Reserve (later Fifth) Army, intended to break through in the First Somme battle, until Gen. Plumer was sent in November, 1917, to command the British force in Italy. There followed several confusing changes of name: first the Second, and later the Fifth, Army became the Fourth when Gen. Rawlinson was appointed to them. For a time the B.E.F. contained only four armies, though after Gough's fall—until the British Government ordered him home—a nucleus headquarters, known as Reserve Army Headquarters, was formed under him at Cr cy-en-Ponthieu to control work on the new lines of defence. Birdwood's army headquarters was to be formed at Cr cy but later would move to Th rouanne.

<sup>2</sup> See Vol V, pp 8-10.

never contemplated the replacement of General Birdwood—his service to the A.I.F. was far too highly appreciated and his personality too congenial to the troops and the nation; but Haig recognised that all Australians would be pleased to have an Australian in that command, and it fitted in with his cherished conception of the Imperial General Staff.

Moreover Haig himself had made the discovery of an Australian officer who, as he strongly felt, was worthy of the position. In December, 1916, when the 3rd Australian Division first entered France after its thorough training under Maj.-General Monash in England, Haig visited it and, with Monash, inspected its reserve brigade. The weight of the Somme battle, which had just ended in the south, had been heavy on the Commander-in-Chief as well as on his troops, and Monash noted that Haig "looked grey and old." But Monash's ability was never more brilliantly displayed than on such inspections. His organisation for them was minute, the timing perfect, the programme untiringly thought out, and his explanations to the visiting officer a masterpiece of clear exposition. Three months earlier he had deeply impressed the King at an extraordinarily successful review of his division and 10,000 other Australian and New Zealand troops at Bulford Field on Salisbury Plain.<sup>3</sup> Now, when the same welcome efficiency was exhibited in the meadows behind Armentières, the sight of it may well have had an emotional effect on the tired Commander-in-Chief. At all events this usually cold and unexpressive leader, on parting from the middle-aged, Jewish-Australian citizen soldier after the inspection

put his arm around my shoulder (Monash wrote) as I rode beside him, and with much feeling and warmth he said—"You have a very fine division. I wish you all sorts of good luck, old man."

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<sup>3</sup> Monash described it in his *War Letters* (pp. 131-3). For nearly two hours the troops were marching past the King in column of platoons. "It was for the division a veritable triumph, and, apart from being by far the biggest and most splendid, it was much the most successful review I have ever been present at." Although the troops had five roads of approach to the review ground, and the King was not due till 11.15, they had to start from their various camps at 7.15 in order to be assembled in time. Monash spent two and a half hours with the King "on a footing of perfect freedom," and finished by bringing him to the railway platform one minute before the royal train was due to start. "Splendid timing, wasn't it, Clive?" said the King to Lt.-Col. Clive Wigram, as they stood on the platform. During the review the King told Monash, "It's a very fine division. I don't know that I've ever seen a finer one." It is quite possible that King George spoke of his impression to Sir Douglas Haig.

That first impression Haig never relinquished. Several times during the preparations for the battles of Messines and Third Ypres he visited Monash's headquarters, and in August, 1917, Monash noted:<sup>4</sup>

Birdwood told me that the Commander-in-Chief had a very high opinion of my division and of me personally and had gone out of his way to express himself in terms of praise of my work. Birdwood added that it was rare for the Chief to do this. White entirely confirmed these statements.

Nor was it Monash alone who recorded this approbation. Haig, after a later review of the 3rd Division before its entry into Third Ypres, noted:

A very fine body of men. The parade was a great success. . . . Every detail . . . had been carefully thought out beforehand, hence the parade was so successful. I think Monash a good head and commands his division well.

After the troops had passed, Haig stayed for an hour chatting with Monash and the senior officers of the division. That night he had Monash to dine privately with himself and the two senior officers of his general staff, Sir Launcelot Kiggell and Maj.-General Butler. Describing the dinner to his wife, Monash wrote:<sup>5</sup>

There were only the four of us present. After each course was served, the mess stewards went out of the room and the doors were locked from inside, until the Chief gave a sign for the next course. So you may imagine that some very important and confidential matters were discussed, about which I need say no more than that there is no question that we are very rapidly wearing down the German military power, and it is now only a question of time and weather. Nothing could have been more charming than the affability and camaraderie of these three great soldiers, upon whom rests the whole burden of the British Western Front.

Haig was keen to see the dominion leaders trained to the highest command. In his vision of the Imperial General Staff he contemplated that the highest post might go equally to a British or an oversea commander, and he would have liked to see them all combined in a common service. Birdwood's experience in the Australian command had shown him the im-

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<sup>4</sup> *War Letters of General Monash*, pp. 151, 185-6

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.

possibility of this: he had frequently had to stand out against the wishes of G.H.Q., particularly against its natural tendency to intervene in promotions and appointments in the Australian service with which, under authority from the Australian Government,<sup>6</sup> he (or his delegates) alone had the right to deal. Haig, though entirely just and honourable in his dealings with his subordinates, resembled most other strong men in disliking opposition from them. He had sometimes resented Birdwood's freedom, and this friction may have increased his inclination for a change. In July, 1917, immediately after the command of the Canadian Corps had been given to a Canadian, Sir Arthur Currie,<sup>7</sup> Haig, visiting I Anzac Headquarters in Hazebrouck, said to Brudenell White, chief of Birdwood's staff and then generally reputed as the most brilliant officer in the Australian service:

"Why don't you have a corps commander of your own? You know, *you* ought to be commanding this corps."

White said, "God forbid. General Birdwood has a position among Australians which is far too valuable to lose."

Haig said he knew all that; but Birdwood could have an administrative command. White replied that Birdwood's great reputation in Australia depended on his being the fighting commander of their troops. . . . Haig turned away impatiently and since then has been very short with White.<sup>8</sup>

Monash, on the other hand, still maintained views not dissimilar from those of Haig concerning the ideal relations of the dominion and British commands. In the early days of his service in Egypt he had argued that his brigade should now come under the British command and not that of General Bridges, then administering the A.I.F., and in 1918 he was still averse from the tendency to assert, at least in any matter affecting the employment of his troops, the Australian Government's control.

Monash (says the diary already quoted) is very full of the idea that he is absolutely under G.H.Q.—he must not consider Australian demands—once he is under G.H.Q., G.H.Q. is all that he has to consider; a simple rule . . .

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<sup>6</sup> Conferred in the Order in Council of 15 Sep 1915, making him G.O.C., A.I.F., after the death of Gen. Bridges, and in later amendments.

<sup>7</sup> On Gen. Byng's being promoted to command Third Army, 9 June 1917, in place of Gen. Allenby, sent to Palestine.

<sup>8</sup> The quotation is from a private but completely reliable diary.

Whether Haig discussed with him the scheme of an Imperial General Staff is not recorded; in any case Monash had then come successfully through the test of divisional command in great battles—Messines and Third Ypres; and by the beginning of October Haig's mind swung strongly to the notion that he would be the best commander for the Australian fighting forces. Haig took the opportunity of sounding separately two Australian Press correspondents on the matter. To Keith Murdoch, the powerful London representative of several Australian papers, who visited the front in September, he suggested that Monash should be appointed to command the I Anzac Corps and Birdwood given the administrative control of the A.I.F. A few days later, after his famous interview with the war correspondents before the Battle of Passchendaele,<sup>9</sup> he detained the senior Australian correspondent, Bean, in order to discuss the Australian point of view on several questions, including that of an Imperial General Staff. He made it clear that he fully recognized the strength and value of national feeling among Australian troops.

He thought each dominion ought to be complete after the war up to the highest commands. We had some very capable commanders in the Australian force—"now—er—there's General Monash, for example. He is a very capable man. He has made a great success of everything he has touched—a very solid man."

Bean replied that the independent standing of General Birdwood was of great value to Australia, and added—what was then true of most Australians associated with the staff and the command—"We look upon General White as the greatest soldier we have by a long way." Haig said that he "knew General White was a most capable officer," but he wondered why Australia had not promoted him.

Haig's belief in Monash was not in the least disturbed by these interviews, or by one in which Birdwood, after the Passchendaele fighting, criticised Monash's leadership—criticism which Haig, not quite fairly, attributed to the fact that Monash's division was not in Birdwood's corps.

Although at the end of 1917 the promotion of Birdwood to general aroused at some of the Australian headquarters an

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<sup>9</sup> See Vol. IV, p. 908.

expectation that he would soon be appointed to an army,<sup>10</sup> few of the troops dreamed of such a contingency. On March 18th Birdwood wrote to the Minister for Defence in Melbourne (Senator Pearce):

Had I to give up the command of the corps, but remain in France, I should, I think, recommend for your approval that Gen. Monash might command the corps, while I retain the position of G.O.C., A.I.F. However, this is a contingency which I hope will not arise. . . .

Personally (he wrote in the same letter) . . . I have no other wish than to remain in my present position until the end of the war. . . . I am prepared to forego advancement rather than leave the A.I.F.

Birdwood had frequently spoken thus, and now, when suddenly summoned to G.H.Q. and told by the Chief of the General Staff, Lieut.-General Lawrence, that the Commander-in-Chief wished him to take at once the command of the assembling Fifth Army, he asked whether this was an order and whether it was open to him to refuse. He had been with the Anzac Corps for three and a half years and, rather than leave it, was ready to give up all prospect of promotion. Lawrence replied that at the present time appointments were not "offered," but the selected men were ordered to take them up. Birdwood's name, therefore, had already been submitted to the Cabinet. If, however, he absolutely and definitely declined to take over the command, Haig would consider his wishes, but he should reflect that by doing so he would block promotion in the A.I.F. and no Australian officer could ever hope to rise to command the Australian Corps. This appeal was decisive. Birdwood now asked whether the corps and other Australian units might be sent to his army—which would bring about a partial fulfilment of the earlier wishes of the Australian Government for the creation of an "Australian Army" on the Western Front.<sup>11</sup> Lawrence replied that he realised that the Australian troops appreciated being with Birdwood and therefore, whenever the tactical situation allowed, they would be sent to his army. The intention at that time apparently was that it should at first comprise the 1st

<sup>10</sup> As always, Gen. Walker, the well-loved British officer in command of the 1st Div, and next in seniority to Birdwood, maintained, in opposition to his own interest and inclination, that Birdwood's successor must be an Australian. For Walker's similar attitude on earlier occasions, see *Vols I* (pp. 234-5) and *II* (p. 423).

<sup>11</sup> See *Vol. II*, pp. 155-6

Australian Division and two British corps, the Australian Corps to be sent to it later.<sup>12</sup>

The discussion then turned to the question of Birdwood's successor. A year earlier he would certainly have recommended White, notwithstanding the fact that White's outstanding services as a staff officer had led to his being retained continuously upon staff work. In 1916 Senator Pearce had suggested White or Monash for the command of the 3rd Division. Monash himself, at that time writing to his family, said that White was "far and away the ablest soldier Australia had ever turned out,"<sup>13</sup> and later in the Australian Corps, like nearly every other Australian leader, he constantly went to White for advice. Even in the critical night of March 26th-27th when, hastily summoned to the Somme, he was throwing his division across the path of the Germans, he telephoned to White in Flanders for his opinion as to the frontages suitable to be occupied in such circumstances by his battalions. It was sometimes argued that White, not having commanded a brigade or division, would lack the experience necessary for commanding the corps, but Birdwood knew that, at least during his own absences, White had, in fact, frequently commanded it; whichever divisional commander was acting knew, as did Birdwood, that the control was perfectly safe in White's hands.

But, though Birdwood himself was most attracted by White's qualities of mind and character, it was impossible for him to pass over so capable and successful an officer as Monash. Monash was White's senior. He had made a thorough success of his divisional command. In addition to the Commander-in-Chief's outspoken belief in him, which weighed considerably, encomiums on Monash had poured in from senior officers concerned with his conduct of the fighting before Amiens. The commander of the VII Corps, Lieut.-General Congreve, had volunteered the opinion that Monash was the best divisional commander he had met on the Western Front. Monash indeed stood well in the opinion of every British general under whom he had served. Years afterwards Birdwood said that for him-

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<sup>12</sup> Eventually the progress of the campaign prevented the allotment to it of any Australian division.

<sup>13</sup> *War Letters*, p. 112.

self the choice had been a most difficult one. But it was made easier by his being able to offer White the position of chief of the general staff of his new army, an appointment which, in accordance with his policy of training dominion officers, Haig was glad to make, and which might—so at least Birdwood thought, and wrote to Senator Pearce—prove a stepping stone to the post of Chief of the General Staff at G.H.Q. should that vacancy ever occur. In fairness to General Hobbs of the 5th Australian Division, who in seniority came immediately between Monash and White, Birdwood mentioned that he, too, was fit for a corps command; but Birdwood felt that the leadership of the Australian Corps required something more than the ordinary qualifications, and, in the interests of Australia, should be filled by a leader of outstanding strength and personality. He had felt that Hobbs, though “thorough, able, loyal, and courageous,” leant upon his corps commander for support and might find difficulty in standing alone. In any case, with White and Monash available, he was not really in the running.

There remained the question—who should now exercise the administrative command of the Australian Imperial Force, controlling promotions, appointments, transfers, reinforcement, and pay. It will be remembered that when the first Australian contingent sailed in 1914, General Bridges, the commander of the 1st Division, was given administrative control over the other troops in the contingent as well as his own. For the sake of the contentment of the force, it was advisable that the holder of these powers should be some leader in whose fairness and judgment all had confidence, and, on the death of Bridges in Gallipoli, they were conferred by the Australian Government upon General Birdwood.<sup>14</sup> Birdwood's control was exercised through a small separate “A.I.F.” staff at his headquarters, under the D.A.G., A.I.F. (Col. Dodds), and had as its main instrument the great A.I.F. Headquarters (under Brig.-Genl. Griffiths) at Horseferry Road, London. That a commander busy with his duties at the front should also control something like a War Office in London was an arrangement open to obvious criticism. For example, some of the rulings of Birdwood

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<sup>14</sup> For short intervals they were held by Gens Legge and Godley



had to apply to the Australian forces in Palestine, and these felt—and in some respects undoubtedly were—cut off and neglected. The difficulty, however, was partly overcome by Birdwood's being authorised to delegate his powers and conferring part of them on Lieut.-General Chauvel, then commanding the Desert Mounted Corps. In spite of all criticisms the system worked, and brought with it one immense advantage, not enjoyed in the same degree, perhaps, by any Allied force—that of almost complete freedom from political interference.

It was the prestige of Birdwood's leadership in the field, combined with his integrity and his good judgment of character, that brought this immunity. Enjoying, as he did, the trust of the Australian nation, his position was very strong. If he now gave up the administrative command its chief claimant would be the next senior in the A.I.F., Maj.-General M'Cay, then commanding the Australian depots on Salisbury Plain, whose capacity was great but whose judgment and powers of leadership were not trusted. Birdwood felt sure that he himself would be able to carry on the administration of the A.I.F. at his new army headquarters. White, the chief supporter of the system, and Dodds would still be at his elbow; the Australian divisions would probably be in his army; all danger of M'Cay's securing the command would be averted; and last, but not least, Birdwood himself would maintain his connection with the A.I.F., a condition which he intensely desired and which certainly would please the troops.

For these reasons he asked to be allowed to retain the administrative command when accepting that of the Fifth Army. Haig agreed, subject to the Australian Government's consent.

For a few days General Birdwood imparted the news of his approaching departure, and of the consequent changes, only to Generals White, Monash, and Hobbs. Each of these expressed his fear that, if Birdwood relinquished the administrative command, M'Cay would endeavour to succeed him, and all expressed relief when Birdwood told them that he hoped to retain that control. In France the promotions at the top of the A I F.

ladder would make necessary other movements on the next rungs. As chief of the corps staff General White would be replaced by Col. Blamey, another officer of the Australian permanent staff who had passed through the Staff College and, except for a short term in command of the 2nd Battalion and 1st Brigade, had been employed continuously on the staff, rising from G.S.O. (3) of the 1st Division at Mena camp to be its G.S.O. (1) at Pozières in 1916. A man of nimble intellect and wide comprehension, he had set himself to follow the footsteps of White, whom he greatly admired. Blamey had no real competitor in the present selection; his capacity was outstanding, and no other available officer of the general staff in the Australian divisions had anything approaching his experience. Apart from some possible doubt as to his possessing the necessary tact, there was never any question as to his suitability for the post.<sup>15</sup> Somewhat less easy was the choice of an officer to command the 3rd Division in place of Monash, but Birdwood had for several months been contemplating the appointment of Australian leaders to the 1st and 2nd Divisions, whose British commanders (Walker and Smyth) at his request were to be transferred to commands in the British Army as soon as suitable vacancies occurred.<sup>16</sup> The Australian officers with whom Birdwood had decided to fill the next vacancies were Brig.-Genls. Rosenthal of the 9th Brigade, Glasgow of the 13th, Gellibrand of the 12th, and, after them, Brand of the 4th.<sup>17</sup> For particular reasons he resolved that Monash should be succeeded in the 3rd Division by Gellibrand.<sup>18</sup> Rosenthal would go at once to the 2nd Division, which General Smyth

<sup>15</sup> His place in the 1st Div. was taken at first by Maj. G. F. G. Wieck, and later by Lt.-Col. A. M. Ross.

<sup>16</sup> The letter stating that he could replace them (and also Br.-Gens. Lesslie and Hobkirk) by Australians was sent on 5 Mar. 1918.—See *Vol. V*, p. 15; for an estimate of their services, see *ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>17</sup> Estimates of these officers have been given in previous volumes of this work: of Rosenthal in *Vol. V* (pp. 300-1), Glasgow *Vols. III* (pp. 839-40) and *V* (pp. 571-2); Gellibrand *Vols. I* (pp. 79-81), *III* (pp. 601-2), and *IV* (pp. 482-3); Brand *Vol. I* (pp. 134-5).

<sup>18</sup> Monash (whom Birdwood consulted) would have liked to give it to Br.-Gen. McNicoll (10th), in whom he had special faith, and who was senior to all three. Rosenthal was a fellow brigadier in the 3rd Div., and his appointment over McNicoll's head might be somewhat galling to the latter. It was to avoid this that the 3rd was given to Gellibrand, a Tasmanian, who had served for many years as an officer in the British Army and passed through the Staff College. He had been almost continuously with the A.I.F. in the field, whereas McNicoll, through wounds, had been for a year and a half away from the front. Monash, after talking them over, agreed with these decisions.

was leaving immediately;<sup>19</sup> Glasgow would go to the 1st as soon as G.H.Q. provided a British appointment for General Walker, who, in accordance with Birdwood's wish, would be the last British officer to leave the A.I.F. Gellibrand's brigade (12th) would be given to Lieut.-Col. Leane of the 48th, an experienced and capable leader of outstanding spirit; and Rosenthal's was allotted to Lieut.-Col. Goddard, its senior battalion commander, whose conduct of the fighting at Villers-Bretonneux on April 4th had brought him much credit.

Birdwood on May 13th cabled his proposals to the Minister for Defence stating his reasons and asking approval. In his reply Senator Pearce agreed but suggested that White might stay at corps headquarters for three months with Blamey as his understudy. Birdwood's continuance in the administrative command was only provisionally approved pending Cabinet consideration. Before this reply was received Blamey had been brought down from Flanders to understudy the part of White, who would stay on until Monash was satisfied.

Blamey's arrival at corps headquarters on May 16th was the first outward sign of the impending changes, and from that day the news began to spread, though only gradually, among the five divisions. Birdwood was known to almost every man of them and his approaching departure was almost completely unexpected. It is safe to say that every one heard it with a sharp pang of regret.<sup>20</sup> But the first shock was quickly followed by growing satisfaction that an Australian was now in command of the corps. To most of the troops outside his own division Monash was then merely a name; though he was

**An  
objection  
raised**

<sup>19</sup> He was appointed on May 21 to command the 58th Div (which, under Maj-Gen. Cator, had fought beside the Australians at Villers-Bretonneux). Like Walker, Smyth displayed a most generous spirit. He wrote to Monash "I rejoice to think that you will lead that Corps to further victories, and that the ambition is being realised of placing it upon a strictly territorial basis throughout, including every branch of the staff. The fortune of war has indeed treated me kindly in enabling me to have the honour of being associated with your historic force." After the war Gen. Smyth transferred his home to Australia, settling on the land in Victoria.

<sup>20</sup> A diarist notes the first expressions of opinion that he heard. A man of the 2nd Div., casually met, said: "I hear we're losing our great general . . . General Birdwood. The boys won't like that." A staff officer said it was "bad luck losing White." A brigadier remarked that one thing pleased him—Birdwood was still retaining his connection with the A.I.F. as its G.O.C.

reputed to be thoughtful for his men, his capacity was known to few. Yet most welcomed him keenly.

But there was one section to which the event came as a bitter disappointment. This was a small group, mainly of staff or others closely associated with headquarters—but including several of the most prominent and honoured names in the force—who since its earliest days had been associated with General White, and who recognised, as others had no opportunity of doing, not merely the brilliance of his intellect but the nobility of his character and the outstanding part—far beyond that of any other leader—that (as chief-of-staff first to Bridges and then to Birdwood) he had played in building up the Australian Imperial Force. By these observers since the death of Bridges he had always been held as easily first among the Australian leaders, but his guiding rule of conduct was well summed up by his old chief, Lieut.-General Sir Edward Hutton, who in 1916, hearing in England many encomiums upon his work in Gallipoli, wrote to him:

Go on as you have begun. Oblivious for yourself and of your own interests or your own future, do what you know to be right and shame the devil.

How for three and a half crowded years White had lavished mental, moral, and physical effort in accordance with that principle, tactfully guiding but, where necessary, rigidly confronting those in higher as well as in lower authority, sacrificing without a thought his own chances of advancement where he felt that the interest of the Allies or the A.I.F. required it, only those closely associated with him knew. He could already have been chief of the general staff of one of Haig's armies, but had refused the appointment because he felt that his duty lay in helping Birdwood with the A.I.F. That this maker of the A.I.F. should now be not merely passed over for its command, but actually withdrawn from its service, seemed to this not unimportant section a deplorable circumstance. That Monash was in some respects an outstandingly capable commander was well recognised in staff circles, but though a lucid thinker, a wonderful organiser, and accustomed to take endless pains, he had not the physical audacity that Australian troops were thought to require in their leaders, and it was for his ability

in administration rather than for tactical skill that he was then reputed. Moreover, a few of those who knew both men doubted whether Monash's judgment would be as resistant as White's to the promptings of personal ambition or whether he was as well equipped to overbear a wrongly insistent superior or the strain of a great disaster. They knew that Monash had an almost Napoleonic skill in transmitting the impression of his capacity, and there was some belief—quite erroneous, as appeared later—that he had sought this appointment by every means in his power.<sup>21</sup> It was realised that White's conception of loyalty, on the other hand, would not allow him to raise a finger to grasp any advancement that did not come to him in accordance with the strict usages of the army.

Although these or similar views were entertained separately by a number of prominent Australian soldiers and officials, most of whom probably thought them more widespread than was the case, it is unlikely that the opinions would have resulted in action had they not been shared by one who was free to act, if he chose, unbound by duty towards the military chiefs. The senior war correspondent of the A.I.F., Bean, had retained his civilian status deliberately, on the advice of Birdwood and White,<sup>22</sup> who held that he should be free of their control as regards his work, and able to express an independent opinion—whether adverse to themselves or not—upon any matter concerning the Australian force, subject only to the rules of censorship. When on May 16th Birdwood informed Bean of the proposed appointments and that the Australian Government had been asked to approve of them, the matter was immediately discussed with deep concern at the Australian correspondents' headquarters at the Brewery Farm, Querrieu.<sup>23</sup> The Australian Government might be petitioned through Keith Murdoch in London, Murdoch being in constant communication with the

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<sup>21</sup> It was known that, when the three new Australian divisions were being formed in Jan. 1916, Monash had suggested to Br.-Gen. Holmes that a protest should be made against the appointment of a British leader for the 4th Div., and that Holmes had refused. It was not, however, known that Monash had then accepted Holmes's advice. In his *War Letters* (pp. 107-8) he says, "I have firmly resolved not to intrigue or canvas for promotion in any way, and if Australia chooses to let her forces be exploited to find jobs for unemployed senior British officers, that is not my affair."

<sup>22</sup> He was graded as captain, but the position did not carry rank, though the title was, by mistake, often given to him.

<sup>23</sup> See p. 8

Australian Prime Minister, W. M. Hughes, to whom, by arrangement, he cabled more or less "inside" information concerning the course of the war. It was decided to urge the Government to give Monash the administrative command and White the command of the corps—the conviction being that these offices obviously suited their respective capacities. It was strongly argued that, if Birdwood accepted a post that would immerse him in interests outside the A.I.F., he could not adequately discharge as a "side line" so great a business as the administration of the A.I.F., and that any attempt to do so must end in failure. In raising this question the little group at the Farm only forestalled the certain course of events—the problem would inevitably have called for solution in the near future. But by the manner of and reason for its raising it became entangled in personalities which obscured the true issue, and a final answer to it was never given. On May 18th Bean, who at all times was left free to travel where he liked within the Australian sphere, from front line to Horseferry Road, crossed to London with Will Dyson, the official artist, and eventually swung Murdoch to the desired view concerning the active and administrative commands. Murdoch promised to telegraph to W. M. Hughes, then arriving with Sir Joseph Cook in western America on his way to the Imperial War Conference. Murdoch's cable painted a picture in much stronger colours than most writers would have considered justifiable,<sup>24</sup> and ended by urging Hughes to have the appointments made "temporary," so that the decision might be deferred until he arrived in London.

Meanwhile Bean, returning to France, had informed White and Birdwood of his visit to London and of the objections raised to Birdwood's retention of the A.I.F. command. On May 19th Birdwood had cabled to the Minister for Defence urging that he should be confirmed in it:

I am prepared (he added) to be relieved of the command of my army rather than be cut off from my old comrades.

Col. Dodds, D.A.G., A.I.F., also telegraphed that the delay in making the appointments was having a disturbing effect on

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<sup>24</sup> Murdoch was, however, doubtless misled by Bean and Dyson, who believed that their views represented those widely held in the A.I.F.

the minds of senior officers at a critical moment.<sup>25</sup> The Cabinet in Australia had already, on May 21st, approved of Birdwood's retention of the administrative command. The orders for the new appointments were promulgated on the 23rd. Meanwhile, however, Murdoch's cable had reached the Australian Prime Minister and had immediate effect. On May 24th the Minister for Defence in Melbourne received a cable from Hughes urging that the matters for decision "be held over until our arrival in London." There followed one from General Birdwood stating that the Army Council had decided that his appointment to command an army was only temporary. It seems probable that this development may have been due to Murdoch's direct influence with Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, whose confidence he enjoyed.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, at 11 a.m. on May 31st, Birdwood and White left the Australian Corps Headquarters for that of the Fifth Army, and Monash, promoted to lieutenant-general, with Blamey as his chief staff officer, took control of the Australian Corps.

What manner of man was the citizen soldier who amid this unfortunate controversy—the occurrence of which was unknown to any but a few of the leaders—was called to command the Australian Corps?

It may be safely premised that, if those who were endeavouring to unseat him had known the life story of John Monash, no voice would have been raised against his appointment even if some continued to doubt—as indeed they may do to this day—whether in all possibilities it was the best. Monash was born on the 23rd of June, 1865, at 1 Rachel Terrace, Dudley Street, West Melbourne, the eldest child of young

<sup>25</sup> The reference was perhaps chiefly to Br.-Gen. Elliott, whose seniority was the same as Gellibrand's and Glasgow's. He felt himself to be superseded by Gellibrand's promotion and wrote most vehemently to White. White gave him the opportunity of withdrawing this letter without its being shown to Birdwood, and Elliott took advantage of this generosity and did so. But to the end of his life he deeply resented this "supersession." Actually Birdwood was a keen admirer of most of his qualities, but believed that an erratic quality in his judgment unfitted him for higher command than he then held.

<sup>26</sup> Murdoch invited Lord Milner, Mr. Bonar Law, and Sir Henry Wilson to meet Hughes at a private dinner party on his arrival in London, in order to enable the Australian Prime Minister "to secure a thorough grip of the situation."

Jewish parents married two years before at Stettin in Pomerania (North Prussia). His father, Louis Monash, had emigrated to Australia in 1853<sup>27</sup> to seek his fortune on the gold-fields, but, finding better prospects in commerce, entered into partnership with Mr. L. Martin as an importer of fancy goods.<sup>28</sup> Late in 1862, at the age of 31, he made a voyage to Europe to secure stock and visit his people, and there met and married Bertha Manasse, ten years younger, sister of his brother's wife. In 1863 they returned to Melbourne, and here the first nine years of John Monash's life were spent. His mother was a cultured woman who taught her little son at the age of five to play the piano,<sup>29</sup> and trained her children, when a little older, to regard it as a privilege to read to her Dickens, Scott, Lytton, George Eliot as well as German and French classics in the original tongues.<sup>30</sup> John's first school was St. Stephen's, Docker's Hill, Richmond, where the attention of the headmaster was attracted by his capacity in English subjects, and that of the boys by his skill for amusing them with drawings. But it was at the age of nine, on his father's taking up business in 1874 in the remote country town of Jerilderie in New South Wales, that he came under a schoolmaster, William Elliott, whose influence powerfully moulded him and who remained his friend through life.<sup>31</sup> At Jerilderie the boy learned to ride, and the delight of nearly every day was a brisk canter in the cool of evening, he on his small bay mare beside his mother on her big chestnut. Horse and bullock teams brought the merchandise to Jerilderie in those days, and

<sup>27</sup> Louis Monash was born at Krotoschin, Poland, in 1831, and came to Australia in the ship *Julius Caesar*.

<sup>28</sup> The firm was Martin & Monash, 19 Little Collins Street.

<sup>29</sup> In April, 1871, he and his fond teacher proudly produced a "piece" as a surprise on his father's birthday.

<sup>30</sup> For most of the details here given of his life in Australia the writer is indebted to an admirable monograph written by his son-in-law, Dr. Gershon Bennett, and read before the Victorian Jewish Graduates and Undergraduates' Association as the first Monash Oration. Miss Mathilde Monash also assisted with many interesting reminiscences.

<sup>31</sup> He taught John Monash much that was outside the school routine, including some higher mathematics. Later Elliott became the proprietor of a newspaper in Jerilderie. He became well known in Australia for his unwilling part in the raid of the Kelly gang of bushrangers on Jerilderie in Feb. 1879, during which they also visited Louis Monash's store. Louis Monash afterwards moved to Narrandera, visiting his family at intervals until 1883, when he returned to Melbourne, where he died in 1894. Besides John he had two children—Mathilde (born at Church Street, Richmond, in 1869), and Louise (born at Clifton Street, Richmond, in 1873). Louise married a distinguished scientist, Walter Rosenhain, who did important work in England during the war.



kangaroos thronged the bush, of which the boy learned something on long rambles with other boys. At ten he was set to teach the more backward children at school. He was also an able organiser of pranks with his sister as an enthusiastic assistant.

After three years at Jerilderie Mrs. Monash brought back her children to Melbourne<sup>32</sup> for their education, a course urged by Mr. Elliott. Thus at twelve John entered Scotch College,<sup>33</sup> one of the most famous of Australian public schools. Games were not then the fetish that they became a few years later. Monash was not good at them and had no conception of their tradition; in 1918, arguing that credit for Australian victories was being withheld, he said that Australians were

by nature and instinct sportsmen, and that they would refuse to go on playing any game in which their scores were not put up on the scoring-board<sup>34</sup>

and he was so pleased with this illustration that he frequently repeated it. As a boy he with some companions attended evening classes in gymnastics away from school, but his main physical recreation, especially in after life, was walking, often in mountainous parts of the bush. Most of his spare time was given to other interests. Nearly every year that he spent at Scotch College he won an English Essay Prize<sup>35</sup> and at fourteen he matriculated for the University of Melbourne, although he remained at school for another two years. Finally, in 1881, he dropped the classics but was "dux" (head boy) in mathematics and modern languages, and "equal-dux" of the school. The dux in 1880 had been James Whiteside M'Cay. Monash also won an exhibition in mathematics, of the value of £25.

With this slender provision for both fees and books he entered Melbourne University. There now opened for him a field of marvel and delight in which for two years his omnivorous mind roamed at will, taking in little that would help him to answer likely examination questions but vast quantities of the

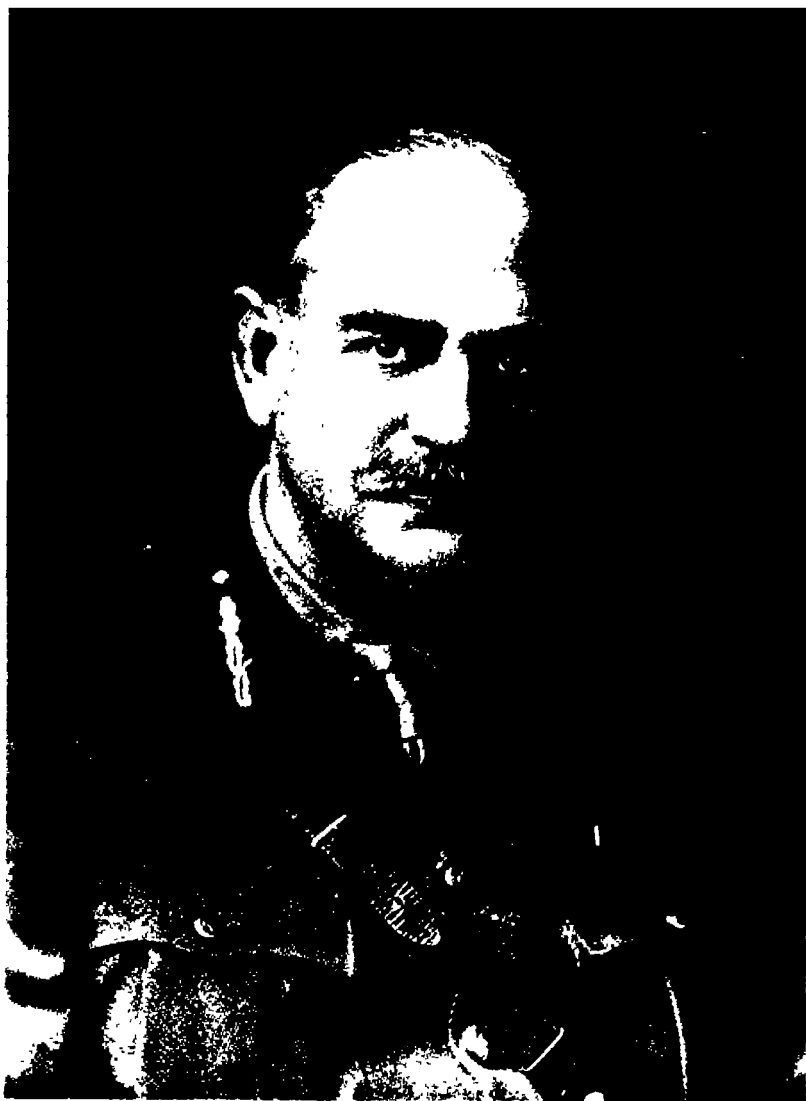
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<sup>32</sup> Then and throughout John's school and early university days they lived at Clifton Street, Richmond, but later moved to St. James's Park, Hawthorn.

<sup>33</sup> Then at East Melbourne

<sup>34</sup> *War Letters of General Monash*, p. 268.

<sup>35</sup> His most notable essay is said to have been one on Macbeth, founded on a German criticism.



II. LIEUT-GENERAL SIR JOHN MONASH, COMMANDER OF THE AUSTRALIAN  
CORPS FROM 31ST MAY, 1918 UNTIL AFTER THE ARMISTICE

*Photo by Elliott & Fry, London*  
*Aust. War Memorial Collection No. H17,424*

*To face p. 200.*



# 12. THE COUNTRY AROUND MORLANCOURT

View into Morlancourt pan photographed by No 3 Squadron A F C on 22nd July, 1918 from the south-west above the farthest point taken by Australians. The view shows the nature of the country, sunken roads, banks, etc. (The hills are steeper than are indicated in the photograph)

To face p 201.

amazingly deep and general knowledge that afterwards stored that immense repository, giving him interests in—and some degree of power over—most men and things that he met, enabling him to pass a valuable judgment upon almost any problem that life presented to him. He often afterwards complained that the university lecturers of his day, instead of providing the food for which his young mind was hungry, appeared to direct their efforts to hammering points taken from a stereotyped syllabus into the heads of the duller pupils. Consequently he “cut” most lectures, where attendance was not then compulsory, but spent eager days digging into every department of knowledge that interested him—digging, consequently, in almost every direction. The part of his exhibition not required for his university fees he expended on books. The day after receiving the money he bought the *Electra* of Sophocles, a Latin-English dictionary, two volumes of Carlyle, Adam Smith’s essays, and a volume of de Quincey; and soon after this Hume’s *Essays*, Tom Hood’s poems, Gibbon’s *Life and Letters* with the *History of the Crusades*, Sale’s *Translation of the Koran*, the works of Shelley and Coleridge, Josephus’ *Wars of the Jews*, Pepys’ *Diary*, and 2s. 10d. worth of penny biographies of famous men. These were only the beginnings of his own library—most of his reading was done either in the Melbourne Public Library or that of the University.

Reading was only one method in his impetuous onslaught upon the whole domain of knowledge. He attended the law courts to hear legal argument and Parliament to drink in debates; he was prominent in debating societies, and took regular lessons in painting. He wrote essays, and, for the newspapers, articles and letters. He practised carpentry as a hobby and had a passion for music. His diary gives some vivid glimpses of his mental ranging during this phase.

14th July 1882. In the evening went to Debating Society and heard an essay by Mr. Beaver on Australian Exploration, the greater part of which I recognised as copied, word for word, from Sutherland’s history.

18th July 1882. Although I went early to the University I only attended the Science lecture. The remaining time I spent reading Macaulay’s *Life, Letters, and Diary* by his nephew. It probably will have the effect of altering the style of my diary.

11th August 1882. Went this morning to the Supreme Court and

heard two splendid speeches by Purves and Madden each occupying one and a half hours. . . . Took six closely written pages of extracts from Sale's *Preliminary Discourse on the Koran*. Will read the Koran after the fashion of the old priests—by sections, at least a section a day.

At the end of his first year of the "Arts" course came the examinations and catastrophe.

25th November 1882. It is all over at last. I went to the University in the morning to inquire about results, receiving condolences from everywhere. . . . When the result became known at home there was great mourning, and I soon felt fit to drown myself.

He managed, however, to pass with ease the supplementary examination soon afterwards, and in his second year, though his raids upon all branches of knowledge resembled those of the first, he paid more attention to lectures, and did well academically.

But at this stage, when he was eighteen, lack of funds began to hamper his studies and he had to take pupils in order to remain at the University. At this time also he became intensely interested in engineering construction and walked all over Melbourne to watch buildings being erected or dredges operating. At the same time, apart from athletics, he lived a full university life. He played chess—on active service a generation later he carried a small chessboard in his kit—and he was elected to the Committee of Students of the University. But possibly it was his reading of war history—or conceivably a lecture by Archibald Forbes to which he listened in July, 1882—that caused him in 1884 to enter the original company of the University Rifles of the Victoria militia, in which he rose to be a colour-sergeant.

In 1884, having to suspend his course at the University in order to work for his living, he secured a position on the works then beginning for Princes Bridge. He was helped by having had at the University some tuition in surveying, and within two years he was given charge of the earthworks on both banks of the Yarra and of all the masonry. In 1886 David Munro & Coy, for whom he was working, employed him on other bridge works. In 1887 came another milestone in his life. The University Militia Company being disbanded in consequence of the irregular attendances of students, John

Monash at once applied for a commission in the garrison artillery. His diary of March 6th says:

The undercurrent of my thoughts has been running strongly on military matters. Yesterday things came to a finality. I have been attached to Major Goldstein's battery. . . . A combination of military and engineering professions is a possibility that is before me.

In 1891 he took his degree of B.C.E. In addition, finding that knowledge of law would be invaluable in his work as an engineer, he decided to qualify in that subject and by 1895 he had taken his B.A. and LL.B. In spite of his impetuous bursts into every field of knowledge, it must not be imagined that he was an unmethodical browser. In later years he mapped every day to a time-table, allowing, like a good soldier, ten spare minutes between each of the main occupations in order that he might make up leeway or, if he were up to time, might relax. He indexed and filed every letter, and catalogued and cross-catalogued his books. Among his private papers is a small card, neatly made out in his strong handwriting when he was leaving corps headquarters in France for his London leave. It shows the precise contents not only of every package that he took with him, but of every pocket. And in his university years, as throughout his life, his day began at 6.30 a.m. and often finished at 1.30 next morning.

But never, probably, were his vast powers of thought and action more keenly employed than during the years in which he had to build up his professional position. In 1893, when he was assistant engineer and chief draughtsman to the Melbourne Harbour Trust and had further qualified for municipal engineer, engineer for water supply, and patent attorney, the Australian land boom burst, and next year the Trust had to reduce its staff. He was now 28, married, and unemployed, but he faced the depression by launching into practice as consulting engineer and patent attorney. There is no space here to tell how work began to come in to him, especially from the other States; he was called in to advise on the Bundaberg-Gladstone railway in Queensland, the Mullewa-Cue railway in Western Australia, the Kelly Basin-Gormanston line in Tasmania. The King River bridge on the Burnie-Zeehan line was built to his design. He was constantly called in as an expert

witness in lawsuits, including that concerning the riparian rights of the great McCaughey estate in Riverina. From 1896 onwards he made a specialty of construction in reinforced concrete<sup>36</sup> and quickly built up a great practice in this branch of engineering. In 1912 he was elected President of the Victorian Institute of Engineers and Member of the Council of the University of Melbourne.

Meanwhile his work in the militia had continued. He rose to major in the artillery in 1897; lieutenant-colonel in the intelligence corps—in which he served immediately under his old schoolfellow, Col. J. W. M'Cay—in 1908; and finally colonel commanding the 13th Infantry Brigade of the Citizen Forces in 1913. It was in this capacity that he addressed his commanders at the end of the field day of which Sir Ian Hamilton, then inspecting the Australian defences, wrote in *Gallipoli Diary*:

I have a clear memory of him standing under a gum-tree at Lilydale, near Melbourne, holding a conference after the manoeuvre, when it had been even hotter than it is here now. I was prepared for intelligent criticisms but I thought they would be so wrapped up in the cotton wool of politeness that no one would be very much impressed. On the contrary, he stated his opinions in the most direct, blunt telling way. The fact was noted in my report.

At the outbreak of the Great War he succeeded Col. M'Cay as chief censor, and as such had the unpleasant duty of arranging for the internment of some of the German scientists who had arrived for the session of the British Association for the Advancement of Science—colleagues whom, as a leader in one branch of science and an expert in many, he had been anxious to welcome. Within a month of this appointment he was offered the command of the 4th Infantry Brigade of the A.I.F., which—again on the heels of M'Cay, who had been given the 2nd Brigade—he accepted.

The chief incidents of his career in the A.I.F. from that time until the day, less than four years later, when he took over at Bertangles the highest fighting command in the A.I.F., have been told in this history. Only the threads of that story need here be gathered. He was not helped, as were the com-

<sup>36</sup> In this year he designed the bridge over the Yarra at Anderson Street.

manders of the first three brigades, by having a professional officer for his brigade-major, and the training of the second contingent, with which he sailed, was necessarily more hurried than that of the first. Yet both were plunged into the Gallipoli Landing on the same day, and for over a month the 4th Brigade held the most difficult sector at Anzac. It was averred against Monash in those days that he was seldom seen in the front line, the complaints from Quinn's Post, where the problems were toughest and the danger greatest, being sometimes bitter. It was further stated that the disastrous attack by his brigade on May 2nd at Baby 700 had left him unstrung, as well it might, and at higher headquarters doubts were expressed as to how he would "stand up to" heavy strokes of adverse fortune. When Monash found he could not push on his exhausted troops after the first night's fighting in the Battle of Sari Bair, he said in distress to Maj. Allanson of the 6th Gurkhas, "I thought I could command men!" Yet some hours earlier in that night's march, when the unfortunate delay in Taylor's Gap occurred, he had grasped the situation firmly enough, going to the head of the column which had met some opposition, taking control of the guides, and setting it in motion again.

Undoubtedly there had been defects in his leadership in lower command, but they had largely been compensated for by the great care and capacity with which his arrangements were made, and at times his brilliance flashed through, astonishing those who observed it. An acquaintance who visited him during the afternoon before that same advance, in order to learn one or two useful points in the programme, has confessed to becoming almost spellbound as, in twenty minutes of transparently lucid exposition, the whole intricate scheme of operations was unfolded to him. Like some hundreds of others, who afterwards had a similar experience, he instantly recognised that he was listening to a master of clear thinking. The British commander of the 4th Division, Sir H. V. Cox—the same against whose appointment Monash had thought of protesting—afterwards told a friend that he made a point of being present, when possible, at Monash's conferences with his battalion commanders for the sheer pleasure and edification of hearing his expositions. As was said in the volume of this work dealing with the later events in Gallipoli, it was then



already predicted of him that he "would command a division better than a brigade, and a corps better than a division."<sup>37</sup> In July, 1916, when giving him command of the still untrained and unassembled 3rd Division, Birdwood recognised his peculiar capacity for organising and training; the one doubt concerned his bodily fitness to endure heavy strain. But by a self-imposed regime of abstinence and ample exercise, Monash avoided the danger of corpulency and, after the six months on Salisbury Plain, returned to France not only fitter in body but refreshed in mind.

The moulding of that magnificent division should have freed Monash from any doubt as to whether he could handle men: his untiring care, ensuring that much of the troops' leisure was healthily and pleasantly planned for, resulted in his taming the 3rd Division so far as an Australian force could be tamed and retain its full fighting value. The head of the Australian military police in France, Lieut.-Col. W. Smith, noted an extraordinary difference between the amount of military crime in this and the other Australian divisions. Yet Monash's attempt to increase *esprit de corps* by openly distinguishing his division from the other four failed, being based on a misconception of the outlook of the men whose pride was rather in being included with the others.<sup>38</sup> Monash's leadership as divisional commander was still hampered by an insufficient experience of the firing line, which made it difficult for him at all times to judge what was likely to be true or false in the reports of events there. He was inclined to believe the best story<sup>39</sup>—a tendency always dangerous in a commander. The war correspondents noted that he was always the best leader from whom to seek information before a fight but the worst to go to afterwards—he tended to think that everything had happened in accordance with plan, and closer inquiry usually

<sup>37</sup> *Vol II*, p. 588

<sup>38</sup> A symbol of his policy was the direction alluded to in *Vol. V* (p. 13), that the men of the 3rd Div. should wear their hat-brims turned down. Monash also ordered all members of his headquarters to wear on their arms the 3rd Div. H.Q. colour patch. The medical officers, however, were only attached, and should have been wearing the chocolate arm-patch of their branch of the service. Surg.-Gen. Howse, seeing in the order a challenge to his control—a point of principle which he held to be vital—insisted on Monash's countermanding the order, and obtained Birdwood's ruling. Monash urged all conceivable arguments, and finally made a personal appeal to Howse not to shake his prestige in the division; but, upon the failure of this plea, he accepted with a good grace.

<sup>39</sup> The instance most widely noted was when in his report of the 14th Bn.'s raid of 2-3 July, 1916, he included the story about the wounded throwing themselves on to the wire-entanglement to form a bridge for others to pass over.

proved that, even in the best planned battles, it had not. Moreover the fact that in dealing with his commanders he did not insist on the standard of front-line supervision that was customary in the A.I.F. resulted in at least one important subordinate leaving this duty to juniors. Monash could not always distinguish between genuine fighting leaders and some who made a better show on parade.

But these shortcomings had been less important in a divisional commander than in a brigadier, and, in contrast, his immense capacity for organisation had more scope. The first great battle of his division was Messines—a set-piece precisely suiting his genius—and he was determined to make a certainty of the division's success. He accordingly organised its performance with the minuteness usual in a company raid. Yet in this he was far from "doing the work of a corporal" by trying to impose detailed plans upon all sections of his troops. No leader was readier to ask the opinions of subordinates, and his plans were constantly dependent upon them. Indeed with all his genius for organisation he knew, and stated with regret, that he was not so strong in invention. But his immense capacity for work enabled him to consult each important junior, whether in the big conferences for which his regime was famous or individually, and to use his great intellect not only in evolving his own plan but in helping subordinates to make their plans in conformity with the greater scheme.

In intellectual development John Monash was as catholic as Napoleon; his mind knew no horizon except that of the universe, and every item of knowledge that it daily acquired was docketed for future use. Like that great prototype he ranged leagues beyond the intellectual confines of most soldiers. He could meet economists, artists, philosophers, educationists, lawyers, astronomers on their own ground, drawing them out with intelligent questions obviously based on knowledge, and by sympathetic listening extend the bounds of that knowledge still farther, and in such fields lay his delight. To military achievements, except as a means of renown and an instrument in saving the national or social order, he attached little importance.

I am very heartily sick of the whole war business (he wrote early in 1917).<sup>40</sup> Its horror, its ghastly inefficiency, its unspeakable cruelty

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted from Memorial Oration by Dr. Gershon Bennett.

and misery have always appalled me, but there is nothing to do but to set one's teeth and stick it out as long as one can.

Napoleon also spoke like that<sup>41</sup> and probably felt it—even at the height of his military glories he would rather have engaged his vast powers as a dictator of peaceful reconstruction. The intellect of John Monash, like his, was stored with knowledge sufficient for the greatest of rulers. Like Napoleon he could get full dramatic value out of a situation. Like him also he was loyal to his clan; at Australian Corps Headquarters his personal staff was Jewish, and men honoured him for this loyalty.

But, if the resemblance in mentality was striking, it ended there. The calculated audacity of the Corsican was replaced by prudence adhered to as a principle. Unlike Birdwood, Monash took no delight in running bodily risk. It was typical that, whereas Birdwood, being on leave in England when the Germans attacked in April, 1918, seized the chance of crossing the Channel by an air force machine in order to reach the front in a few hours, Monash four months later, in the climax of his life, when informed that he might at any moment be required in France to play his part in the Allies' great offensive, arranged for a destroyer to stand by at Dover, "as I was not quite prepared for the alternative proposition of flying across."<sup>42</sup> There was never any sign that he lacked physical courage; rather he was determined to avoid all except inevitable risks, whereas Birdwood, with his eye on the effect among his men, was resolved to share some of their dangers. Thus Birdwood kept his headquarters in Hazebrouck when the house next door was shattered by the searching fire of a monster gun, but Monash withdrew his from Bailleul and, later, from Franvillers as soon as those towns were uncomfortably shelled.

There was much less of the gambler in John Monash than in Napoleon, and much more of the genuine artist. Possibly the musician's sense of symphonic composition helped him in his operations of war. But, vividly illuminating as is his conception of a battle-plan as an orchestral score, each group of instruments coming in at the precise moment to play its part

<sup>41</sup> Compare his statement to Josephine: "Do you think I enjoy it? You know I can do other things than waging war, but I am the bond slave of necessity."

<sup>42</sup> *War Letters*, p. 253.

in the concert of sound,<sup>43</sup> this relates only to the actual development of his set-piece battles and gives no notion of the vast care of preparation in getting men and material to the right place in the right time to play their parts. It was as engineer rather than artist that he consciously built these great static battle-plans, using the same care and, on the administrative side, largely the same methods with which he would design and organise the construction of a bridge. His last great fight at the Hindenburg Line he described—before the battle and after—as “simply a problem of engineering,” and some years later, when seeking the degree of Doctor of Engineering of Melbourne University, he submitted his book, *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*, as a thesis on the application of the principles of engineering to the conduct of war. He cared for his men just as he would for his workers—their welfare was a necessary condition of their efficiency, and although, tested by the casualty lists, he was not more economic of them in battle or raids than other commanders—indeed the losses of his brigade, division, and corps were, if anything higher than the average in the A.I.F.—the expenditure of their lives was never due to lack of care in thinking out and preparing operations. As every effective soldier must be, he could be ruthless where results required it—to fail in this would be merely to run the risk of failure in the use of this barbarous method. In the conduct of war generosity and humanity—or the appearance of them—are essential only in two respects: the lack of them in dealings with one’s own side destroys morale, and in dealings with the enemy may render unattainable the peace for which the war is waged. Monash was eager for military glory; but of none of his battles can it be said that he embarked upon it for that reason. He was naturally humane. But his love of his well kept garden (of which he often spoke during the war), and of walking in the bush; and of the piano, which he played beautifully; and, in later life, his devotion to his grandchildren, whom he taught to read after himself especially studying phonetics and the teaching of young children<sup>44</sup>—all these attributes are irrelevant to his attitude towards war, which was

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<sup>43</sup> See *Australian Victories in France in 1918*, p. 56.

<sup>44</sup> Dr. Gershon Bennett says that he taught them daily from 9 till 9.15 a.m., so that they could read at 5 years of age. Every night that he spent at home he read for an hour and a half to his daughter and son-in-law

entirely that of a realist. Probably his heart affected little his dealing either with the enemy or with his own troops; but in every dimension the range of his thought and the insistence of his care were greater than those of any other leader in the A.I.F. "His was the most highly trained mind that I had to deal with in the war," writes General Blamey, the chief of his staff.

But it was typical of his mind that as soon as construction was finished his care ended. For all his earlier devotion to history and literature, when his military achievements were passed and it came to writing of them, he was incredibly careless; like a painter, he splashed his canvas with a large brush in order to produce a desired impression, with the result that his writings are full of errors in detail, not always unimportant. Probably this work also interested him only so far as it was also, in a sense, constructive—a means of obtaining wide recognition of the part played by himself and his troops; and, like all his other works, it was on the whole well designed for its purpose.<sup>45</sup>

From the first day of his command at Corps Headquarters his relations with his staff were admirable. With his extraordinary knowledge of most of its departments he combined great driving power and a most considerate mind. In the last six months Birdwood had made the headquarters almost completely Australian—only two of its leading figures, Brig.-Genls. Carruthers (D.A. and Q.M.G.) and Fraser<sup>46</sup> (B.G.H.A.) were British. Most Australians probably expected that Monash would have them replaced by Australians, but he retained both to the end. In the case of Fraser this may have been due to the fact that the whole of the heavy artillery of the corps was British.<sup>47</sup> In the case of Carruthers a junior, Lieut.-Col. Somerville,<sup>48</sup> an officer of the permanent Australian service, was recognised as an organiser of outstanding capacity, and Carruthers deliberately allowed him to play a leading part in

<sup>45</sup> Even his *War Letters*, though in a different category, are not wholly accurate.

<sup>46</sup> Br.-Gen L. D. Fraser, C.B., C.M.G. Royal Arty. B.G.H.A., Aust. Corps, 1916-18. Of London; b. 15 Apr. 1868. Died 4 Feb 1926.

<sup>47</sup> The two Australian siege batteries were then still with Second Army, where they supported the French D.A.N. at Kemmel and the Scherpenberg.

<sup>48</sup> Col. G. C. Somerville, C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. D.A.A. & Q.M.G., 1st Aust Div., 1915-16, A.A. & Q.M.G., 2nd Div., 1916-17; A.Q.M.G., Aust. Corps, 1917-18; Metropolitan Area Comdt., Sydney, since 1920. Of Sydney, b. Goulburn, N.S.W., 13 July 1878 (As Secretary of the Royal Agricultural Society of N. S. Wales since 1924, he is the organiser of the annual Royal Show in Sydney.)

the administration. Monash, apprehending that, if he dispensed with Carruthers, Somerville's activity might be restricted, retained the existing arrangement. The heads of other main departments of the staff—Brig.-Genls. Blamey (B.G.G.S.), Coxen (B.G.R.A.), Foott (Chief Engineer), all regulars, and Col. Barber (D.D.M.S.), a civilian—were men of unusual capacity.

Of course he (Monash) was lucky (wrote Col. Barber long afterwards) in that the corps was turned over to him as a perfect fighting machine. There was a wonderful spirit of cheerfulness and optimism in the corps when all the troops around us were in the depths of gloom, and we never looked back from this time onward.

He made the Australian Corps (says Gen. Rosenthal, commander of the 2nd Division) a team of willing workers.

The change in the character of the higher leadership of the Australian Corps at this time had important results upon its history. The combination of Generals Birdwood and White had united a rare natural leader—interested in men but not in organisation—with an assistant of undoubted brilliance in his profession and of definite genius for organisation. Both had been men of outstanding integrity—indeed of nobility—personal charm, and a high degree of moral courage. From the time of Monash's advent the corps had at its head a very great mind—certainly one of the greatest that has ever controlled a British military force—with an assistant whose capacity challenged comparison with White's. Both commander and staff officer were now organisers of first rate ability. In the control of his staff Monash's principles were—that by conference and continuous consultation it should resist the inevitable tendency to work in watertight compartments, and that it should always regard itself as the servant of its troops. Further, he wrote to a friend,<sup>49</sup>

it did not take me long to learn that the only ways to carry out the responsibilities of command were, firstly, to erect optimism into a creed for myself and for all my brigades, arms, and depots, and secondly, to try and deal with every task and every situation on the basis of simple business propositions, differing in no way from the problems of civil life except that they are governed by a special technique. The main thing is always to have a plan. . . .

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<sup>49</sup> Dr Meyer (See *War Letters*, p. 232)

The still unsettled questions involved in Birdwood's "temporary" appointment may here be briefly followed to their end. On reaching England early in June Mr. Hughes became convinced that there were grounds for objection to the continued tenure of the administrative command by Birdwood if his appointment to the Fifth Army were made permanent. The alternative so much feared—that M'Cay might be appointed to succeed him—was in no danger of being adopted; Hughes quickly formed the opinion that White and Monash were best suited for the two leading positions. By that time Monash was well seated and thoroughly successful in the corps command; and, although the attractiveness of the administrative command was purposely increased by the prospect of possible advancement to the rank of general, Monash had no intention of leaving—at least for the present—the command in the field which, even with lower rank, would still be much the more important in the public estimation. He wrote asking Mr. Hughes "upon every ground and in the best interests of the A.I.F." to retain the present system of administration, "which has worked so well and kept the A.I.F. so efficient, so contented, and so entirely free from intrigue." He asked the Prime Minister to visit the force in France when he would discover that the existing regime was almost universally supported by all senior officers qualified to express an opinion. Writing to his family a little later, he said: "My own personal view is that I cannot relinquish the corps command until I have made a proved success of it. . . . I propose therefore to . . . insist upon retaining the command of the corps. In this battle I possess, of course, very many and very strong cards and some of them are trump cards among which is my undoubted belief that both Rawlinson and the Chief (Haig) will see me through."

He never had to use them. In the first place General White, though he would have greatly preferred the corps command, resisted, as strongly as Monash, the alterations now suggested. In a letter he told Keith Murdoch that he would fight him to the end over the matter; and, when eventually sent for from London and consulted by Hughes as to the officers most suitable to command the corps, he answered: "First Monash, next

Hobbs." "And isn't there a man named White?" said the Prime Minister. With a smile White waved away the suggestion. He would have taken the position only if ordered to do so, and if Monash voluntarily left it. At the beginning of July Hughes visited the troops in France and, as Monash had requested, consulted the Australian divisional commanders and several other senior officers and found nearly all of them to be thoroughly satisfied with the existing arrangements; they were full of confidence in General Monash, and most of them supported his assurance to the Prime Minister that the retention of Birdwood as G.O.C., A.I.F., was in the best interests of the force.

Nevertheless Hughes was unshaken in the conviction that to administer the A.I.F. was a task for the full attention of a special commander. At this stage General Chauvel, in Palestine, being confidentially informed by Col. Dodds that an appointment was meditated, put in a claim for consideration if Birdwood gave up the command; but Hughes would have none but a leader experienced on the Western Front. Eventually, obtaining from the War Office notification that General Birdwood's command was made permanent, he decided to offer him the choice between keeping the administrative command of the A.I.F. or remaining with the Fifth Army. If, as Hughes expected, Birdwood decided to continue as army commander, the position of G.O.C., A.I.F.—possibly carrying the rank of full general—would probably be offered to Monash; if he refused it, to White. On August 12th Hughes wrote offering the full-time position to Birdwood. Birdwood consulted Haig, who expressed the opinion that he should accept, but, as the British Army was then engaged in a crucial offensive, should ask if the Australian Government could see its way to lend him to the British Army until November 30th. This apparently was done. It was not the result that Mr. Hughes or his advisers had wished or anticipated, but the existing arrangement was allowed to continue. By September difficulties had arisen and General Monash, feeling himself hampered by them in his conduct of fighting operations, was swinging to the conclusion that the administrative command should be transferred from Birdwood to himself, who would combine it with the active



command as for three years Birdwood had done. The Armistice found the temporary arrangement unchanged, but it was evident that the administrative command was now likely to increase in relative importance. At this stage Monash wrote:

The whole question of my future and my possible appointment as G.O.C., A.I.F. is still open. The events of the recent few weeks have rather delayed any further action by Hughes, but it is still quite on the cards that he may ask me to take up the supreme command of the A.I.F. so as to supervise demobilisation and repatriation. On the other hand . . . it is quite likely that General B. will be prepared to relinquish his army command and devote himself to the command of the higher administration of the A.I.F., that is, if Hughes can be got to agree to that course.

The Prime Minister's decision will be recorded in its place: it suffices here to note that from the end of May, 1918, so long as the five Australian infantry divisions continued to fight, Monash commanded the Australian Army Corps and Birdwood, with General White and Col. Dodds by his side, remained the administrative chief of the A.I.F. The attempt, based on various motives, to have this arrangement altered, had led only to a subconscious feeling of unsettlement at all the higher Australian headquarters. Fortunately the effects of this, as it turned out, were unimportant—there continued to be a marked happiness in the internal relations between the Australian staff and commanders under General Monash. The matter had really been decided by the appointments themselves before the effort to alter them was made. But, even to some of the civilians most deeply concerned, the result was strong proof that, in wartime administration as well as in tactics and strategy, when a decision is duly made it is better to let it be worked out than to risk confusion by immediately attempting to have it changed.

In England Maj.-General M'Cay continued to command the Australian depots at Salisbury Plain, and Brig.-Genl. Griffiths —pattern of all that was best in the administrative service—the A.I.F. Headquarters at Horseferry Road. In August, to the regret of every one, partly in consequence of the uncertainty as to the future control of the A.I.F., Griffiths asked

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to be allowed to return to Australia. He was persuaded to accept five months' leave, and his place was temporarily taken by Col. Dodds.<sup>60</sup> As the drafts from Australia dwindled and the combing-out of the training staffs to find officers and men for the front became increasingly necessary, M'Cay had reduced his training battalions from 15 in 1917 to 5<sup>61</sup> by the beginning of May, 1918. On the 6th of April 1918—apart from soldiers in hospital but including men who had recovered after hospital and nearly 2,000 recruits on the way from Australia—the total infantry reinforcement in sight for the five Australian divisions in France was just over 7,000, and about as many more were training in Australia. By again combing out all N.C.O.'s who could be spared from the training staffs, and sending them to France together with 2,000 partly trained men and a few of the best conducted military prisoners, specially released, M'Cay had managed to furnish most of the drafts required after the German March offensive, and to avert the breaking up of more than three infantry battalions. The training staff now mainly consisted of officers and men from France in need of rest and specially sent to England on a short tour of duty. Of the hard worked staff of Brig.-Genl. Griffiths at Horseferry Road, 1,727 in all, less than 400 clerks were fit men, and, of these, 250 were specialists of the pay branch, who were not available. In June a reduction of the establishment of the battalions throughout the British Army from 966 men to 900<sup>62</sup> furnished an additional 4,000 men; but it was certain that with heavy fighting a crisis in the matter of reinforcements for the A.I.F. would recur.

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<sup>60</sup> Dodds was succeeded at Birdwood's headquarters in France by Lt.-Col. J. L. Whitham. Griffiths travelled to Australia with Surg.-Gen. Howse, D.M.S., A.I.F., who, partly with a view to insisting on the maintenance of high physical standards, partly for private reasons, had obtained similar leave.

<sup>61</sup> Three of 3 companies, and two of 2 companies. The Australian system of training depots on Salisbury Plain has been described in *Vol. III* (pp. 167-72) and most admirably in *Vol. II* of the *Official History of the Australian Medical Services*.

<sup>62</sup> This had been urged by Foch and had already been carried out in the French Army. German battalions were now established at 980 including 130 of the machine-gun company. In July they were reduced to 880 including machine-gun company. The reduction in British battalions did not apply to officers.