



Major General The Honourable Sir William GLASGOW KCB, CMG, DSO

[1876 – 1955]



Major General Sir William Glasgow was a life-long member of the United Service Club and a distinguished soldier, politician and diplomat. The Club's dining room is named *The Glasgow Room* in his honour.

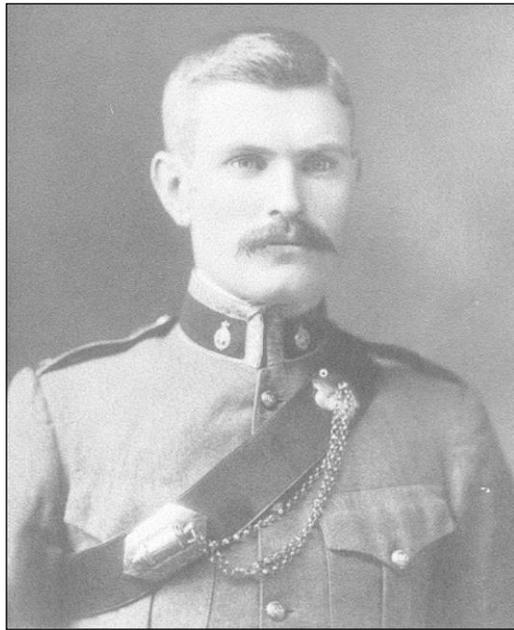
Thomas William Glasgow was born at Tiaro near Maryborough Queensland on 6 June 1876, the fourth child of an Irish farmer. He was educated at One Mile State School in Gympie and at Maryborough Grammar School. After leaving school he went to work as a junior clerk in the office of a mining company in Gympie. Later he worked as a clerk in the Queensland National Bank in Gympie. (Sir) Brudenell White, a clerk in a rival bank, was among his friends

Bill Glasgow joined the Wide Bay Regiment, Queensland Mounted Infantry, while still a teenager, giving up most of his week-ends to soldiering. In 1897 he was selected with nineteen others and he travelled to London to represent Queensland at the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Glasgow volunteered for service in South Africa and served as a Lieutenant in the 1st Queensland Mounted Infantry Contingent. He participated in the relief of Kimberley, the capture of Cronje's laager on the Modder, and the occupation of Bloemfontein in 1900. On 16 April 1901 he was Mentioned in Dispatches and awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO).

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

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A young Lieutenant Bill Glasgow

After returning to Australia, he formed a partnership with his younger brother Alexander (TW & A Glasgow), and they took over their father's grocery store in Gympie.

In 1903, Glasgow organised the 13th Light Horse Regiment at Gympie.

On 21 April 1904 he married Annie Isabel, the daughter of Jacob Stumm, the federal member for Lilley. He tired of storekeeping and bought a cattle station in central Queensland.

He was promoted to Captain in 1906 and to Major on 6 May 1912.

World War I

When war broke out in 1914 he volunteered for overseas service and was appointed to the AIF with the rank of Major in the 2nd Light Horse Regiment on 19 August 1914. Three of his six brothers also enlisted in the AIF. He embarked for Egypt on 24 September 1914 where his regiment trained until called forward for dismounted service at Anzac Cove.

Major Glasgow landed at Anzac on 12 May 1915. When Colonel Harry Chauvel of the 1st Light Horse Brigade reorganised the defences of Monash Valley, Glasgow was appointed second in command at Pope's Hill, under Lieutenant Colonel F Rowell of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment.

The idea was that the same staff would remain responsible for the post while the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Regiments rotated in weekly reliefs. Rowell subsequently became ill and died on 8 August 1915, leaving Glasgow in charge of the post.

On 7 August 1915 Major Glasgow led an attack on Dead Man's Ridge which had sweeping views of The Nek. After the failed attack on the Nek, Glasgow, realising that the ridge would now be attacked by the full force of the Turkish army, ordered a retreat. Glasgow was among the last to retire, carrying with him one of his wounded troopers. Of the 200 men in the attack, four officers and 56 other ranks had been killed and seven officers and 87 other ranks wounded. All but 46 had been killed or wounded. Every officer except Glasgow had been hit.

The next day he was appointed to command the regiment with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Just before the end of the Gallipoli campaign he took 'French leave'¹ from Lemnos, where he had been sent for a few days' rest, to return to Gallipoli to take away the remnants of his regiment. His inspiring voice and wise guidance were valued during those anxious hours.

In Egypt in March 1916 Glasgow was appointed commander of the 13th Infantry Brigade, which he commanded on the Western Front at Mouquet Farm in September 1916, Messines in June 1917, Polygon Wood in September 1918, and Dernacourt in April 1918 (where the brigade helped halt the German advance during the Spring Offensive).

Following the German attack which captured Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918, Brigadier General Glasgow's brigade was detached to support General Heneker's division which was under pressure and in some disarray.

At the Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux, Glasgow's 13th Brigade (as the right wing), and Harold ('Pompey') Elliott's 15th Brigade (as the left wing), recaptured the town of Villers-Bretonneux on 25 April 1918 after the Germans had overrun the 8th British Division under General William Heneker. This feat was described by Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash as *the turning-point of the war*.

Before the counter-attack, Glasgow, having reconnoitered the position, demurred at British orders to attack across the enemy's front. *Tell us what you want us to do Sir*, he said to Heneker, *but you must let us do it our own way*. He refused to attack at 8 pm: *If it was God Almighty who gave the order, we couldn't do it in day-light*. They attacked successfully at 10 pm. At the height of the battle, with the 13th Brigade surrounded on three sides, the Germans had sent Glasgow a message demanding that he surrender. *Tell them to go to Hell* was his response.

13th Brigade's battle procedure on the march to the battlefield, Glasgow's planning procedures, and his refusal to be bullied, remain outstanding examples of the degree of maturity and development of the AIF by this time.

On 30 June 1918 Glasgow was appointed to command the 1st Division which was fighting alongside the British in Flanders. On 8 August 1918 the fourth anniversary of Glasgow's enlistment, the 1st Division joined the other four Australian divisions on the Somme front, participating in the Battle of Amiens (which became the 'Hundred Day Offensive' that included capturing Lihons and Chuignes), and the Battle of the Hindenburg Line.

Glasgow remained with the 1st Division until the end of the war, embarked for Australia on 6 May 1919, and was demobilised on 19 August 1919.

For his services during the war, Major General Glasgow was made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG) in June 1916, a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) in December 1917, and was appointed Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KCB) in the 1919 New Year Honours' List. He was Mentioned in Dispatches nine times and was appointed an Officer of the Légion d'Honneur by the French.

Post War

After the war Sir William rejoined the Militia and commanded the 4th Division from 1921. He led the Anzac Day parade in Brisbane for twenty years.

Glasgow was elected to the Senate as a Nationalist in 1919. He became Minister for Home and Territories on 28 June 1926, and was Minister for Defence from April 1927 to October 1929. Out of office in 1929, he became deputy leader of the Opposition in the Senate.

In 1931 Labor polled well enough in Queensland (against the national trend) that Glasgow lost his seat. His political career over, Glasgow resumed his pastoral interests in Queensland where he became a director of several companies. In January 1936 he became a member of the Queensland board of advice of the National Bank of Australasia Ltd. As President of the Queensland branch of

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary records: "the custom (in the 18th century prevalent in France and sometimes imitated in England) of going away from a reception, etc. without 'taking leave' of the host or hostess". Hence, jocularly and in military parlance at the time, to 'take French leave' is to go away, or do anything, without permission or notice.

the United Australia Party he stressed the necessity for unity among the parties opposed to the 'extremists'.

On 24 December 1939 Sir William was appointed as the first Australian High Commissioner to Canada. Canada thus became only the fifth country in which Australia had diplomatic representatives. Glasgow built good relations with the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, and his ministers, but was not successful in getting Canadian support for Australian strategy in the Pacific. He did conclude a 'mutual aid' agreement between the two countries, resulting in Canada providing two merchant ships to Australia.

His work included negotiation on matters of policy regarding the Empire Air Training Scheme and he regularly visited the far-flung camps and schools in Canada where Australians were training or awaiting embarkation.

He made sure the airmen had good conditions and that mail and other amenities were promptly distributed. He established Anzac clubs in Ottawa and Halifax and during his tours publicised the Australian war effort. The University of Manitoba awarded him an honorary LL.D. in 1942.



Major General Sir William Glasgow, Australia's High Commissioner to Canada, speaks with aircrew of the British Commonwealth Air Training Scheme in the Anzac club.

In August 1943 and September 1944 Glasgow attended the Quebec Conferences between US President Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Churchill and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, where he represented Australian interests.

Glasgow's direct and frank approach won the trust of Prime Minister Mackenzie King and the Ministers for External Affairs, Defence, and Munitions and Supply. From the time of his arrival he advocated much closer liaison on Pacific strategy and dispositions. He was not so successful in enlisting Mackenzie King's support for Prime Minister John Curtin's idea of a British Commonwealth Council and secretariat. Canadian government advisers recommended Glasgow for consideration as Governor-General.



Glasgow (left) greets Robert Menzies (centre) with Canada's Prime Minister William Mackenzie King (right) on his arrival in Ottawa, Canada, in May 1941

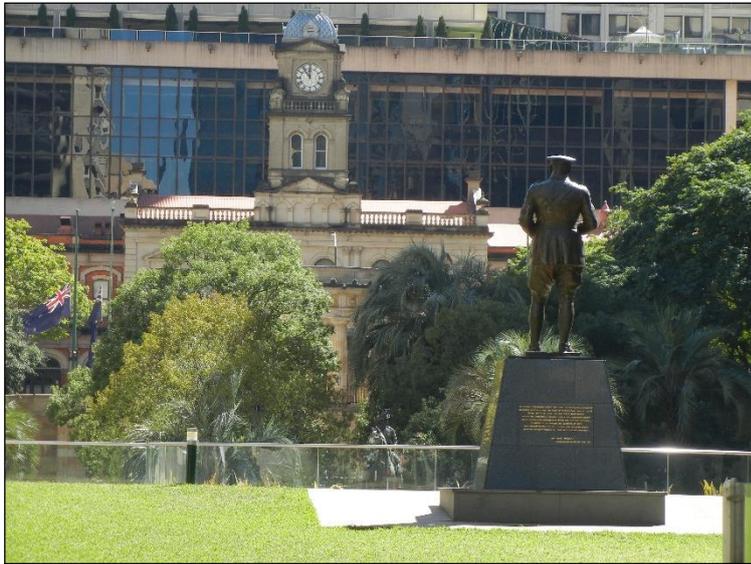
Sir William returned to Australia in 1945 and once again resumed his pastoral and business interests.

He died in Brisbane on 4 July 1955. He was given a state funeral and cremated.

In 1966 a bronze statue of Glasgow by Daphne Mayo was unveiled at the junction of Roma and Turbot streets in Brisbane. At the ceremony Sir Arthur Fadden described him as *one of the most distinguished soldiers of our age and generation*. It was later moved to Post Office Square where it now overlooks ANZAC Square.



Glasgow's statue at Post Office Square, Brisbane.



Glasgow's statue in Post Office Square overlooking ANZAC Square

The Man

Charles Bean described him as:

...the most forcible of the three strong brigadiers of the 4th Division. With keen blue eyes looking from under puckered humorous brows as shaggy as a deer-hound's; with the bushman's difficulty of verbal expression but sure sense of character and situations; with a fiery temper, but cool understanding and a firm control of men; with an entire absence of vanity, but translucent honesty and a standard of rectitude which gave confidence both to superiors and subordinates, he could - by a frown, a shrewd shake of the head, or a twinkle in [the eye] ... awaken in others more energy than would have been evoked by any amount of exhortation.

According to Monash:

Glasgow succeeded not so much by exceptional mental gifts, or by tactical skill of any very high order, as by his personal driving force and determination.

(Sir) Robert Menzies later described Glasgow as:

...the complete personal embodiment of the A.I.F.

Glasgow was a stern man in his military views. He joined Brigadier-General William Holmes in 1917 in requesting an amendment of the Defence Act to bring it into line with British and New Zealand law so that it would be possible to inflict the death penalty in a few flagrant cases of desertion.

In 1918 when 119 men of the 1st Battalion were found guilty of desertion he refused to recommend remission of the sentences which were, however, not exacted because the war ended. But he was at the same time a great battler for the welfare of his men.

After the war he was an equally stern fighter for the rights of soldiers, though he deprecated extravagant claims to privileges.

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents