



Air Commodore The Honourable SIR WALTER CAMPBELL AC, QC

[1921 – 2004]



Flight Lieutenant Walter Campbell became a member of the Club on 22 July 1946

His Excellency Air Commodore Sir Walter Campbell was Club Patron from 1985 to 1997

Sir Walter was elected to Life Membership of the Club in 2001.

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Sir Walter Benjamin Campbell AC, QC an Australian judge, administrator and Queensland's Governor. He was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Queensland, Chancellor of the University of Queensland, and Governor of Queensland.

Campbell was born on 4 March 1921 in Burringbar, northern New South Wales, to Archie Eric Gordon Campbell and Leila Mary (née Murphy). Archie Campbell was a decorated soldier of the Great World War, having won the Military Cross for gallantry against the Turks in Gaza and the Distinguished Service Order for later efforts in Damascus. Leila Campbell died unexpectedly, leaving Walter and his brothers to spend a considerable amount of time with their mother's parents in northern NSW.

The death of his mother had interrupted his early education in Toowoomba and led to Campbell continuing his studies at a college in Lismore, NSW. Campbell completed his education at Downlands College, Toowoomba, becoming the college's first Open Scholar in the late 1930s, having already been named dux of the college twice and earning the highest grade in Queensland for Senior Latin.

Campbell attended the University of Queensland from 1940 with an interruption to his studies the following year to take up service in the RAAF.

He passed his pilot's examination at Amberley Air Base on 7 December 1941 and was assigned to the 67 Squadron, which patrolled Australia's eastern coast. He became a Flight Instructor and was based in Tasmania, badly injuring his knee in a biplane crash. After his recovery, the RAAF put Campbell in command of 102 Special Purpose Squadron based at Cecil Plains on the Darling Downs. As Station Commander, Campbell's role was to provide ferry services to the islands north of Australia, using the highly-advanced, four-engined Liberators.

Shortly after the end of the war, Campbell was at Morotai, dropping supplies by 'storpedoes' to Prisoner of War camps, and ferrying troops back to Australia. He was among those lined up on the strip at Morotai when General Blamey took the surrender of the Japanese forces in the Halmaheras and the Celebes.¹

Flight Lieutenant Walter Campbell became a member of the United Service Club on 22 July 1946 and continued to climb the RAAF ranks after the war to the Honorary rank of Air Commodore. Whilst Governor, he was also Honorary Colonel of the Royal Queensland Regiment.

He graduated from University of Queensland in 1948 with first class honours in Law, having already gained a Master of Arts the previous year.

Campbell was admitted to the Bar in 1948 and became a Queen's Counsel in 1960.

His practice took him as high in the legal world as the Privy Council in London, before which he appeared on several occasions. He became a member of the Law Faculty Board at the University of Queensland in 1954. In 1965, Campbell became President of the Queensland Bar Association, holding this position simultaneously with the presidency of the national equivalent from 1966 to 1967.

¹ See <http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/OwenDixonSoceJI/2013/1.pdf> for more background detail of his RAAF days.

In 1967, Campbell gained a position on the bench of the Supreme Court of Queensland. In 1982, the incumbent Chief and Puisne Justices of Queensland were scheduled to retire, having reached the mandatory age of 70. Campbell's selection became the centre of a controversy. Campbell emerged largely unscathed from the controversy but did clash at times with the Bjelke-Petersen government as Chief Justice, criticising the legal integrity of certain legislation when he found it necessary. He was also noted as having contributed significantly to the modernisation of the Court in Queensland during his time as Chief Justice.

Having been a member of the University of Queensland Senate since 1963, Campbell was well established within the activities of the University. In 1977 he became Chancellor of the University, holding the position for nine years until 1985.

Campbell succeeded Sir James Ramsay as Governor of Queensland on 22 July 1985, a day when ceremony and controversy vied for ascendancy in the media. There has been some conjecture that the Bjelke-Petersen government may have elevated Campbell to this position to remove him from the Chief Justiceship. All the controversies surrounding Campbell appear to be merely projections of the controversies affecting Joh Bjelke-Petersen and his government, with Campbell's inauguration as Governor attracting complaint from the Queensland Trades and Labour Council that they had been ostracised from the swearing-in ceremony due to political manoeuvring by the State Government.

This tradition of controversy involving Campbell and the government came to a head in 1987 when there was internal strife within the National Party between Bjelke-Petersen and his cabinet - which almost caused a constitutional crisis in Queensland governance with the State Opposition's call for Campbell to sack Bjelke-Petersen over allegations of illegal conduct by the Government. These suggestions came to nothing.

However, later in the year when Bjelke-Petersen lost the confidence of his cabinet, the question was again raised as to what role Campbell as Governor would play in the event of a constitutional crisis.

While the government's internal problems were already serious, the difficulty for Campbell really began on 26 November. That day, a spill motion was carried in the National party room which was won by one of the dismissed ministers, Mike Ahern. However, Bjelke-Petersen touched off a constitutional crisis when he refused to resign his commission. Campbell refused to use his reserve power to terminate it after receiving legal advice. Some sections of the press attacked Campbell for his apparent inactivity during the crisis, while other voices within the legal and political world supported his course of action. The crisis only ended when Bjelke-Petersen retired from politics on 1 December. Campbell was later praised by many in the media for his handling of the undesirable situation.

Whether or not Walter Campbell as Governor was an "interventionist" in constitutional affairs, it is not disputed that he was an enthusiastic activist in the area of ceremonial duties. In August 1986, following the example of Buckingham Palace and Government House in Victoria, Sir Walter opened the Vice-Regal doors at *Fernberg* to welcome some 1500 guests at two successive garden parties. Politicians from all sides, various professional luminaries and a representation of Queenslanders from country and city joined in tea-sipping and sandwich eating while the strains of bagpipes resounded through the sprawling grounds. While billed as formal affairs, the garden parties provided further opportunities for Campbell to display "his strongly outgoing personality" and cement his relationship with Queenslanders from wide-ranging backgrounds.

The scenes of deference and pomp over which Campbell presided soon began to show hints of impishness and levelling good humour. No occasion was so grand, no guest so important, no moment too grave for that to disappear entirely. This balloon-pricking and the Governor's well-known populist streak mingled well.²

The sophisticated but folksy mingling of tradition and laid-back, down-to-earth style was much in evidence at the Government House parties, where police on security duty mixed with guests and shared refreshments.

Sir Walter Campbell's stint as a World War Two flying instructor seemed slight preparation for the supersonic manoeuvring of an F-111, yet the Governor enthusiastically acted as navigator and then took the controls of the aircraft during a visit to Amberley Air Force base in November 1985. "Once

you learn, you never forget," was the Governor's jaunty throwaway as he emerged, clearly exhilarated, from the aircraft's cockpit.

This sort of activity did much to cement the image of a people's Governor - the "Sir Wally" syndrome - in a state which prided itself on a free and easy, egalitarian, frontier ethos while remaining fiercely loyal to its traditions. The overwhelming view of the general populace was that, apart from a necessary veneer of protocol, their Governor was like them. He developed a self-deprecating sense of humour. Despite his bonhomie and avuncular demeanour, Sir Walter took a serious view of constitutional issues.

The conventional term for a State Governor or Commonwealth Governor-General is five years. This may be extended by mutual agreement between the Government, the Vice-Regal office holder and the Queen. In February 1990, following discussions between Premier Wayne Goss and Sir Walter Campbell, the Premier's Department advised Buckingham Palace that the Governor was prepared to stay on for another two years. The extension of Campbell's term till 1992, confirmed by the Palace in March, was a popular decision.

After seven years as Governor, Campbell retired in July 1992. He did not retire quietly, continuing to speak at various functions, and advocating for the monarchy in the face of the push for an Australian republic in 1993.

Campbell had married Georgina Pearce in 1942, and fathered three children, Deborah, Peter and Wallace Campbell. He died at age 83, at his home on 4 September 2004 after a short period of illness and was cremated at the Mt Thompson Crematorium.

Walter Campbell was appointed a Knight Bachelor in 1979 and was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in 1989. On 1 January 2001, he was awarded the Centenary Medal.

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
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Campbell_\(judge\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Campbell_(judge))
- <http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/OwenDixonSoceJl/2013/1.pdf>

² For example, in his opening speech to the 4th World Conference of the Chianina Cattle Society, he drew parallels between the legal fraternity and the bovine subjects of the conference: "I had seen the Chianina parading in the ring at the Exhibition and I must say that I noticed the great dignity with which it carried itself — not unlike some members of my former profession"