



Colonel Percy Ralph RICARDO CB

(1855-1907)



Major Ricardo, 1899. (source: State Library Queensland)

Colonel Ricardo was known as ‘The Father of the Queensland Mounted Infantry’ and was a foundation member of the United Service Club in 1892.

When you next see an Australian soldier with emu plumes in his hat, think of Percy Ricardo, a foundation member of the United Service Club. Known as the ‘Father of the Queensland Mounted Infantry’, and responsible for the wearing of the plume, and founding, training, and commanding the QMI.¹

¹ He was dubbed “Father of the Queensland Mounted Infantry” – known all over Australia and South Africa as the QMI. It was his own creation. The first corps was formed in Brisbane, 130 strong, in February, 1885, and on 24 February that year Ricardo was gazetted as lieutenant. He was made a captain on 16 June 1888, and in the following April raised to the rank of major. He wrote the drill manuals and tactics that formed the basis of QMI training in peace and operations in war.

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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Percy Ralph Ricardo (1855-1907), grazier, businessman and soldier, was born on 28 August 1855 at Weston, near Bath, Somerset, England, into a county family with military traditions. Educated at Cheltenham College, he served in the Royal Canadian Artillery before migrating to New South Wales about 1874.

He moved to Queensland in 1875, leased Waterview station on the Herbert River, and from 1879 managed and partly owned Franklyn Vale, near Laidley, until defeated by drought. He was secretary of the Queensland Turf Club but resigned in 1885 to become secretary of the Queensland Ice & Freezing Co. From 1889 he was managing director of the Brisbane Ice Co.



Lieutenant Colonel Ricardo on 30 October 1899

Fiercely patriotic, Ricardo joined the Queensland Volunteer Force as acting captain in 1884, urged participation in the Sudan War, transferred to the Queensland Defence Force in February 1885, was commissioned captain in 1888, major in 1889, and joined its permanent staff in December 1891.

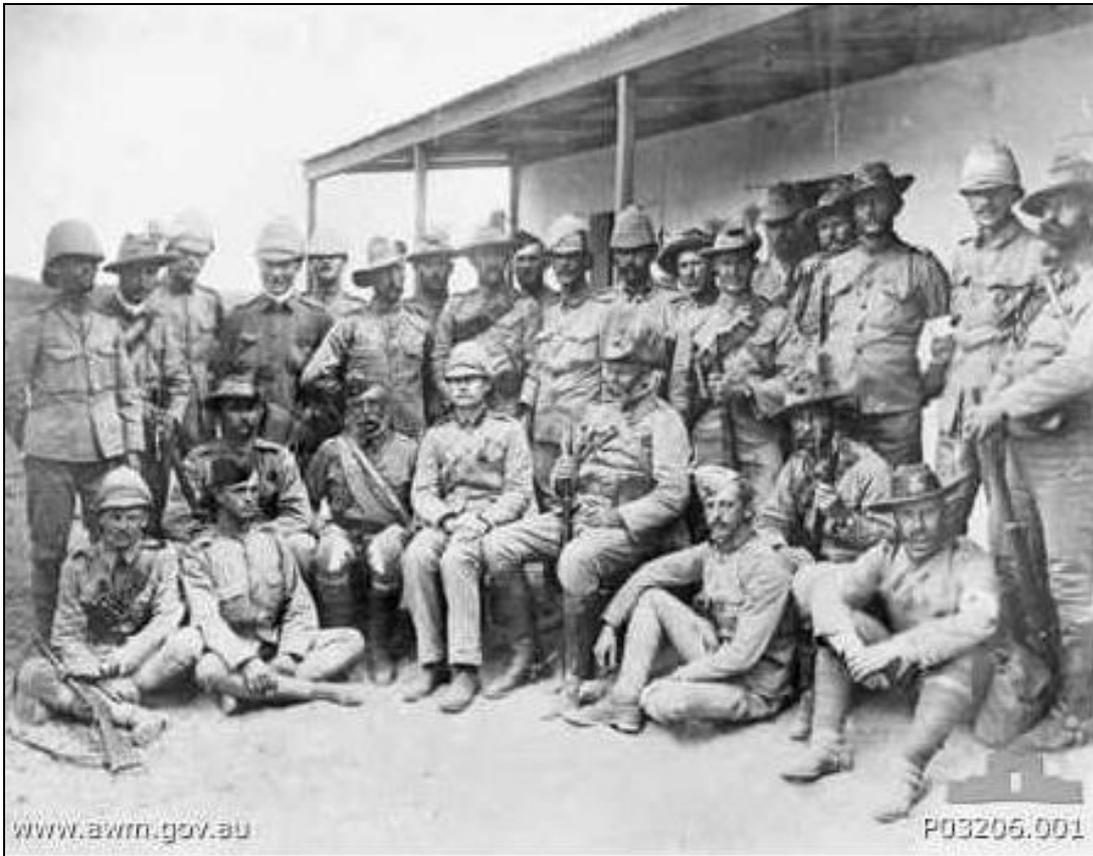
From July 1897 he was lieutenant-colonel of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, which he had initiated and welded into a highly regarded regiment. An accomplished horseman, inventive and with mechanical skills, he improved cavalry equipment and wrote Mounted Infantry Drill after he returned from a year in England (at his own expense) when he was attached to a British cavalry unit.

Opportunity for military experience came with the shearers' strike of 1891, when Ricardo commanded the first detachment of mounted infantry sent to Clermont.

Ricardo was one of the two officers responsible for the wearing of emu plumes in the hats of the QMI. Percy Ricardo and his friend, fellow USC member and brother officer, Harry Chauvel, were serving in the West Moreton Mounted infantry when they began to wear the plumes after a weekend socialising together at Franklyn Vale station (partly owned by Ricardo), at Grandchester in the Lockyer Valley. They were made from feathers from a dead pet emu. Ricardo and Chauvel served together during the shearer's strike operations and encouraged the QMI troopers to shoot an emu

and wear the plumes then and thereafter. They are worn to this day, not only by members of the QMI, but by all members of the Royal Australian Armoured Corps.

In the South African War Ricardo commanded the 1st Queensland Contingent, and claimed indirect responsibility for Queensland's offer of troops.



South Africa, c1900. An informal group portrait of British and Australian Army officers, includes twelve officers of the 1st Queensland Mounted Infantry Contingent wearing slouch hats with koala-skin puggarees and emu-feather plumes.

Identified in the group are: Lieutenant Colonel Percy Ralph Ricardo (sitting on a chair on the right holding a rifle) who commanded the 1st Queensland Mounted Infantry; Capt Henry (Harry) Chauvel (squatting on Lt Col Ricardo's left) who commanded A Company until he was appointed Adjutant on 13 February 1900; and Lt Thomas William Glasgow (thought to be standing behind and between Ricardo and Chauvel).²

Ricardo led the Queenslanders at Sunnyside on 1 January 1900, and participated in the relief of Kimberley and engagements at Poplar Grove, Driefontein, the Vet and Zand rivers, Pretoria and Diamond Hill. He was mentioned in despatches for his actions.

On 9 April the 2nd Contingent was added to his command, but command was soon handed over to Major Harry Chauvel, after the force had been reduced (by casualties, illness, or recruitment into the constabulary or railways) to one too small for Ricardo's rank of lieutenant-colonel.

Lieutenant Colonel Ricardo was appointed military commandant of Western Australia in July 1902. Appointed Temporary Colonel from January 1904, he was military commandant of Victoria from February 1905.

² Ricardo, Chauvel, and Glasgow were all members of the United Service Club at the time.



Colonel Ricardo (sitting, centre), when he was Military Commandant of Victoria c1905

Colonel Ricardo was tall, of soldierly bearing, and stout and plagued by gout in his later years, but was always liked by his men. The cattlemen and the boundary riders who made up the bulk of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, were amongst his most enthusiastic admirers.

Ricardo died in Melbourne on 4 June 1907 from a fractured skull after falling off his horse while hunting. He was buried in Boroondara cemetery following an Anglican service; his favourite charger, Carnage, led the cortège.

He had been twice married. By his first wife he had two children, a daughter, a son. Colonel Ricardo first married William Lyall's daughter, Annabella (Bella) at Harewood in 1879. Bella died at the family home 'Wyandra,' Bowen Hills, Brisbane, in 1895. His second wife, who survived him, was a daughter of Colonel Thompson, principal medical officer of Queensland.

Percy Ricardo was a Foundation Member of the United Service Club.

Sources included:

- Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 11, (MUP), 1988
- Various web pages, eg www.diggerhistory.info/pages-heroes/ricadro.htm; www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1508152; http://www.bwm.org.au/soldiers/Percy_Ricardo.php; <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/168250977?q&versionId=183422848>; <https://monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/people/military/display/100006-colonel-percy-ricardo->
- *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