



Background Notes
History and Heritage Series

Bust of
Sir Donald Cameron CMG, DSO, VD Order of Nile



These Background Notes have been prepared as 'bite-sized' light reading for our Members. The intention is to broaden understanding of selected aspects of the Club's rich history and heritage, and the remarkable people who have contributed to its development over the years. They are based primarily on a number of websites, with specific additional information in places. We acknowledge that there are probably errors and omissions. **Please contact the Club if you have additional information or comments that will assist to improve these notes.**

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed over time. They are intended as casual reading, for private use by Members only, and as they lack the rigor, attributions, and acknowledgements required for academic or public use, Members are requested not to reproduce or distribute them outside of our membership.

Bust of

Sir Donald Cameron CMG, DSO, VD Order of Nile¹



Introduction

When the lift doors open at Level 2, Members and guests arriving at the Club find themselves under the gaze of a bust presented to the Club by 5th Light Horse in 1967.

The presentation was made at a time when the Club was seeking to expand its collection of artworks and memorabilia. In the 1966 Annual Report, the president appealed to Members to *honour the Club with art gifts for the enrichment of its atmosphere and as permanent expressions of appreciation of the Club's objectives, its fellowship, and its place in the affairs of Officers of several wars.*

The bust commemorates Sir Donald Cameron, who served as the Commanding Officer (CO) of the 5th Light Horse Regiment in the Great War. He was a long-time USC Member.

Sadly, we are finding it difficult to track the records that tell the story of the bust itself and its presentation to the Club, and we would welcome advice and input from readers who can shed some light on its story to help us better record the details.

But we can summarise Sir Donald's story and through that, Members may better understand the feelings of the Regiment for their former CO and appreciate the remarkable past Members who helped create and build the Club's rich heritage.

His is an interesting tale. He served in the Boxer Rebellion, Boer War, and Great War and, being too old for enlistment and active service in the Second World War, served on the RAAF recruiting committee. He was a leading spokesman for the interests of ex-servicemen especially following the Great War. He was also a successful federal politician and was president or patron of many community organisations.

¹ The Order of the Nile (*Kiladat El Nil*) is Egypt's highest state honour. The award was instituted in 1915 by Sultan Hussein Kamel to be awarded by Egypt for exceptional services to the nation. It was reconstituted under the Arab Republic of Egypt on 18 June 1953. It consists of the Grand Cordon, plus a Collar which is worn by the President of the Republic and may be granted to other Heads of State. Although the junior grades (Grand Officer, Commander, Officer and Knight) were originally documented, they are not believed to still be awarded and may have been abolished.

Biography

Sir Donald Charles Cameron CMG, DSO, VD, Order of Nile (1879-1960), soldier, pastoralist and politician, was born on 19 November 1879 in Brisbane. His father (John Cameron) was born in British Guiana, his mother (Sarah Annie, née Lodge) in New South Wales. He was educated at Toowoomba and Brisbane Grammar schools and at 18 became a clerk in the Queensland Meat Export and Agency Co, of which his father was chairman of directors.

In 1899 Cameron went on a tour of Europe and Asia. He was in China during the Boxer Rebellion and after attaching himself to an American infantry regiment which had been dispatched from Manila, accompanied it to Peking.

He returned to Australia in 1901, volunteered for service in the South African War, and on 19 March was commissioned lieutenant in the 6th (Queensland Imperial Bushmen) Contingent.

He reached Cape Town in May and for the next year participated in patrolling and mopping-up operations in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony. Before his unit was disbanded in June 1902 he risked his life to rescue a wounded trooper on 16 June and was mentioned in dispatches.

From 1902 until 1914 Cameron and his brothers managed the family property, Kensington Downs, near Longreach, and was involved in their associated pastoral and other business activities. He visited Europe and the United States of America in 1903.

On 18 February 1914 he married Evelyn Stella Jardine, granddaughter of John Jardine, at St John's Cathedral, Brisbane, and soon afterwards toured China and Japan and had just returned home when World War I broke out.



*Donald Charles Cameron (1879-1960),
By Regent Studios
National Library of Australia, nla.pic-an23566705*

He enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 30 September 1914 and was appointed Captain in the 7th Light Horse Regiment (LHR). On 17 November he transferred to the 5th LHR and embarked for Egypt in December as second-in-command of C Squadron.

His regiment fought as infantry at Gallipoli from 20 May 1915 until the Evacuation in December. Cameron was wounded on 9 June and again, quite severely, on 28 June in the heroic but fruitless attack on Turkish trenches known as the Balkan Gun Pits. This wound was to trouble him for the rest of his life as removal of the bullet which had entered just below his ribs was considered too hazardous.

Cameron was promoted Major on 9 September 1915 and after his recuperation was complete, he re-joined his unit in Egypt on 3 January 1916. After serving in the Suez Canal zone he crossed into Sinai in April and for the next ten months commanded his squadron in numerous patrols and skirmishes and in the battle of Romani on 4-5 August 1916.

In February 1917 the Light Horse advanced into Palestine and took part in the Battles of Gaza and in operations and patrols in the Wadi Ghuzze, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership in the first Battle of Gaza.

Cameron was promoted Lieutenant Colonel on 30 October 1917 and appointed as Commanding Officer of the 5th Light Horse Regiment which he led in the attack on Beersheba and the advance on Jerusalem.

In the early months of 1918 he went to England on leave, returning in April to resume command for the offensives against the retreating Turks that ended in their capitulation at Ziza on 30 October. Here Cameron was faced with the task of protecting the enemy force from Bedouin troops while he arranged the surrender.

For service in the Palestine campaign he was Mentioned in Dispatches three times, awarded the Distinguished Service Order and the Order of the Nile², and appointed a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG).

He was a capable CO with a gift for obtaining *machine-like discipline* from his men without having to demand it. Morale in his Regiment was always high. The writer Ion Idriess, who served under him, remembered him as: *a nuggetty chap, not very tall, with a rugged face that [broke] easily into a smile*. In action he was *never flustered* and was *a cool but a quick thinker*.

After demobilisation Cameron returned to Kensington Downs and in 1919-31 represented Brisbane for the National Party in the House of Representatives. Ill health forced his retirement but he was Nationalist member for Lilley in 1934-37. He contested the Senate election in 1937 but was defeated. As a parliamentarian he represented Australia at the League of Nations Assembly in 1923 and sat on the joint select committee on Commonwealth electoral law and procedure in 1926-27.

A tireless worker, he always had the interests of ex-servicemen at heart and in parliament was a leading spokesman for the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia. When a history of the 5th LHR was printed in 1926, he paid the publishing costs and presented a copy to every member of the regiment. He commanded the 14th LHR in 1921-24, was president or patron of many social organisations and Hospitaller and Almoner of the Order of St John in Australia.

He was Knighted in 1937 (KCMG). In World War II Sir Donald served as chairman of the New South Wales recruiting drive committee for the Royal Australian Air Force.

After the war Sir Donald lived in retirement in Sydney and Brisbane and towards the end of his life he and his wife were hospitalised in Brisbane. His wife predeceased him, as did their only daughter.

He died on 19 November 1960. In accordance with his wishes his ashes were buried near the grave of his grandfather in the family cemetery on Home Creek station near Barcaldine.

These Notes are based primarily on:

- S. W. Wigzell, 'Cameron, Sir Donald Charles (1879–1960)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cameron-sir-donald-charles-5473/text9301>, published in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 26 May 2014. (The article was first published in hardcopy in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 7, (MUP), 1979)
- The Club's history (*United Service Club Queensland: The First Century 1892-1992*, by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton)

² The Order of the Nile (Kiladat El Nil) is Egypt's highest state honour. The award was instituted in 1915 by Sultan Hussein Kamel to be awarded by Egypt for exceptional services to the nation. It was reconstituted under the Arab Republic of Egypt on 18 June 1953. The warrant for Cameron's Order of the Nile (3rd Class) is held in the Australian War Memorial's collections, (PR03249) but has not been translated from Arabic.