



In Freedom's Cause

Missing Soldiers of Fromelles Group

Death Of Sir James McCay

Published on Page 7, of the Argus (Melbourne, Victoria), on Thursday, 2 October, 1930, this article relates to the 'Death of Sir James McCay'. Cited as the National Library of Australia: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article4202283> .

DEATH OF SIR JAMES McCAY.

REMARKABLE CAREER.

MILITARY LEADERSHIP.

Politics and Literary Work.

It is with extreme regret that we announce the death of Sir James McCay, who was conspicuous for many years in Victorian public life and in journalism, and was one of the foremost leaders of the Australian Imperial Force. Sir James McCay died yesterday at a private hospital in East Melbourne. He had been ill for several months.

Major-General Sir James Whiteside McCay, K.C.M.G., K.B.E., C.B., M.A., LL.M., V.D., was born at Ballynure, Ireland, in 1864. His father, the Rev. A. R. Boyd McCay, was a Presbyterian clergyman, who, when James McCay was a child, came to Australia and took charge of the Presbyterian Church at Castlemaine. In this town James McCay spent his boyhood and lived until approaching middle age. His mother was a brilliant woman. She spoke seven languages fluently and she never considered that she had mastered one until, as she said, "I can think in it." With a naturally bright intelligence, fostered carefully by his parents, James McCay made rapid progress at his studies and won a number of scholarships which took him through Scotch College and the University of Melbourne, where he graduated as a master of arts and master of laws. For some years he was a teacher at the Castlemaine Grammar School, but in 1883 he decided that that profession did not offer enough opportunities, and he determined to read law. This he did while carrying on his work as a teacher. He passed all the legal examinations within two years. He then commenced practice in Castlemaine.

On the death of Sir James Patterson, Sir James McCay contested the Castlemaine seat in the Legislative Assembly and was elected. He soon established himself as a sound debater and a lucid

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THE LATE SIR JAMES McCAY.

exponent of political principles. In 1890 Mr. Allan McLean moved a vote of no-confidence in Sir George Turner's Ministry. Sir James McCay was one of the younger men who crossed the floor and voted for the motion. Upon the defeat of Sir George Turner he accepted a portfolio in the McLean Ministry, taking the departments of Education and Customs. Another young member of this Ministry was Mr. W. A. Watt. At that time it was necessary for a member upon accepting office to submit himself to his constituents for re-election. Sir James McCay on this occasion was opposed by Mr. H.S.W. Lawson (now Senator) Lawson, and he was defeated. One of the factors which brought about this result was his attitude toward Australian participation in the South African war. Sir James McCay had expressed the view that at that stage Britain did not require any assistance. His defeat ended his career in State politics, while affording Mr. Lawson his chance in public life.

In the Federal Arena.

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Sir James McCay took an active part in the political movements preceding the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1901. Receiving the support of the party led by the late Sir Edmund Barton he contested the Corinella seat at the first Federal election and he was returned at the top of the poll. The reputation which he had won in the State Parliament was sustained in the Federal sphere, and he soon established himself as an authority upon defence. The speech which he delivered on the Naval Agreement Bill introduced by Sir Edmund Barton in 1902 was widely praised. During the stormy times of 1904, when the first Arbitration Bill was being discussed, he took a leading part in the debates, and he was entrusted with the motion which led to the downfall of the Watson Labour Ministry. Upon the subsequent formation of the Reid-McLean Administration in 1904 his ability and his services to his party were recognised by his being given the portfolio of Minister for Defence. In the brief period during which he occupied this post his reputation was considerably enhanced, but the Cabinet was ousted within 11 months.

In the redistribution of seats of 1906 the electorate of Corinella was merged into Corio and Laanecoorie. Sir James McCay contested Corio, but he was defeated by Mr. Crouch, who nearly 20 years later again won the seat. In response to earnest solicitation Sir James McCay submitted himself as a Liberal candidate for the Senate in 1910, when the death of Mr. Thomas Skene, which occurred two days before nomination day, had placed the party in an embarrassing position. The election, however, proved a triumph for the Labour party, and Sir James McCay suffered defeat. He did not again seek to enter Parliament. Though Sir James McCay was eminently successful in Parliament he did not appear to possess those qualities which win popularity with constituents. His temperament was rather reserved, and his character contained little of that ready appeal to sentiment so useful in electioneering.

Military Service.

Sir James McCay was always interested

Sir James McCay was always interested in military matters. As soon as his education had been completed and he had accepted a position at Castlemaine he enlisted in the volunteer forces of the State, being gazetted in 1886 a lieutenant of the 4th Infantry Battalion; three years later he was promoted captain. In 1896 he was made a major, and he was raised to the rank of lieutenant-colonel in 1903. He joined the Intelligence Corps in 1907, and he was director of intelligence from 1909 until 1913. When the Great War commenced Sir James McCay was one of the first to volunteer for active service abroad. He left Australia with the first expeditionary force in command of the Second Infantry Brigade. Although he was a most able officer, whose bravery in the face of fire was extraordinary, those qualities which militated against him in politics operated to his disadvantage in military life also, with the result that he was blamed by the rank and file for many things, such as an exceptionally gruelling and unnecessary desert march in Egypt and the awful tragedy of Fleurbaix (or Fromelles), for which subsequent researches by the official historian of the A.I.F. (Mr. C. E. W. Bean) showed that he was not in the slightest degree responsible. It was not until nearly 11 years after the close of the war (in April, 1929) that the facts of the tragic affair and of the colossal loss of Australian lives at Fromelles were made public. They received wide publicity in the Australian press, and it was a source of great satisfaction to

Sir James McCay to know that he had been vindicated handsomely.

His active service embraced both the Gallipoli and French fronts. He was twice wounded on Gallipoli, where he led the celebrated charge at Helles on May 9, 1915. On becoming convalescent he was returned to Australia and appointed inspector-general of the forces. This position he held until the formation of the Fifth Australian Division, when he was promoted to the rank of major-general and given command. He saw service with this division in 1916 on the Somme, where some of the fiercest fighting of the war occurred, and it was here that the incidents at Fromelles oc-

here that the incidents at Fromelles occurred. The soldiers believed that he ruthlessly drove them time after time to attack practically impregnable positions. The truth was that Sir James McCay was obeying orders from the High Command, and that he had strongly protested against the operations which it was his misfortune to be instructed to carry out. In December, 1916, Sir James McCay was invalided to England, being succeeded by Major-General Sir Talbot Hobbs. On recovery he was appointed general officer commanding the Australian Forces in Great Britain. He was created a Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George in 1918, and a Knight Commander of the British Empire in 1919. He was also created a Commander of the Legion of Honour.

Return to Australia.

Upon his return to Australia Sir James McCay retired from active participation in the legal firm of McCay and Thwaites, and became business adviser to the Commonwealth, a position he held until 1922. He was also appointed a commissioner of the State Savings Bank. At the time of his death he was deputy chairman of the commissioners. Sir James McCay at various times filled, temporarily, posts allotted to him by State Ministries. One of these was the chairmanship of the Prices Commission—an activity born of war-time psychology which, although he gave it the knowledge and thoroughness that he brought to all his tasks, could not have appealed to a man of his economic ideas. Another work in which his military experience was invaluable was his training and organisation of an emergency police force after the police mutiny of 1923. Always a deep reader, and with a particularly wide general knowledge, he occupied his leisure in the study of literature and in journalism. For several years Sir James McCay was a valued contributor to "The Argus." He wrote many leading articles and many articles upon political and economic subjects, chiefly under his own name but occasionally under pen-names. He also contributed some interesting reminiscences of his experiences in the Great War. His well-stored mind, his wide knowledge of the subjects he discussed, and his pungent literary style admirably qualified him for

subjects he discussed, and his pungent literary style admirably qualified him for this responsible and much appreciated work.

Sir James McCay married in 1896 Miss Julia Mary O'Meara, the daughter of the late Mr. O'Meara, a well-known police magistrate of Melbourne. His wife died in July, 1913, while Sir James was recovering from wounds received on Gallipoli. There are two daughters, Mrs. G. O. Reid, LL.B., of Mont Albert, and the Rev. Mother Margaret McCay, of the Sacred Heart Convent, Malvern. Sir James McCay was one of a large family, and he is survived by six brothers and two sisters. The brothers are Messrs. Adam McCay (Sydney); Delamore McCay (editor of the Sydney "Sun"); Walton McCay, under-secretary for Lands, Western Australia; C. E. McCay, formerly superintendent of city markets (Melbourne); H. D. McCay, of the Royal Mint, London; and Ross McCay (Tasmania). The sisters are Mrs. J. W. Thwaites (Melbourne) and Mrs. Drake, of Sydney.

The funeral will leave Cairns Memorial Church, Powlett street, East Melbourne, for the Box Hill Cemetery after a service, commencing at 11 o'clock to-morrow morning.
