

EULOGY

Major General Gordon Lindsay Maitland AO, OBE, RFD, ED

The solemn splendour of this ceremony marks the death, on 18th October last, and commemorates a life of service – to the Army, to the Defence Reserves and Ex-service communities, and to Australia - of a man who became a popular and familiar figure at ANZAC Day and most of Sydney's commemorative ceremonies, described by a Chief of Army as a legend, and by a Governor-General as a “doyen of the veteran community”, Chief of the clan Maitland, and our most conspicuous remaining link with the 2nd World War - the senior surviving soldier of that war, and the only one who, having enlisted as a private recruit, would become a Major General and a member of the Chief of the General Staff's Advisory Council.

Early days

Born on 25 August 1926 in Rockdale, the young Gordon Lindsay Maitland learned from his father a love of the bush, and life in it, and the mateship which it brings; while with the support of his artistic mother he became an avid reader, acquiring an appreciation the written and spoken word, of which he would become so fine an exponent. At the age of 11, he was placed eighth in the State at the Qualifying Certificate for high school admittance, and was enrolled at Canterbury Boys' High School. In a portent of his future, at the age of 14 in 1941, on a dark cold Anzac Day morning, he attended unescorted his first of what would be many Dawn Services in Martin Place.

Attaining his the Leaving Certificate in 1942, he embarked on the study of economics at the University of Sydney by night, while by day he worked as a clerk for the Commonwealth Bank, where he was assigned to a department which, depleted of manpower by the war, was supervised by an able 20-year-old woman, Dorothy Gunn, in whom he saw a remarkable blend of all the important virtues - including a unique ability to bond her staff.

War Service

Approaching his 18th Birthday, and determined to enlist in the 2nd AIF rather than being conscripted into the militia, Gordon enlisted at his local Army depot, at Arncliffe – a depot which would have a lasting place in his military career. On his recruit training at Cowra, he found himself sandwiched between Jim Gerathy, an illiterate boundary rider, and Ken Prowse, who would become chair of an insurance company, on whose board he would later serve. But it was to Gerathy, whom he taught to sign his name, that he attributed his greatest lesson in humility, which would be among his foremost qualities. In him he saw soldierly qualities superior to his own, and he learned that education and opportunity was not necessarily the best yardstick.

Private Maitland was told that he would be proceeding to an intelligence course, and then to the intelligence section of an infantry battalion. He asked whether he instead might be trained for a Z-Special unit, but when interviewed, was told that university students were few in the Army, and it would be of great assistance if he could speak Japanese. So he went to the Air Force School of Languages, and on 20 September 1945, aged 19 and still a Private, he flew from Melbourne to join Timor Force, where

his responsibilities ranged across the then Netherlands East Indies, including locating and questioning Japanese war criminals and witnesses, finding Australian graves, ensuring Japanese compliance with surrender arrangements, and dealing with issues arising from the Free Indonesian Movement. The last was the most dangerous, and he recounted that the indigenous population “were leaping onto the bonnet of my jeep, waving their knives and yelling ‘Merdeka’ (freedom)”. Then, as a youthful Sergeant, he served as the Chief Interpreter at the War Crimes Trials in Darwin.

Returning to Sydney aboard the troop ship *Manoora*, during his leave, on 24 May 1946, took Dorothy Gunn out on their first date. They were soon totally committed to each other, and their commitment endured for the rest of their lives. Then, he returned as an instructor to the School of Languages at Point Cook, where he was commissioned as a Lieutenant on 14 October 1946.

The three best decisions

In 1947, when offered a Captaincy, he made what he would later describe as the three best decisions of his life. The first was to return to the Commonwealth Bank, from which he would eventually retire as a Chief Manager. The second was to join the Citizen Military Force when it was raised on 1st April 1948, from which he would retire as a Major General and Chief of the Reserve. And the third was to marry Dorothy Gunn, on 6 November 1947; they adored each other for seven decades thereafter.

But never having been a member of an Australian Army unit, he had no banner to march behind, and no mates with whom to reunite, and it would be more than 50 years before, at the urging of the RSL, he would march on Anzac Day.

Civilian career

The Bank made him an Executive cadet, and in time he proceeded to executive positions.

As Papua New Guinea approached independence, and while relations soured with Indonesia, Gordon was sent to determine the Bank’s future in that country. His report and recommendations were accepted without amendment.

Initially specialising in lending, he was instrumental in expanding the Bank’s lending business, to the point that it became Australia’s major home lender.

When the Commonwealth Bank, concerned that it was seen as a large lumbering money box, being left behind by its competitors, decided to embrace marketing, it was Gordon Maitland that it appointed as a Chief Manager to transform its image.

When at the age of 55 he retired from the Bank, he became Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales. In that capacity he revitalised the Society, restored it to profitability, and laid the foundations for its move to Homebush Bay. Recognising the value of military organisational skills, he found employment for many ex-service personnel.

Military career

When the CMF, as the Army Reserve was then known, was raised in 1948, Lieutenant Maitland applied to join the 45th Battalion (The St George Regiment), headquartered in the Arncliffe depot. He was duly paraded before the Commanding Officer, the redoubtable Lieutenant Colonel – later Major General - Paul Cullen, who had commanded the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion. Most of the Battalions' officers were from the 2/1st; and many were decorated. Cullen promptly rejected Lieutenant Maitland as lacking the requisite infantry experience, but as he was being marched out, called out: "If you have the right spirit, you will turn up anyway". Maitland had the right spirit, and he turned up; in time he would become one of Cullen's closest friends, and eventual successor as Regimental Colonel of the Royal New South Wales Regiment.

The youthful officer became well-liked and was well mentored, and proved more than competent, topping the Army's first Infantry Tactics Course. He spent thirteen enjoyable years with the 45th battalion, ultimately as a company commander, which he considered the most enjoyable of all his postings. As Brigade Major of the 5th Brigade, he had an experience to which many will be able to relate. He ascertained that it would be quicker, cheaper and more comfortable to move the brigade by private buses than by troop trains. But this earned a reprimand from Headquarters 2nd Division, as there was no provision in its budget for buses – after all, buses were not trains. And then he was counselled, for telling his superior headquarters that they were stupid.

Promotion to Lieutenant Colonel followed in 1962, with appointment as second-in-command of the 3rd RNSWR Battle Group under the pentropic restructure of the early 1960s. When, in 1965, those arrangements were discarded in yet another restructure, he was appointed to command the newly-raised 4th Battalion, the Royal New South Wales Regiment, whose colours you saw marched into the Church this morning, to be placed with the other colours of the Regiment. Mentored by Major General Sir Ivan Dougherty who had commanded the 2nd/4th Australian Infantry Battalion, Cullen, Cox and Major General John Broadbent who had commanded the 2nd/17th, his reading of history and his acquaintance with the battalions of the 2nd AIF taught him that their quality had nothing to do with education and class, and everything to do with "spirit". And it was on that basis that he selected and mentored his own subordinates, from whom he would spawn a Major General, three Brigadiers, and many Lieutenant Colonels. His sometime subalterns continued to take him out for a birthday lunch, even until last year. There was also a young NCO, whom he advised to transfer to the ARA: Sergeant Wally Thompson would later become the first Regimental Sergeant Major of the Army, but for the rest of his life maintained his connection with Gordon and with 4 RNSWR. Lieutenant Colonel Maitland's achievements as a Commanding Officer earned him the quite exceptional award, for an officer of his than rank, of appointment as an Officer in the Order of the British Empire, the then equivalent of an AO.

His subsequent career included prestigious staff appointments; a period in Vietnam with the 9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, with the then Lieutenant Colonel Alby Morrison; appointments as ADC to two Governors-General; and in 1974, the responsibility of assembling and farewelling the Royal Family from Australia; and the establishment of the 2nd Training Group in Bardia Barracks, Ingleburn.

It was also in 1974 that, on promotion to Major General, he assumed command of the 2nd Division, when it was shrinking following the end of conscription; his tireless efforts and inspirational leadership, and his belief in training that was interesting, demanding, and challenging, and extended his people and organisations well beyond their comfort zones, sustained it. Recognising that after fifteen years in which the Army had been focussed on jungle warfare in South East Asia it needed to learn about the continental defence of Australia, he conducted a major tactical exercise in the Northern Territory. For his service as Commander 2nd Division, he was in 1978 appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia.

Then, initially as Inspector-General of the Army Reserve (1978-79), and subsequently as Chief of the Army Reserve (1979-82), he set about shaping the modern Army Reserve and enhancing Reserve service. He united the discrepant agendas of the state-based fiefdoms into a coherent single Army Reserve approach, and as a member of the Chief of the General Staff's Advisory Council won the respect and friendship of his regular colleagues. He established the Chief of Reserves conference, attended not only by senior Australian Army Reservists, but also by the Chiefs of Reserves of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. And when Russia invaded Afghanistan, he secured the Fraser government's support for a 50% increase in the strength of the Army Reserve, from 20,000 to 30,000, which he then implemented through the most successful ever Reserve recruiting campaign.

As might be expected of one who had been mentored by the likes of Cullen and Broadbent, General Maitland did not succeed by sycophancy; his advice could be firm as it was fearless, as illustrated by his first encounter with the then Field Force Commander Major General Dunstan, who would later become Chief of the General Staff, and eventually Governor of South Australia. As Field Force Commander, he was the immediate superior commander of Maitland's 2nd Division. Dunstan issued a directive which in Gordon's view showed a lack of understanding of conditions that were different in the Reserve from the Regular Army, and Gordon wrote to him highlighting the issues. The response from Dunstan was blistering, and Major General Maitland took what he regarded as the only course open - to walk up the hill from Moore Park where 2nd Division was then headquartered, to the Field Force Commander at Victoria Barracks. What followed went something like this. Maitland: "You wrote a disturbing letter to me". Dunstan: "You wrote an inappropriate letter to me". Maitland: "I am sorry you found it inappropriate, but I believed it necessary to be direct, and in a proper relationship one has a duty to protect one's superior from making mistakes". Dunstan then raised the stakes. According to Gordon's discrete and polite account, he asked when Maitland was going to have recourse to the Army Reserve political group; but I suspect that there was an allusion to the so-called Rum Corps. Maitland replied that he was offended to be so misjudged, that he knew those people well and respected them, but that was where it ended while he had a position of trust. Happily, things calmed down. Within days, the Maitlands were dining with the Dunstans in the Bungalow at Victoria Barracks, and they developed enormous mutual respect, and a close and deep personal friendship.

Retirement

Following his retirement in 1982, General Maitland devoted his next thirty years to commemorative and community activities, to assisting veterans and their

organisations, to researching and publishing six books on military history, and to the Royal New South Wales Regiment.

As an officer, patron and benefactor, he left his mark on more than 20 organisations – many of them represented here today – including the 2nd/4th Battalion Association, which in 1970 uniquely made him – who had never served in that battalion - a member, in recognition of the support he had provided to them when Commanding Officer of 4 RNSWR; the Association of 4th Infantry Battalions, the formation of which he promoted when Commanding Officer, and of which he became a Patron; the Royal United Services Institute; the Military History Society of New South Wales; and Legacy.

For eight years (1982-89), General Maitland served as Regimental Colonel of the Royal New South Wales Regiment, and afterwards remained the Regiment's elder statesman. Until very recently, he was a fixture at virtually every regimental activity, even in later years when it might have been more comfortable for him to remain at home. He has been responsible for the foundation and fostering of many of the activities and traditions that sustain the Regiment's spirit, morale and welfare. He was at the forefront of contributing and enlisting support for the sponsorship of a station on the Kokoda Memorial Walkway at Concord: Uberi was selected by him, though it did not have the renown of Isurava or Iorabaiwa, as one through which the antecedent battalions of the Regiment had passed on their way north. He was also instrumental in the conception and creation of the Regimental memorial – designed by his son Neil - on the foreshore of Sydney Cove, south of the Opera House, at the place from which in 1885 the Soudan Contingent departed, to commemorate the soldiers of New South Wales who sailed from Sydney for abroad, in that and subsequent wars.

There has been no greater servant of the Regiment, than General Maitland, and none has earned it greater lustre. Perhaps his most significant legacy to the Regiment is his magnificent twin volume *Battle History of the Royal New South Wales Regiment*. As an historian, he brought to his work a combination of academic rigour and the understanding of a soldier. His account of the battles of the infantry battalions drawn from New South Wales in the Soudan, the Boer War, and the two World Wars, is in the best tradition of Australian military history: both scholarly and readable, it presents the soldiers' perspective as much as it does the generals'. As the then Premier Bob Carr said, it is "an important and worthy contribution, not only to the military history of New South Wales, but to the history of the Australian people as a whole".

General Maitland's quiet influence as a mentor has given his successors the benefit of his wisdom and experience. On appointment, they could expect an eloquent and gracious letter of congratulations, with some gems of sage advice, but which never seemed an attempt to tell them how to do their job. This did not end with his declining physical health; happily his faculties remained intact until then end. In a brilliant speech at the 2nd Division dinner in 2014, which he said then would be his last outing and which those who heard it will never forget, he encapsulated in half-an-hour the history of the Division from its formation in 1915 to the present, and moved and inspired the current generation of officers.

Family

Somehow, he managed to combine his multiple and demanding civilian and military careers with success as a husband to Dorothy and as a father to Neil, Barbara and

Elizabeth. Dorothy and he were a partnership who mutually supported each other in every undertaking. Two Chiefs of Army wrote singing her praises. She was his secretary and the keeper of his diaries, and his chief assistant in researching and composing his six books and numerous papers. When she died just a year ago on 28 October 2017, they had been married 69 years.

Neil became an architect and served as an officer in the 4th Battalion; tragically, he died far too young. Gordon's relationship with his beloved and loving daughters Barbara and Elizabeth was cemented in their teens, on long walks and talks. He had a phrase of sage advice for their every situation, and was delighted when his youngest grandchild quoted back to him: "When in doubt, don't".

The man

There was about Gordon Maitland a natural dignity, without airs or graces. This was a man who could talk with crowds and keep his virtue, yet walk with Kings nor lose the common touch. He was well-connected at the highest levels of government and business; his counsel was sought by Chiefs of Defence and Prime Ministers, and his company by Governors. And yet he was entirely unassuming: his manner was relaxed, and he enjoyed mixing with every one; he was as at home with privates and pensioners as he was with Governors and generals. It appealed to his sense of humour to tell a story against himself; one favourite was of the then Sergeant Fred Nile's 21st Birthday, out in the scrub. Fred's platoon commander decided that a drink or two would be in order, and invited their company commander Major Maitland. All were gathered in the platoon headquarters dug out when the platoon commander, in pumping up his cooker, set fire to the overhead cover. In the ensuing melee, a sergeant lost his glasses, and by stooping to pick them up, provided a foothold for the major to make a rapid exit. Thereafter an observer said "We knew then you would climb over everyone to the top".

He is quoted as having responded to an inquiry why it had taken so long for a biography of Harry Murray VC to be written by pointing to that hero's "innate modesty"; those words are equally applicable to himself. His great generosity of spirit was manifested in his readiness to help others. He liked to help people. There may have been those of whom he had a low opinion, but he spoke ill of no-one. If, as it has been written, the measure of one who is truly great, is the courtesy with which he treats lesser men and women, then Gordon Maitland was a truly great man.

According to the Roman orator Cicero, the life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living. General Maitland will live, not only though above all in the memory of his beloved daughters and grandchildren, but also in the memory of those many whom he has influenced, and who tentatively tread, with awe and admiration, in his formidable footsteps. For as the American poet Longfellow wrote, When a great man dies, for years the light he leaves behind him, lies on the paths of humankind.

P. BRERETON

Major General

Colonel Commandant

The Royal New South Wales Regiment