

The Poles in the Gallipoli Campaign

Sir John Monash



Brigadier General Monash

John Monash (1865-1931) was born on 27 June 1865 in West Melbourne, eldest of three children and only son of Louis Monash (1831-1894) and his wife Bertha, née Manasse. Several generations of John's paternal ancestors had lived at Krotoschin (Krotoszyn), Posen province (Poznan, Poland), Prussia, near Breslau (Wroclaw). Almost one-third of the town's population was Jewish. John's grandfather Baer-Loebel Monasch was a learned publisher and printer. His uncle by marriage Heinrich Graetz was the eminent historian of the Jewish people. His father Louis migrated to Melbourne in 1854, prospered as a merchant, was naturalised in 1856 and was secretary of the Deutscher Verein. He returned to Europe in 1863, married Bertha (of Dramburg, near Stettin (Szczecin)), and next year took her back to Melbourne.

John was brought up bilingually (but never acquired any Yiddish). His parents spoke good English. For three years he attended St Stephen's Church of England School, Richmond, and then the public school in 1875-77 under William Elliott who delighted in the boy's intelligence and taught him all the mathematics he knew. In some anguish Bertha returned with the children to Melbourne late in 1877, to further their education; At school he was studious and quiet, without games skills; later he was a good runner, a mediocre horseman and a fair shot. He retained a lifelong affection for Scotch College.



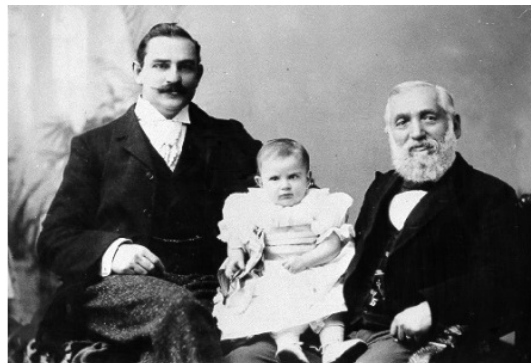
Young John Monash

After secondary education John had firmly decided to take arts and engineering at the University of Melbourne. In 1883 he passed with third- and in 1884 with second-class honours, becoming

passionately interested in mathematics. He tutored a few students and managed almost to keep himself. He played much chess and kept up the piano, sometimes performing in public; a Chopin 'Polonaise' was his star piece.

Monash furthermore became deeply involved in student politics, being a co-founder of the Melbourne University Union, active in arranging debates, socials and concerts, and editor of the first twelve issues of Melbourne University Review in 1884-85. He was also in 1884 one of the first to join the university company of the 4th Battalion, Victorian Rifles: 175 cm tall, well-built but slim and agile, the raw recruit rose to colour sergeant within fourteen months.

During his mother's long fatal illness in 1885, Monash abandoned his course. Highly distressed, he trod an erratic path for the next few years. His father was stricken and his business as a financial agent was yielding little. John had to contribute to the family finances. Through his friend J. B. Lewis, Monash found a post on construction of Princes Bridge over the Yarra which gave him valuable experience for more than two years. After a bungled attempt in 1886, he passed his university third year in 1887 as a part-time student but abandoned his intention of sitting for honours in mathematics. Early in 1888 he was fortunate to be given charge of construction of the Outer Circle eastern suburban railway-line which he capably concluded after three years 'enormous and extensive experience', having in August 1890 lucidly and unpretentiously addressed the university's Engineering Students' Society on 'The Superintendence of Contracts'. In November 1891, after the collapse of the boom, he was grateful to find a post with the Melbourne Harbour Trust.



John Monash with his daughter Bertha and father Louis

In 1891 he became engaged to 20-year-old Hannah Victoria Moss whom he married on 8 April 1891. Their only child Bertha was born on 22 January 1893.

On 4 April 1891 he took out his BCE, having won the Argus scholarship with a high second-class honour. In 1891-92 he crammed himself through the exams for municipal surveyors' and water-supply engineers' qualifications. Identifying a possible lucrative monopoly in legal engineering, again in 1891-92 he forced himself through a law degree. In December 1892 he completed arts by conquering his bugbear Latin. He formally graduated (MEng, 1893; BA, LL B, 1895) when he could afford the fees. It had been an astonishing spare-time programme.

In July 1886 Monash joined the North Melbourne Battery of the Metropolitan Brigade of the Garrison Artillery, whose fixed guns defended the Victorian ports, being appointed probationary lieutenant on 5 April 1887. By then he had almost settled on a combination of engineering and soldiering as his life's work. Military theory had begun to excite him and he enjoyed the control of men in a hierarchical disciplined structure. Moreover, a military commission carried much more status than the professions of engineering and teaching.

He also joined the Naval and Military Club. He was chiefly responsible for construction of a dummy practice-gun which served for several years as a useful training device. He lectured frequently on artillery, weapons, explosives, practical mechanics, and many other subjects, within the militia and in public, and his expository ability won recognition. By 1893 he was senior subaltern in the Garrison Artillery. He was active in and became secretary of the United Service Institution of Victoria. Under the patronage now of Lieutenant-Colonel WH Hall, he was promoted captain at last on 18 October 1895. Next year he sat the examinations for major (which, he calculated, made 94 written exams in 17 years) and was promoted on 2 April 1897 with command of the North Melbourne Battery, which he was to retain for another eleven years. Although work in coastal artillery was highly specialised and something of a backwater, it was there that Monash developed his gift for administration and learned to command men with fatherly authority

Meanwhile his friend Anderson had gained from the Sydney contractor-engineer FM Gummow the patent rights in Victoria for Monier's reinforced concrete construction. Monash & Anderson now concentrated on contracting for bridge-building and planned to manufacture concrete pipes with David Mitchell and his employee John Gibson. Their bridge building was highly successful until one of their Bendigo bridges collapsed under testing and they had to rebuild at their own cost. Then in 1905, with Gibson as managing director, formed the Reinforced Concrete and Monier Pipe Construction Co. Ltd. He had paid off his debts at the rate of £1000 a year. Protected still by the Monier patents and largely monopolizing concrete construction, the company undertook a dozen jobs at a time and formed a South Australian subsidiary. By 1913 Monash was worth over £30,000. In 1910 he had made his first overseas trip: to Britain, the Continent and, briefly, the United States of America whose technological achievements deeply impressed him. In 1907 he had seemed to be in a dead end. But Colonel McCay, commanding the Australian Intelligence Corps (militia), offered him charge of the Victorian section and Monash was promoted lieutenant-colonel on 7 March 1908. Military mapping—disgracefully backward—was the prime task, general intelligence gathering was also important but, in alliance with his new friend Major (Sir) Julius Bruce, Monash involved himself in general staff work. He attended Colonel Hubert Foster's schools in military science at the University of Sydney; helped to prepare for Lord Kitchener's inspections; suggested, umpired and reported on tactical exercises. Above all he studied military history and in 1911 won the first army gold-medal essay competition on 'The Lessons of the Wilderness Campaign, 1864' (Commonwealth Military Journal, April 1912). From 1 June 1913 he was appointed to command the 13th Infantry Brigade, as colonel. His conduct of manoeuvres in February 1914 won the warm approval of the visiting General Sir Ian Hamilton. Monash's pamphlet, 100 Hints for Company Commanders, became a basic training document.

Monash was now a pillar of Melbourne society. He had bought a Toorak mansion and a luxurious motor car, with a chauffeur and other servants to match, and was the calm centre of his extended family. He lectured and examined in engineering at the university, became chairman of the graduates' association and president of the University Club, then from 1912 was elected to the university council and its more important committees. As president of the Victorian Institute of Engineers, in 1913 he gave a constructive radical critique of his profession and worked towards foundation of a national body.

In the outbreak of war Monash was appointed to command the 4th Infantry Brigade, Australian Imperial Force. It was an Australia-wide brigade which had to be organised and gathered at Broadmeadows, Victoria, and given elementary training before sailing with the second contingent on 22 December 1914. Monash chose as his brigade major Lieutenant Colonel JP McGlenn. They were soon good friends. Monash commanded the convoy of seventeen ships which reached Egypt at the end of January 1915. The 4th Brigade went into camp near Heliopolis as part of Major General Sir Alexander Godley's New Zealand and Australian Division. Godley and the corps commander Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood were well satisfied with Monash's training of the brigade.

At the Gallipoli landing it was in reserve: Monash did not land until the morning of 26 April and was given the left-centre sector including Pope's Hill and Quinn's Post to organise while the Turks counter-attacked. His brigade was still not fully gathered by the 30th but Monash had an orderly conference of his battalion commanders that day. The brigade played its part along with the 1st Light Horse Brigade commanded by Colonel Harry Chauvel in withstanding the Turkish offensive of 19 May and the break-in to Quinn's on the 29th. It was here that Monash along with Chauvel developed his battle control strategy. The 4th Brigade was relieved from the line at the end of the month. As a result of this effective defence, a part of Turkey is known as 'Monash Valley (Gully)'.



Monash Valley - Gallipoli



View from Hill 971 Gallipoli

In July Monash learned of his promotion to brigadier general at a time when wild rumours were circulating in Cairo, London, and Melbourne that he had been shot as a German spy and traitor; there had been a similar vicious whispering campaign in Melbourne the previous October. The brigade now prepared for the battle of Sari Bair and its part in the left hook-on Hill 971. Their night-march of 6 August was delayed, and a vital wrong turning made. Monash forced himself to the front, punched his battalions into position and made good progress against moderate resistance. But the maps were faulty, Monash's independence of command was restricted (at this point reporting to Major General Herbert Cox GOC the 29 Indian Brigade rather than directly to Major General Godley GOC ANZAC Division) the men were exhausted, and next morning could only dig in. On the 8th, after attacking, they had to withdraw. The remnant of the Brigade then took part in the unsuccessful attacks on Hill 60, before being withdrawn to Lemnos.



Hill 60 and Suvla Bay from Chunuk Bair - Gallipoli

Monash had three weeks leave in Egypt where he learned of his appointment as CB (Commander of the order of the Bath). The brigade returned to a quiet sector on Gallipoli until the evacuation. Gallipoli had given him an education. His brigade had performed well. Bean reported the saying that Monash 'would command a division better than a brigade and a corps better than a division'.

In Egypt in January 1916, he wearily began retraining his reconstituted brigade, distressed by the news of his wife's operation for cancer. The brigade, after dismemberment to form daughter units, joined 4th Division and spent two months in the local defences east of Suez Canal. In June they

moved to France, to the Armentières sector, and were immediately tagged for a substantial diversionary and unsuccessful night-raid on 2 July.



Map showing the location of Armentières



Armentières War Cemetery

That month Monash was promoted major general in command of the new 3rd Division arriving on Salisbury Plain, England. He was given two first-rate British professionals to assist him, Lieutenant-Colonels GHN Jackson, and HM Farmar, who soon became his admiring devotees. Training proceeded vigorously. Monash had a flattering triumph when King George V himself inspected the division.

In November they moved into the Armentières sector as part of Godley's II Anzac Corps and General Sir Herbert Plumer's Second British Army. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig inspected on 22 December. Monash had established and retained a remarkably low crime-rate in the division. By an extraordinary feat of will-power he had reduced his weight drastically to 79 kg, which considerably added to his authority. His good fortune was, unlike the other Australian divisions, to serve under Plumer and Major General Harington, and that his first major battle, Messines in June 1917, was Plumer's masterpiece. According to Bean, *Monash 'concentrated upon the plans an amount of thought and care far beyond that ever devoted to any other [AIF operation]'. 'Wonderful detail but not his job'*, Harington commented. In the autumn, during 3rd Ypres, at Broodseinde Monash brought off the greatest AIF victory yet. But the weather had broken and in the following week Monash and his 3rd Division suffered the misery of Passchendaele.

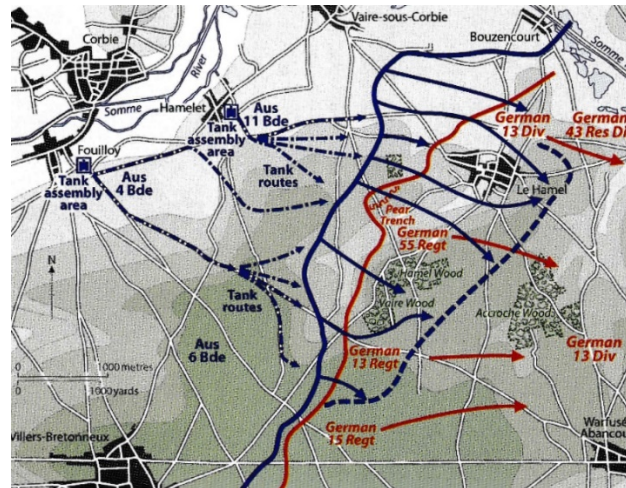


The approach to Messines Ridge taken by 3 AS Div in 1917

3rd Division, which Monash was sure was *'one of the Crack Divisions of the British Army'*, spent most of the winter quietly in the Ploegsteert sector. In November it had at last joined the other divisions in I Anzac Corps. Monash dined privately with Haig who let it be known that he wanted him as a corps commander; at the New Year he was appointed KCB, not a mere knighthood. In March 1918, in the face of the great German offensive, he brilliantly deployed his division to plug the gap in front of Amiens. They were, however, in the eye of the storm, and saw little serious action. But in late April and May they were heavily involved in aggressive 'peaceful penetration'. Then, to the general satisfaction of the AIF, Monash was appointed corps commander from 1 June and promoted lieutenant-general; Birdwood remained general officer commanding the AIF Bean

and the journalist (Sir) Keith Murdoch, however, carried on a relentless campaign for more than two months to replace Monash with Major General (Sir) Brudenell White and Birdwood with Monash. He stood to win both ways but was determined to test himself in the field at corps level.

The battle of Hamel of 4 July - *'all over in ninety-three minutes ... the perfection of teamwork'*, Monash wrote - proved his point. The Americans participated, and Monash had to withstand, by extraordinary force of personality, a last-minute attempt by General Pershing to withdraw them. Military historians have acclaimed it as *'the first modern battle'*, *'the perfect battle'*. *'A war-winning combination had been found: a corps commander of genius, the Australian infantry, the Tank Corps, the Royal Artillery and the RAF'*.



The plan for Le Hamel was Monash's. A plan made by an engineer soldier with a brilliant mind. An engineer who knew that a structure must have every component's property contributing effectively to the strength and functionality of the whole and to build in a contingency just in case a calculation was wrong, or a factor not accounted for. A soldier who had seen success at Monash Valley, a difficult time at Hills 971 and 60, success at Messines. He knew that to be successful in battle every resource had to be used. The plan had to be meticulous, and contingencies allowed for. In conjunction with the Canadians, the break-out on 8 August including Le Hamel, *'the black day of the German army'*, was a classic set-piece.

On 11 August an extraordinary chance gathering at Villers-Bretonneux of senior allied generals and politicians made Monash and Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie, the Canadian, the centre of congratulations. Next day the king invested Monash with his knighthood.



Lieutenant General Monash knighted by King George V



The knighthood parade



General Monash decorates soldiers in the field



Australians wait to move up the line

The sixty days from 8 August, with the AIF as virtual spearhead of the British army, were glorious. There was a minor botch on 10 August near Proyart, but thereafter, until about the end of September, a series of conclusive victories followed—at Chuignes, Mont St Quentin and Péronne especially (where Monash's ability in a fluid battle was finally proved), and Hargicourt. The breaking of the Hindenburg line, during which Monash commanded some 200,000 including Americans, was a much more uncertain matter; and the very last AIF infantry action at Montbrehain, with heavy casualties, was probably unnecessary. But it was a series of victories unsurpassed in the annals of the British army and, according to military historians, the 5000 AIF dead were a remarkably light cost.

During the battles Monash had had to deal with Prime Minister Hughes's decision to send 6000 veterans' home on leave, the British army's enforcement of disbandment of some battalions, and the tragic 'fatigue mutiny' of some of the 1st Battalion. Exhausted, Monash sought seclusion in England. Blessedly, the AIF was moving back into action only on the day of the Armistice.

By the end of the war Monash had acquired an outstanding reputation for intellect, personal magnetism, management, and ingenuity. He also won the respect and loyalty of his troops. Monash was regarded with great respect by the British. Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery later wrote: *1919, he 'I would name Sir John Monash as the best general on the western front in Europe [1918]'*. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George described him as *'the most resourceful General in the British army'* and indicated that should the war have continued *'till would have been nominated to replace Haig as Commander in Chief (a field marshal's posting)*.

The efficient and harmonious repatriation of 160,000 Australian soldiers, almost entirely within eight months, is among the most remarkable of Monash's achievements. He compelled the government to alter its initial policy of slow repatriation for fear of employment difficulties, and aggressively fought for and found ships, despite the shortage. He delighted in presiding over the

superb AIF Education Scheme. Commonwealth governments, in 1919 and later, entirely neglected to honour him or treat him with any generosity or ordinary courtesy, until the Scullin government eventually promoted him general. From early August in about a month - another amazing feat - he wrote *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*. Monash left for home on 15 November and had a tumultuous welcome in Melbourne on Boxing Day. But his happy homecoming was ruined by his wife Vic's illness; she died on 27 February 1920.

Monash had been uncertain about his future. He seriously considered standing for the Senate in 1919, but the Nationalist politicians blocked his path. He was looking for a national job, but negotiations for him to head the Institute of Science and Industry fell through. The salaries attached to the most senior military posts were meagre. He picked up the threads of his enterprises which Gibson had carried on but could not resist a takeover offer for the Concrete Constructions Co. by WR Hume; Monash became a director of the Hume Pipe Co (Aust) Ltd and picked up other directorships. Then in late June 1920 came the offer of the general managership of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria, which he was happy to accept, withdrawing from the Reinforced Concrete Co.

His new task was of great public importance, difficulty, and attractiveness to an engineer. Making abundant cheap power available by harnessing the huge deposits of Gippsland brown coal would remove a crippling handicap to development of industry. He had strong fellow commissioners-Sir Robert Gibson, (Sir) Thomas Lyle and George Swinburne-and Hyman Herman as chief technical expert; Monash himself was soon appointed chairman. Unexpected high moisture content of the coal produced a grave early crisis, but power from Yallourn, the model garden-town, was turned on in 1924. German technology was used to solve many problems. Monash faced great political difficulties and distrust of the project which required all his forceful pugnacity to overcome; he could not tolerate (Sir) Frederic Eggleston, his minister in 1924-27, who distrusted Monash's 'ruthless egotism'. He survived a major inquiry in 1926, and next year the commission showed a profit. By 1930 the initial task was completed, the SEC grid covered the State, and the commission was established as a highly successful state enterprise. Monash himself had inspired a degree of creativity, loyalty and affection, probably unparalleled in any other large Australian corporation then or since. As in the AIF he displayed his gift both of exciting their best from his colleagues and making them his personal friends. 'He was a great leader', Herman wrote, 'and a genius in getting to the heart of any problem and finding its solution ... the ablest, biggest - minded, and biggest-hearted man I have ever known'.

From 1925 he led Melbourne's Anzac Day march and from 1927 was its chief organiser. The cause closest to his heart in his last years was the Shrine of Remembrance of which he was in practice chairman of the constructing body. Premiers constantly pestered him for advice. From 1923 he was vice-chancellor of the university (acting chancellor for a year in 1925-26), which involved heavy burdens. He was president of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1924-26. He advised and lobbied governments on engineering appointments and other matters relating to the profession. The clubs he most enjoyed, other than the Naval and Military, were the Wallaby and Beefsteak, and he was president of Melbourne Rotary in 1922. His haven was the family home, Iona, where he lived with his daughter and delighted in his grandchildren; he had a great gift with children.

In the 1920s Monash was broadly accepted, not just in Victoria, as the greatest living Australian. The soldiers had to have a representative hero who was a volunteer; he was acceptable to the community as a seemingly unpretentious outsider, not really part of the Establishment. His commanding intellect was sensed as well as his basic honesty and decency. He was one tall poppy who was never cut down. His knowledge ranged extraordinarily widely but was neither very profound nor original. He achieved greatness essentially as an administrator, by cultivating to a super-pitch of excellence the ordinary qualities such as memory, concentration, stability, and common sense, allied with temperamental capacity to work harmoniously with colleagues. He had

the gift of being able instantaneously to turn from one task to the next. He was a great teacher, supremely articulate, 'the greatest advocate I ever listened to' said Sir Robert Menzies. No one in Australia's history, perhaps, crammed more effective work into a life; but, he said, work was the best thing in life. In later years at least, his charm, courtesy and impression of simplicity were striking.

On Anzac Day 1924 when no recognition had been extended to Monash in five years after WW 1, AIF members and others gathered to salute John Monash at a huge dinner convened by Albert Jacka VC. Government Senate Whip, WA Senator Edmund Drake-Brockman who commanded the old Monash 4th Brigade on the Western Front spoke to loud cheers when he said:

"The wonderful work of this wonderful man has not been fully appreciated in Australia. I can tell you where it has been appreciated and that is by the people of Great Britain and by the general staff of the War Office. No one pays any attention to the ridiculous statement that Australia won the war but I think that we can say that it was through Sir John Monash and his men, the war finished much sooner than we thought possible."

"That operation that commenced on the 8 August 1918 was the sole conception of Sir John Monash. Sir John's ideas were carried forward to the commander in chief via General Rawlinson and the consent to the scheme was given in this way: Very little harm can be done, let them have a go at it! The Australians had a go at it and before they finished the Germans had completely cracked back through the Hindenburg Line."



The Cenotaph, Martin Place Sydney, Dedicated 1929



General Monash (inset) addresses the people of Sydney at the dedication of the Cenotaph, Martin Place

From 1927 Monash was troubled with high blood-pressure. With his eyes open he continued to work. In 1929 he visited Sydney for the dedication of the Cenotaph in Martin Place. Early in 1930 the Scullin government briefly considered him as a possible governor-general. In 1930-31 he rebuffed sporadic attempts to persuade him to lead a right-wing political movement. Early in 1931

he enjoyed representing the Australian government at the durbar for the opening of New Delhi. By August his health had markedly deteriorated, and he died of coronary vascular disease at Iona on 8 October.

His state funeral, with crowds of at least 250,000, was probably the largest in Australia to that time; he was buried in Brighton cemetery with Jewish rites. Numerous memorials were raised, including an equestrian statue near the Shrine of Remembrance. The Australian War Memorial holds portraits by John Longstaff and James Quinn and shares with the National Library of Australia his huge collection of private papers and memorabilia.



John Monash's funeral procession



Gravestones of Hannah and John Monash



Monash's Statue - Melbourne

Autor: Danuta Piotrowska



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