



Major General W.A.B. STEELE CBE

[1895 – 1966]



General Steele was the Secretary of the Club in 1959

William Alan Beevor Steele was born in Gympie on 4 February 1895. He was the son of Charles Beevor Steele OBE, [1860-1913], a Channel Islands born mining engineer, and Gayndah born Mary Frances “Minnie” (née Tymons) [1864-1939]. He had six brothers and one sister.

He was educated at De La Salle College, Armidale, NSW and entered the Royal Military College, Duntroon – Sergeant Steele was in the College’s first graduating class in August 1914.

The 19-year-old Lieutenant Steele enlisted in the AIF on 15 August 1914 and was allotted to “A” Squadron 2nd Light Horse Regiment which embarked from Brisbane on 24 September 1914. He served at Gallipoli as Adjutant (and a Captain) of the Regiment. He embarked for France in 1916 and served on the staff of 13th Infantry Brigade before being posted to 52nd Infantry Battalion – and fighting at Mouquet Farm / Pozieres. He was promoted Major later in 1916, returned to Australia in early 1917 and transferred from the AIF to the Staff Corps.

Steele continued to serve as a Regular Officer with the militia between the World Wars. This included a time as Brigade Major of 1st Cavalry Brigade; and in 1922-25 as Adjutant and Quartermaster of 11th Light Horse Regiment based in Toowoomba. He was the Brigade Major for

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troops at the opening of the provisional Parliament House on 9th May 1927; while posted to Army Headquarters in Melbourne as GSO2 Training.

In 1929 he was Brevet Lieutenant Colonel with postings at HQ 1st Cavalry Division in Sydney. In 1935, Steele was posted as Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General (Mobilization), Army Headquarters. After attending Staff College in England in 1936-37 he was Deputy Assistant Adjutant & Quartermaster-General, Field Troops, 6th Military District (Tasmania).

After the outbreak of a second world war in 1939, Steele once more volunteered for service with the Second AIF. In April 1940, upon promotion to Colonel, he was posted as District Officer Commanding 7th Military District (Northern Territory), followed by staff appointments in Victoria.

In 1942 he was promoted Brigadier and appointed General Officer Commanding 1st Australian Motor Division (Apr-Nov 1942) followed by General Officer Commanding 3rd Australian Armoured Division (Nov 1942-May 1943) in New Guinea. Later that year he was Commanding Officer Moresby Base Sub-Area, New Guinea Force, followed by Deputy Quartermaster-General, Army Headquarters.

He was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1948 for "continuous good service and devotion in New Guinea Force". His final posting was as commander of the 7th Infantry Brigade (1948-50) in Brisbane. He retired with the rank of Honorary Major General.

Research into his family life has not been strongly evidenced.

He appears to have been married to Hilma Mary (no known maiden name) who is described in some military documents as "de facto" and appears to have still been living in 1980 in Brisbane.

Other military documents describe his next of kin as Kathleen E. Steele of Dover Heights in Sydney in the 1940s.

He is known to have had two children – a daughter Frances born 1942, and a son David born 1944.

Prior to his retirement from the Army, he established his residence at Wecker Road, Mount Gravatt.

Steele became Secretary of the Club in 1959. The Club History reports that "... he is remembered today as a comfortable gentleman who spent much time, away from his not particularly onerous secretarial duties, sitting on the verandah with a gin in his hand." At about the same time as Brigadier Amies resigned in 1960, the Club also lost the services of Major General Steele as Secretary. Lieutenant Colonel N E Aley, then assistant secretary, was appointed to take Steele's place.

It is not known if William Steele was related to Lt H.K. Steele – a Club Committee Member 1948-50 and 1956-58. His forename of Beevor is very commonly paired with the surname of Steele – and was also the surname of his Commanding Officer of the 52nd Battalion in France.

General Steele died in Brisbane on 22 January 1966 aged 70 years, and was buried at Mt Gravatt.

During his tenure, General Steele served Presidents McIntyre and Amies.

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *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
- NAA / AWM / DVA archives