

# *Gunner of Renown*



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

## **Major General Sir George Arthur FRENCH, KCMG**

**(1841-1921)**

George French was a Royal Artillery officer with extensive experience in the British and Canadian armies as well as being the first permanently appointed commissioner of what became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

On 1 September 1883, French was appointed commandant of the Queensland Defence Force, with the local rank of colonel. Shortly after, he submitted a special report on the poor state of the colony's army, recommending the establishment of a permanent battery of artillery and a militia force, and the down grading of the volunteer force to rifle club status.

In 1885, the Queensland Defence Force was reorganized under the 1884 Defence Act framed by French and based mainly on the Canadian system. He was also largely responsible for obtaining the agreement of the Australian colonies for the construction of fortifications on Thursday Island and King George Sound from 1891 to 1893. In 1891, he employed over 1400 troops to break the Queensland shearers' strike, on one occasion personally controlling an advance with bayonets fixed against the strikers. His appointment in Queensland was twice renewed and thereafter, in August 1891 he returned to Britain.

In October 1887, French had been promoted lieutenant colonel, RA, and in August 1891 was appointed Commander, RA, Dover. In June 1892, he was appointed Chief Instructor, School of Gunnery, Shoeburyness, and in November promoted colonel for 'distinguished services other than in the field.' He was appointed Colonel, RA, Bombay, in January 1894 and in April next year Officiating Brigadier General, RA, Bombay Command.

French was appointed Commandant of the New South Wales Military Forces with the local rank of major general in March 1896. Despite his attitude to volunteers in Queensland, the strength of the volunteer movement quadrupled under his command. The Australian Horse, Australian Rifles, National Guard and the Railway Corps were formed and the existing regiments greatly increased in strength.

Although bitterly disappointed that he was not released for service in the South African War, French's energetic training program was largely responsible for the high regard held for the NSW contingents serving in South Africa. In May 1900, he was promoted major general, RA, and, in 1901, Sir John Forrest, Minister for Defence, appointed him president of the Federal military committee to draft a defence act for the Commonwealth.

In January 1902, he handed over command to Brigadier General H. Finn and next month sailed for England where he retired on 3 September; that year he was appointed KCMG. French died on 7 July 1921.

Sources: R. Sutton, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 8, pp.586-8. E.J. Chambers, *The Royal North-West Mounted Police*, Montreal, 1906. ; D. H. Johnson, *Volunteers at Heart*, Brisbane. 1974; L.M. Field, *The Forgotten War*, Melbourne. 1979; *Votes & Proceedings* (Legislative Assembly, NSW), 1900, 4, 37; *London Gazette*, 30 May 1877, 9 Nov 1902; *Brisbane Courier Mail*, 23, 27 Jan, 3, 6 Feb, 14, 15 Apr, 1 Oct 1885, 18, 19 May 1888, 27, 28 March, 23 July 1891; *The Times*, 11 July 1921; North-West Mounted Police, Canada, Commissioner's report 1874 (ML); Privy Council Committee's Reports, 22 July, 7 Oct 1876. Royal Canadian Mounted Police Headquarters, Ottawa; correspondence with RCMP, 11 July 1979 (held by author, Coogee, Sydney); letter to author from D.J. French, Newbay, Wexford, Ireland, 11 Nov 1979.

For more information follow this link: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/french-sir-george-arthur-6247>