



Profile: Sir John Monash (1865-1931)

Sir John Monash was Australia's most accomplished senior commander of the First World War and, arguably, in Australia's military history.

His command of the 3rd Division and later of the Australian Corps in 1918 is remembered for its remarkable achievements and skill, thoroughness and competence.

Monash valued men over machines, coordinating all resources to preserve lives, and he encouraged individualism.

Before the war

Monash grew up in difficult circumstances, but he was intelligent, strategic and worked hard for success. He openly attributed his achievements to "industry and concentration" instead of "genius".

He was born to Jewish Prussian parents in West Melbourne. While studying Engineering at the University of Melbourne, he supplemented the family income by working on major design and construction projects.

Monash joined the Victorian Rifles and then the Garrison Artillery. He studied Law and Arts and was appointed commander of the North Melbourne Battery, becoming a specialist in coastal artillery, administration and military command.

He was promoted to Commander of the Australian Intelligence Corps in Victoria, undertaking military mapping, tactical exercises, military history, and general staff work. In 1913 he was promoted to Colonel in the 13th Infantry Brigade.



First World War

When the First World War broke out, he was appointed commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade, controlling 17 ships that reached Egypt in January 1915.

He was promoted to Brigadier General and then, on the Western Front, became a Major General, commanding Australia's 3rd Division. His troops served in Armentieres, Messines, Broodseinde, Passchendaele and Ploegsteert.

In 1918, Monash was knighted in the field by King George V. He was promoted to lieutenant-general, commanding the Australian Imperial Force and on occasion American troops.

Nearing the end of the war

The Battle of Hamel (4 July 1918) was regarded by many as his greatest hour, earning him a reputation as a commander of genius. Monash planned the battle to last 90 minutes; it was completed in 93 minutes.

A series of victories followed - Chuignes, Mont St Quentin and Peronne - with relatively low casualties.