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**MAJOR-GENERAL SIR GRANVILLE DE LAUNE RYRIE, KCMG, CB, VD.**

**(1865 - 1937)**

Granville Ryrie, a grazier, soldier and politician, was born on 1 July 1865 on a 4,200 ha grazing and cattle property named *Micalago* situated at a railway whistle stop called Michelago, between Queanbeyan and Cowra.

Granville's father Alexander, was a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly from 1880 to 1891 and a member of the NSW Legislative Council from 1892 to 1909.

Granville's father and mother, Charlotte, nee Faunce, were both born in New South Wales.

They sent their son to be educated at a private school at Mittagong and, from 1878 to 1883, at The King's School, Parramatta. He then became a jackaroo on a number of properties in the north-west of New South Wales.

He enjoyed life in the outback and he became an accomplished horseman and rifle shot. He was also a very good boxer and was twice runner-up in the NSW amateur heavyweight championship. He also studied the Aborigines and learned one of their languages.

He returned to the family property and on 18 February 1896, he married Mary Frances Gwendoline, the daughter of Judge McFarland, at St Thomas's Anglican Church, North Sydney. They had twin daughters and a son.

At the time, the Australian colonies had a strong volunteer citizen's army and Ryrie joined the movement as a trooper.

In 1898, he was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the 1st Australian Horse. Note the title of his unit, three years prior to Federation. He was promoted to Lieutenant in 1889 and a Captain in 1901 and served in the Boer War in South Africa with the 6th (New South Wales) Imperial Bushmen from May 1900 until June 1901.

He first saw action in Rhodesia and then at the Transvaal, Cape Colony and the Orange River Colony.

In September 1900, he was severely wounded at Wonderfontein and, two months later, he was promoted to Honorary Major. He was awarded the Queen's Medal with four clasps.

Ryrie returned to *Micalago* in July 1901 and he resumed his part-time military service in the 1st Australian Horse which, in the military re-organisation following

Federation, became the 3rd Light Horse Regiment. He was promoted to Major in 1903.

In October 1904, he was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and given command of the regiment which he retained for the next seven years.

Meantime, Granville Ryrie decided to follow his father's footsteps in a career in politics.

In April 1906, he was elected to the NSW Legislative Assembly as the member for Queanbeyan. It was claimed, that he tried to impress voters with 'rollicking ballads' sung to his own accompaniment! He resigned in 1910 to contest the Federal seat of Werriwa and, in October 1910, the State seat of Cootamundra. Perhaps his singing had deteriorated because he was defeated on both occasions. He persisted and, in 1911, Ryrie won the Federal seat of North Sydney where he had strong support.

In the parliament he had a reputation as a blunt, forceful speaker with a ready sense of humour and a good measure of common sense.

Although his politics were thoroughly conservative, he mixed easily with all members of the House and the people of his constituency.

Immediately following the outbreak of the First World War, he was promoted to Colonel and on 17 September 1914, Ryrie was promoted to Brigadier-General and given command of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade of the AIF.

His constituents presented him with a charger named *Plain Bill* which came to be regarded as the finest horse in all the mounted regiments.



Brigadier-General G. De L. Ryrie, Commander of the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade, 1914-18, on his horse, 'Plain Bill.'

Ryrie was one of a very rare breed indeed. He was a politician who went to war. So did 17 other members of the wider Ryrie family from Michelago and surrounding districts.

Ryrie's 2nd Light Horse Brigade, and later the 3rd Light Horse were sent to Egypt to be under General Walker who was then in command of the 1st Australian Division. Ryrie was seen to be a bluff but genial Australian countryman with a high level of common sense, a close affinity with his men and little tolerance for military forms and text books.

As a consequence, General Walker sent his own Aide-de-Camp, Captain Foster, a trained and skilfull soldier, to be Ryrie's Brigade Major.

When the Anzacs sailed for Gallipoli, the 2nd and 3rd mounted brigades remained in Egypt and, at first, resisted the British commander, Lieutenant-General Birdwood's plan to send their troops to Gallipoli as dismounted infantry reinforcements but, as the casualty lists grew, they relented and Ryrie, in spite of objections from two of his three unit commanders, volunteered his Brigade.

On 19 May 1915, Brigadier Ryrie and his men arrived at Anzac Cove to be attached to the 1st and 3rd infantry Brigades of the 1st Division. They were stationed at the southern most section of the Anzac position. The 2nd Light Horse dug in and, on 28 June 1915, they were ordered to stage a diversion supported by artillery and gunfire from a destroyer.

Later Ryrie's Post was established and held by the 7th Light Horse.

By August, Ryrie's 2nd Light Horse had not been engaged in any important attack until Birdwood ordered an attack on the heavily fortified enemy positions opposite Ryrie's Post.

The Australian commanders, including Ryrie, raised strong objections and Birdwood abandoned the proposal.

Brigadier Ryrie 'The Bull' strode fearlessly around the front line to share a joke with his men and, at the same time, see for himself the realities of the situation. His superiors quickly appreciated the wisdom of his advice.

Bro. Lord Kitchener visited the battlefield in November 1915 and ordered an evacuation. Many strategies were used to fool the enemy. One of them was a cricket match held on what was called Shell Green, within range of Turkish rifle fire, on 17 December.

Ryrie wrote in his diary:

'Just to let them see we were quite unconcerned . . . . . when shells whistled by we pretended to field them. The men were wonderfully cheerful and seemed to take the whole thing as a huge joke!'

Fortunatel nobody had to retire hurt. The 'Old Brig' was twice wounded on Gallipoli and, because he shared the heat and burden of the day, he earned the admiration of his men.



Lord Kitchener at Anzac, 13 November 1915.  
The group shown was on North Beach. The prominent figures are (from left to right) - General Birdwood, Lord Kitchener, General Godley, and General Maxwell.  
Inset: Kitchener talking to Brigadier-General G. de L. Ryrie on his way down Walker's Ridge.

Next came Sinai and Palestine. Ryrie was a mounted soldier and this was more to his liking.

Despite his 105 kg weight, he was one of the best horsemen and one of the best rifle shots in Palestine. His knowledge of horses and his sense of country were outstanding.

Despite his weight and 51 years, he excelled at exercise and he had a close personal relationship with his men.

In the two and a half years of the desert campaign, he did not once make a serious mistake.

In 1916 he was awarded the CMG. The following year he was in the battle of Gaza and in October 1917, the battle for Beersheba. He was created a CB at that time.

His war ended at Amman in September 1918.



Brigadier Ryrie and his staff of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade entertained by Arab Chiefs, immediately after crossing the Jordan River on 24 March 1918.

Although Mentioned in Despatches five times, Ryrie had received no promotion during the fighting. In December 1918, he was appointed commander of the Australian Mounted Division with the rank of temporary Major-General in April 1919.

He was awarded the Order of the Nile (2nd class) and was appointed KCMG in October 1919 just before he returned to Australia.

He returned to Federal Parliament where he was assistant Minister of Defence from February 1920 to December 1921.

He returned to the army as a Major-General in June 1920 and he became commander of the First Cavalry Division from 1921 until his retirement at the age of 62 in 1927.

In 1922, Ryrie took over the safe seat of Warringah.

He was chairman of the Joint Committee on Public Accounts in 1926-27.

He was staunchly loyal to his party and this together with his experience, earned him the appointment as Australia's High Commissioner in London in 1927 by the Prime Minister, Bro. Stanley Bruce.

He represented Australia at the League of Nations in Geneva where he came up with the famous line:

Cut the cackle and let's get down to business.'

Sir Granville Ryrie returned to Australia and retired from public life in 1932.

He died in Sydney on 2 October 1937, survived by his wife and children and was buried after a State Funeral at St Andrew's Cathedral, at his beloved Michelago.

Bro. Major-General Sir Granville Ryrie was made a mason on 14 January 1924 in Lodge Neutral Bay No. 267. He was passed a Fellowcraft on 10 March 1924 and raised a Master Mason on 12 May 1924. At the regular meeting of the Lodge held on 11 April 1927, *The NSW Freemason* reported:

Wor. Bro. Hynward gave the toast of Bro. Granville Ryrie, saying that as one, who for a decade served on the staff of Major General Sir Granville Ryrie, he felt it a great honour to be entrusted with the toast. After extolling the excellent qualities of Br. Granville Ryrie as a soldier and politician, he on behalf of the Lodge wished him a very happy term as High Commissioner of Australia in London, and expressed the hope that when his term was finished that he would return to his Lodge in Neutral Bay.

On rising to respond, Bro. Granville Ryrie met with a most tumultuous reception. His reply, which was punctuated with much applause, was that of an Australian gentleman, in which he gave credit to those who had served under him for what ever success he had attained as a soldier. We were glad to hear that he intended linking up with a Lodge in the old country, and thus keep in touch with the Order, of which he is so very proud to be a member.

Bro. Ryrie called off from Lodge Neutral Bay two months later on 30 June 1927. It is not known if he affiliated with a Lodge in London.

He did not renew his membership of a New South Wales Lodge on his return to Australia.

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