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BIOGRAPHY

Who was..... Edward Thomas Henry Hutton?

Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Hutton, KCB, KCMG, third president of The United Service Institution of New South Wales, commanded the New South Wales Military Forces from 1893 to 1896, and the Australian Commonwealth Military Forces from 1902 to 1904.

Edward Thomas Henry Hutton was born on 6 December 1848 at Torquay, England, and was commissioned in the 60th Rifles in 1867. As a regimental officer, he saw active service in the Zulu War (1879), the first Anglo-Boer War (1881), at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir (1882), and on the Soudan expedition (1884-85). He became an expert on the training and employment of mounted infantry and commanded a mounted infantry unit in England (1888-92).

In response to the 1892 Tulloch Royal Commission into the military forces of New South Wales, Colonel E. T. H. ("Curly") Hutton was appointed commandant of the New South Wales Military Forces, with the local rank of major-general, and served in that role from May 1893 to March 1896. An able, energetic leader and administrator who was committed to military reform, he revived the New South Wales forces and raised the army's profile in the community. He produced a New South Wales army capable of taking the field as part of a federal force, despite severe economic constraints and much political and military opposition (Hill 1983; Perry 1996).

Hutton became the third president (1894 and 1895) of The United Service Institution of New South Wales, which had been established in 1888 to promote the study of naval and military art, science and literature; and, during his presidency, he held two-sided, umpired, war games on maps of New South Wales. Both through the Institution and in inter-colonial fora, he vigorously supported the movement for federal defence, advocating one defence policy for the six colonies, a common organization of their forces, a federal regiment of artillery and a federal council of defence (Hill 1983; Sutton 1989; Perry 1996).

Hutton was sent to Canada in 1898 to command the Canadian Militia and build a national army. Unwisely, he became involved in Canadian politics and he was forced to resign.

As a major-general in the second Anglo-Boer War (1899 – 1902), Hutton commanded a brigade of mounted infantry which included Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and British units. He performed with great distinction in the advance to Pretoria and he was made a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George in 1900 (Hill 1983).

Australia's first federal government appointed Hutton to transform Australia's six colonial military forces into a national army.



Right: Major-General Sir E. T. H. Hutton, KCMG, CB, c. 1900 [Photographer unknown; Australian War Memorial negative P03875.002]

He assumed command of the Australian Commonwealth Military Forces in January 1902; and submitted a minute in April outlining Australia's strategic situation. He proposed a garrison force to defend the major coastal centres and ports and a field force which could be sent wherever Australian interests might require it.

Hutton merged the colonial militia forces into an Australian citizen army, converting the cavalry and other mounted units into mounted infantry (known as light horse) in so doing. He promoted efficiency, discipline and training in every department of the new citizen army, but he could not obtain funds for equipping and rearming the forces. He was attacked in parliament and the press; there was a shortage of trained officers; and he fought a losing battle in trying to maintain an adequate headquarters. Nevertheless, he succeeded in creating the field force and the garrison force, with complete war and peace establishments (Hill 1983).

A Defence Act, drafted by Hutton at the request of the prime minister, was proclaimed in March 1904. It made no provision for sending Australian troops overseas, but it preserved the general shape of the Australian Army as proposed by Hutton (Hill 1983).

Hutton's constant battles with his ministers, however, were his undoing. Later in 1904, the Defence Act was amended, abolishing the post of commander and substituting a military board in its place. Hutton resigned (Hill 1983).

On his return to the United Kingdom, Hutton was given command of the 3rd British Division. In November 1907 on the eve of retirement, he was promoted to lieutenant-general; and he was made a Knight Commander of the Bath in 1912. He died on 4 August 1923 and was buried with full military honours at Lyne.

David Leece

References and Further Reading

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- Sutton, Ralph (1989). Some reflections on the USI of New South Wales over one hundred years. *United Service* 42 (4), 5 – 25.

¹This volume is available in the reference section of the Ursula Davidson Library. It is also available on the Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University website at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hutton-sir-edward-thomas-henry-6779/text11725>.