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BIOGRAPHY

Who wasGideon James Grieve?

Lieutenant G. J. Grieve was a Scot who emigrated to Sydney and rose through the ranks of the New South Wales Scottish Rifles to become its adjutant. He volunteered for the Boer War (1899 – 1902) and was killed-in-action at the battle of Paardeberg, while on secondment to the 2nd Battalion, The Black Watch, as a company commander on 18 February 1900.

Gideon James Grieve was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1863. When his father would not let him join the local regiment, The Royal Scots, due to his tender years, he came out to Sydney and established a successful stationery business in the city. He enlisted as a private in the Scottish Volunteer Rifle Corps (re-designated 5th (Union) Volunteer Regiment¹ in 1896), a colonial volunteer unit raised in Sydney in 1885, and rose through the ranks (Buckley 1986). He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in October 1895, became a Special Service Officer on the New South Wales Permanent Staff and was appointed adjutant of the 5th Regiment.

When the second Anglo-Boer War broke out in South Africa in 1899, Grieve, now a first lieutenant, volunteered and was appointed to the New South Wales Staff. Shortly after arrival in Cape Town he was seconded to command H Company, 2nd Battalion, The Black Watch, to replace one of the many British regular army officers who had been killed-in-action at Magersfontein on 11 December 1899 (Buckley 1986, Anon. 2009).

One of his first acts was to write to the next-of-kin of those members of the company who had been killed at Magersfontein. The actual text² of one of those notes, written in pencil in camp at Modder River, Orange Free State, on 30 December 1899, reads: "I regret that I have the painful duty of informing you of the death of your son No. 6852 Private Cuthbert who was killed-in-action at Magersfontein on 11th Inst. Please accept the consolation that your son died a true Scotsman. The Company and the Regiment send you their sympathy." It must have been a harrowing experience for Grieve to write that letter to the mother of one of his men killed in battle.



Lieutenant G. J. Grieve c. 1895 – 1900
[Photo: Australian War Memorial Negative No. A03889]

Six weeks later, Grieve led his company in the Battle of Koodesberg displaying conspicuous gallantry and skill as a leader. Subsequently, during the operations for the relief of Kimberley and the attack on Cronje's Laager at Paadeberg Drift on 18 February 1900, he was killed-in-action while attempting to save one of his wounded soldiers.³ His actions were described by a brother officer as displaying "the most magnificent bravery". He was 36-years-old at the time of his death and left a widow and young children.

It is a mark of the high regard in which Lieutenant Grieve was held in Sydney that two memorials were erected to his memory in 1900. The first was the handsome Grieve memorial drinking fountain on the cliff at Watson's Bay, which originally bore a figure of Lieutenant Grieve in highland dress uniform. Sadly, the statue was destroyed by vandals

many years ago. The second was the splendid obelisk, recently restored, at the corner of York and Jamison Streets in Sydney, opposite Scots Church.

References

- Anonymous (2009). *Monumentally Speaking*. NSW Boer War Memorial Committee Occasional Newsletter No. 3, August 2009. p. 8.
- Buckley, M. J. (1986). *Scarlet and tartan: the story of the regiments and regimental bands of the NSW Scottish Rifles (Volunteers), the 30th Battalion (NSW Scottish Regiment), and "A" Company and Pipes and Drums, 17th Battalion, Royal New South Wales Regiment* (The Red Hackle Association: Sydney).

Donald Ramsay⁴

¹'Union' in the title refers to the fact that the unit contained Scottish, Irish and St. George Rifles. It was re-designated the New South Wales Scottish Rifle Regiment in 1908 and became affiliated with the Royal Highland Regiment, The Black Watch (Buckley 1986).

²The original letter in 1998 was in the possession of Colonel Donald Wilson of the Black Watch and was published in *Red Hackle*, the Black Watch magazine.

³Based on the inscription on the Grieve memorial opposite Scots Church, Sydney.

⁴Colonel D. Mcl. Ramsay OAM (Retd), a member of our Institute, is the Black Watch Association representative in Australia. He served with the Black Watch in Italy and Greece in World War II and post-war with the Royal Australian Regiment and the Pacific Islands Regiment. This is an edited version of an address that he gave on Boer War Day, 31 May 2009, at the re-dedication of the Grieve memorial at Watson's Bay.