

HAROLD EDWARD (POMPEY) ELLIOTT (1878-1931)

Full military funeral for war hero “Pompey”

The outpouring of grief which resulted from news of the untimely death of Major General “Pompey” Elliott, CB, CMG, DSO, DCM, VD on 23 March 1931 culminated with a full military funeral. The cortege, with his casket loaded onto a gun carriage pulled by horses sporting black plumes, moved from his home in Camberwell along four miles of crowded streets accompanied by an escort party and military bands. Several thousand attended and the former Prime Minister, Stanley Bruce, marched as a common soldier along with the others to Burwood Cemetery. He left a wife, son Neil and daughter, Violet.



Nicknamed by his men after the famous footballer, Fred “Pompey” Elliott, his outstanding physique and imposing presence inspired those he led and, together with his questioning mind and ability to personally lead from the front, he was held in high regard by those he led. Not so much so by the

British command who resented his willingness to question orders and outspokenness.

His reputation for personally checking out conditions, often resulting in changes to the plan of battle, caused him to quarrel with his commanding officers.

His open contempt for some leading British commanders who, in his opinion, often preferred to stick to regulations and rules unsuited to the type of war they were now fighting, meant that his attempts at promotion were passed over in preference for those who had toed the official line. Later, on his return to Australia, some had not forgotten his disregard for formality and his lack of tact when publically disagreeing with military decisions. Once he entered parliament as a popular Senator he made it his mission to speak out on any matters relating to military issues or returned soldiers.

He was highly decorated in almost every area he served. In the Boer War his abilities were soon noticed. In the First World War he was instrumental in victories at Bullecourt and at Polygon Wood as well as Villers-Bretonneux and developed an innovative and impressive knowledge of actions which resulted in success as well as less loss of life. Unlike many leaders he always put the safety of his men first. The initial action of the 15th Brigade on the Western Front was at Fromelles, an event he was personally opposed to, resulted in 5,533 casualties with 3,000 dead in 24 hours.

Elliott’s deep and abiding sense of injustice, combined with the strain of his war service, undermined his health leading to early death.

Find out more

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McMullin, R. *Pompey Elliott*, (2002)

McMullin, R. *Pompey Elliott at War: In his own Words*, (2017)



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Jan is a professional historian who has worked across the fields of heritage, education and tourism. She has taught at several universities, including Monash University where she delivered the master of public history course. She is also a former Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria. Jan was appointed to The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in 2010.



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