

James Whiteside McCAY



James (Jim) McCay was born in Ireland in 1864. His family migrated to Castlemaine in 1865. He won a scholarship to Scotch College and was dux in 1880. He was an Ormond man, at Melbourne University, and was initially an educator, having bought Castlemaine Grammar school at the age of 20. He obtained his law degree (and a Supreme Court Prize) in 1897.

Active in the militia and politics, McCay was a lieutenant-colonel in the Victorian Rifles by 1900. He was Federal Minister of Defence in 1904-5, after which he opened a legal practice. He was appointed to command the new Australian Intelligence Corps in 1906 and became a colonel.

At the outbreak of War, McCay was appointed to command the 2nd Infantry Brigade and embarked with the first contingent, aboard the *Orvieta*, in October 1914. His brigade was at the landing in Gallipoli in 25 April 1915 and suffered enormous casualties at Krithia, for which he was unjustly blamed. He was wounded in the leg and invalided home.

In 1916, he was inspector general of the AIF in Australia but soon returned to Egypt to command the 5th Division. In July 1916 his unit was at

Fromelles, where again massive casualties were suffered and again he was held responsible.

He was relieved of his field command in January 1917 and appointed to command the base depots in England, where he served until after demobilisation, and was appointed KCMG and KBE respectively.

After his return to Australia he abandoned legal practice and became a business advisor to the Commonwealth Government, and then deputy chairman of the State Savings Bank of Victoria. He also wrote for *The Argus* on political and economic subjects.

He died in 1930 and was survived by his two daughters.

A biography about McCay entitled *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life* authored by Christopher Wray, has been published by Oxford University Press.