

# Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

## Major General Sir Charles ROSENTHAL, KCB, CMG, DSO, VD

(1875-1954)

Charles Rosenthal was an architect and joined the Geelong Battery of the Victorian Militia Garrison Artillery in 1892 and was commissioned in 1903. He was promoted major in the Australian Field Artillery in 1908 to command a 5 inch howitzer battery and lieutenant colonel in July 1914 and appointed CO of the 5th Australian Field Artillery Brigade (FAB).

When war was declared, Rosenthal joined the AIF and was appointed CO 3rd FAB, 1st Division. Despite Major General Bridges' initial refusal, Rosenthal convinced him to allow some guns to be landed at Gallipoli on 26 April 1915 and placed in exposed forward positions allowing them to use direct fire on occasions. They also played a part in counter-battery work. The guns proved crucial to the defence of the beachhead.

He was wounded twice on Gallipoli, on the first occasion, 5 May, he was hit in the head, back, left arm and right knee, by shellfire and evacuated to Egypt. On the second occasion, a rifle bullet passed through his left leg but he remained on duty. However, on 25 August he was evacuated to England with enteric dysentery.

Rosenthal rejoined his brigade on 3 January 1916, in Egypt, after the evacuation of Anzac. For his services on Gallipoli, he was mentioned in dispatches and made a Companion of the Bath (CB) on 8 November 1915. On 21 February 1916, he promoted and appointed CRA 4th Division and briefly commander of the artillery of an ad hoc force, including RA units, defending the Suez Canal.

His new divisional artillery was quickly forged from a core of experienced gunners and recruits from other corps. They embarked for France on 2 June 1916 and the next month his guns were in action at Fromelles. Rosenthal was mentioned in dispatches in November and again in January 1917 and made CMG. He was wounded again on 20 December 1916.

The German counterattack at Lagnicourt on 15 April 1917 found the Australian artillery well forward and some guns of the 1st Division Artillery were overrun. At one point, Rosenthal ordered Rabett, commanding Q Group in the Noreuil Valley, to bring up his horses and, at his discretion, prepare to remove or disable his guns by removing the sights and breech blocks. Fortunately, the infantry halted the German advance.

Being the senior brigadier, Rosenthal was acting commander of the 4th Division on five occasions in 1916 and 1917 and was given command of the 9th Infantry Brigade to gain infantry experience. The Official Historian, Captain C. E. W. Bean, wrote that Rosenthal was '*a man with a breezy, thrusting personality, and keen, simple enthusiasms - especially for the*

*British Empire, its history and its traditions -- who brought to the leadership of the brigade a robustness and audacity intensely welcome to its members'.*

This came at a cost; he was gassed at Passchendaele on 18 October 1917 and evacuated but rejoined the brigade on 12 January 1918 in time to become acting commander of the 1st Division until 13 February 1918, and the 3rd Division 16-26 March 1918. On 3 June 1918, he was awarded the DSO for Broodseinde in October 1917 and his brief command of the 1st Division.

On 22 May 1918, Rosenthal was appointed GOC 2nd Division and promoted to major general. He was wounded a fifth time on 19 July, this time by a sniper while performing a daylight reconnaissance of a dangerous spot, and evacuated, but rejoined his division on 6 August 1918 just in time for the Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918. On 31 August to 2 September 1918, the 2nd Division took Mont St Quentin by storm, in what is widely regarded as one of the AIF's greatest achievements of the war. On October 1918, the 2nd Division punched through the German front at Montbrechain, the Australian Corps' last fight of the war.

By wars end Rosenthal had been mentioned in dispatches seven times and in the 1919 New Year's list he was created a Knight Commander of the Bath (KCB). Thereafter, he took command of the AIF Depots in the UK on 10 March 1919 and embarked for Australia on 22 November. He commanded the 2nd Division (Militia) 1921-26 and 1932-37.

After the war, Rosenthal returned to business, politics, and community interests. He was also Administrator Norfolk Island 1937-45 and helped organise an infantry unit on the island during WWII.

He died on 11 May 1954 and was cremated with full military honours after a service at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney.

Sources: A. J. Hill, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 11, p.451-453; Personnel File, NAA; "Notes re German Attack April 15th", dated 19 April 1917, AWM26 170/12\*; C. E. W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-19 18*. Volume 1: *The Story of Anzac*, p. 507, Volume 1: *The Story of Anzac*, pp. 77: *The AIF in France 1917*, pp. 300-301. W. Perry, *Major General Sir Charles Rosenthal*, *Victorian Historical Magazine*. Vol. 40, No.3, August 1969. Hallcraft. Melbourne.

For more information follow this link: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rosenthal-sir-charles-8268>