

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Major General Harold William GRIMWADE, CB, CBE

(1869-1949)

Harold Grimwade was born in St Kilda, Melbourne on 18 May 1869. He was educated at Melbourne Grammar and the Queen Elizabeth School, Ipswich, Essex, England. He qualified as a pharmacist in London. On return to Australia he joined the family firm, Felton, Grimwade & Co., as warehouse manager and was admitted as a partner in the company in 1893. In this role he displayed a considerable talent for leadership and management of employees.

Grimwade joined the Victorian Field Artillery in 1891 and was promoted to lieutenant colonel of Australian Field Artillery on 16 May 1910. In August 1914, he became Chief Embarkation Officer for Victoria. He was appointed to the AIF as a lieutenant colonel on 26 August 1915 to command the 4th Australian Field Artillery Brigade (FAB), a new unit formed for the 2nd Division. The formation of the 2nd Division Artillery drained Australia of guns and instructors and left the artillery in Australia badly depleted. The 4th FAB embarked for Egypt on 8 November 1915, arriving on 12 December.

The 2nd Division Artillery thus missed the Gallipoli Campaign, and instead began intensive training for France. The 4th FAB departed Alexandria for France on 12 March 1916. On 10 July 1916, Grimwade was promoted to colonel and temporary brigadier general and appointed CRA 3rd Division, then training at Lark Hill, England.

The 3rd Division Artillery was deployed to France on 31 December 1916. Although the division carried out a number of raids, its first major operation was at Messines in June 1917. For this battle, Grimwade had not only his own two brigades (7th and 8th) but also the AIF's three Army brigades (3rd, 6th and 12th) and two British brigades, a total of 120 18 pounder guns and 30 4.5 inch howitzers. The commander of the 3rd Division, Major General John Monash, charged Grimwade with responsibility for shelling some 446 targets before the day of the assault. Perhaps because of their similar business and military backgrounds, Monash and Grimwade got along well. Although a Gunner himself, Monash relied on Grimwade for advice. In the event, the artillery barrage was flawless, and the battle a complete success.

The next battle was a tougher fight. At Broodeseinde on 4 October 1917, Grimwade had his two brigades plus five British brigades. German counter-battery fire was fierce and the artillery and ammunition columns came under heavy fire. Despite casualties of the same order as the infantry, the gunners managed once again to produce a tremendous barrage, enabling the infantry to advance. By this stage, barrages were carefully choreographed affairs, alternately moving and pausing, and searching out beyond the infantry positions. But when it came to move forward for the next step, Grimwade had overwhelming problems. The weather broke and the ground turned to mud. Some guns became bogged and had to be abandoned.

Guns began to wear out faster than they could be repaired or replaced. Owing to the number of guns out of action, Grimwade had to borrow 13 from a British division. Unlike the infantry, the gunners remained in the line; in the case of 3rd Division Artillery, continuously from May to October 1917. Living in waterlogged bivouacs under intermittent shellfire took its toll on the men's health. Grimwade was forced to set up his guns along plank roads, distant from the intended positions. The barrage that followed for the attack on 9 October was thin and irregular and was a failure. Another failure on 12 October brought the Australian involvement in the campaign to an end.

In January 1918, Grimwade was promoted to colonel. In a quiet sector of the line near Messines the 3rd Division, now part of the Australian Corps spent the winter preparing for a German Offensive in the spring. Grimwade and Monash clashed with their new Corps Chief of Staff, Major General C. B. B. White (qv.) over the placement of the artillery, which they felt was too far forward and would be overrun in the event of an enemy offensive. In the event, the initial German blow fell on the Somme sector to the south and the 3rd Division Artillery was rushed south to defend the river.

For the Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918, Grimwade had control of nine brigades of field and horse artillery. They fired the initial barrage and then became part of the defensive artillery set-up. The whole operation was not only complex, but had to be conducted under conditions of great secrecy, with positions prepared and ammunition dumped without alerting the Germans. Nonetheless the artillery scheme was carried out without a hitch. The gunners fired in support of the advance to the Hindenburg Line and beyond, and remained in the line after the infantry had been withdrawn, firing in support of the British and American armies.

On 14 November 1918, after the Armistice, Grimwade became GOCRA of The Australian Corps. In response to a strike by men of the 3rd Division Artillery in December, Grimwade resumed command. "Grim Death" - as he was called by his men - met with the men, listened sympathetically to their troubles, attempted to rectify what he could, and promised to pass the rest on to an equally sympathetic corps commander, Lieutenant General J. J. Talbot Hobbs (qv.). Grimwade had been made a Companion of St Michael and St George (CMG) in 1917 and a Companion of the Bath (CB) in 1918 and had been mentioned in dispatches four times. He returned to Australia on 27 February 1919. From 1926 to 1930 he commanded the 4th Infantry Division (Militia) based in Victoria.

With his brothers Norton and Russell Grimwade, Harold continued to build up the family business. In 1929, their company was forced to merge into Drug Houses of Australia (DHA), with Norton as chairman and Harold as a board member. When Norton died on 29 April 1945, Harold replaced him as chairman of Australian Consolidated Industries (ACI) and Felton, Grimwade. He died on 2 January 1949.

Sources: Reprinted from University of NSW ADFA website <http://www.unsw.adfa.edu.au/-rmallett>; AWM 183/22 and Family information.

For more information follow the link below.

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/grimwade-harold-william-7053>