



**Major General J.M.A. DURRANT CMG, DSO**

[1885 – 1963]



**Major General Durrant was President of the Club 1941-43**

James Murdoch Archer Durrant was born on 17 March 1885 at St Leonards, South Australia to Jonathon William and Margaret Elizabeth Durrant. He was educated at Goodwood State School and then studied teaching and graduated from the University of Adelaide in 1903.

In December 1910 James announced his engagement to Clara Ellen (née Birk) and they were married on 7 January 1911 at St John's Anglican Church in Parramatta NSW.

At the age of 14, James enlisted in the Adelaide Rifles as a bugler. In 1903 he joined 1 South Australian Battery and was promoted to Sergeant in February 1904.

*We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.*

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James Durrant as a Bugler with the Adelaide Rifles

On 1 July 1907 James was appointed Staff Sergeant Major with the 1<sup>st</sup> Light Horse Regiment at Lancer Barracks in Parramatta NSW. On 1 July 1910, on becoming the first member of his regiment to pass the stringent officer examinations, he was commissioned as a Lieutenant. On 1 February 1912 he was promoted to temporary Captain and was transferred to Melbourne, with his rank being confirmed shortly before the outbreak of WW1.

Captain Durrant enlisted in the AIF on 20 November 1914 and was appointed Captain and Adjutant of the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion. He embarked with his battalion on 22 December and they landed at Alexandria on 1 February 1915. The battalion then completed training at which time Captain Durrant proposed the adoption of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion Colour patch of a light blue over navy blue rectangle.

The 13th Battalion landed at Anzac Cove on the evening of 25 April where, over the following week, they sustained heavy casualties, including senior officers. On 2 May 1915 Captain Durrant was promoted temporary Major and appointed second in command of the battalion. He assumed command of the battalion on 4 June 1915 and, as an acting Lieutenant Colonel, led the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion in heavy fighting around Quinn's Post before influenza forced his evacuation to Egypt on 23 June. He resumed command of the battalion on 23 September but, on 2 October, was once again evacuated because of illness. He resumed command on 28 October however a case of jaundice caused his final evacuation from Gallipoli on 19 November 1915.

GENERAL LIST.			
4th Inf.	4th Aust. Div.	1st ANZAC.	No. 9.16. Date of Recommendation.
		Action for which Commanded.	Recommended by Honour or Reward.
18th Bn.	Lt-Col. Edward Alfred BRAKE-SHOCKMAN C.M.G.	For his untiring energy and devotion to duty from the time the 15th Bn. arrived in France (7th June) until he landed and transfer to 11th Bde. as Brigadier on 29th August. This period included the operations at POINTE and vicinity. It was due to his continuous good service that the 15th Bn acquitted itself so well in these operations.	C.H. BRANK, Brig-Gen. D.S.O. 4th Inf. Bde.
		For continuous good and successful work as C.O. his Battalion during the fighting on the Somme in August and September, 1916. A fine Battalion leader.	
15th Bn.	Lieut-Col. James Hardeck Archie. DURRANT.	For continual good work as Bde Major 4th Inf. Bde. He now commands the 13 Bde. and already is raising its fighting efficiency. Strongly recommend he be awarded the D.S.O.	C.H. BRANK Brig-Gen. D.S.O. 4th Inf. Bde.

On 16 January 1916 Major Durrant was transferred to the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade where he was temporarily appointed as Brigade Major. On 15<sup>th</sup> March his knowledge of staff work resulted in him being appointed as the Brigade Major of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which was being reorganised to be amongst the first units to proceed to France.

In a letter to a friend he described the fighting in this period “... you will be pleased to hear of the honours our battalion has won on the field.....I cannot praise the men too greatly. They are the salt of the earth and nothing that can be done is too good for them; ... The officers are a band of brothers, in whom I and the men have the utmost confidence. The climatic conditions are extremely severe. I have been unable to find a dry place to write a letter for about 2 weeks....”

Major Durrant proceeded to France in early June 1916. Over the following 18 months he rendered distinguished service as commanding officer of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion and acting commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. In August 1916 he led the battalion at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm and was promoted Temporary Lieutenant Colonel. Throughout 1917, he commanded the battalion and at times, the brigade in major operations including: the attack on Stormy Trench (in February), the first Battle of Bullecourt (in April) and the Battle of Messines (in June). In August of that year he sustained a shell wound and was evacuated to England. He re-joined the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion in October and in December was appointed Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General of the 2nd Australian Division.

On 3 June 1918 he was appointed a Brevet Lieutenant Colonel, “*For specially meritorious work during the present War*”. On 25 July 1918 he was confirmed in rank as a Major and was confirmed as a Brevet Lieutenant Colonel.

On 1 October 1919 Lt Colonel Durrant was appointed Deputy Director of the Repatriation and Demobilisation department and spent the remainder of his WW1 service in senior roles assisting in the enormous task of repatriating 180,000 Australian troops. He departed England on 22 January and disembarked in Sydney on 12 March 1920. He was discharged from the AIF on 11 May 1920.

Lt Colonel J.M.A Durrant had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order (1 January 1917), the Serbian Order of the White Eagle, 4<sup>th</sup> Class with Swords (15<sup>th</sup> February 1917) and the Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (3 June 1918). He was Mentioned in Despatches on five occasions. He was also awarded the Australian War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Lt Colonel Durrant was later appointed Assistant Quartermaster General of the 1<sup>st</sup> Military District in Queensland and he subsequently held senior roles in Queensland (until 1926), South Australia, (1926 to 1935), Victoria (1935 to 1937) and Tasmania (1937 to 1939). He was appointed Aide-de-Camp to the Governor General (Sir Isaac Isaacs) on 1 June 1935, a post he held for a number of years.



Major General Durrant being farewelled from Western Command on his departure for Northern Command in July 1941.

In August 1939 he was appointed General Officer Commanding Western Command and in July 1941 he was appointed General Officer Commanding Northern Command. He spent the remainder of WW2 based in Queensland. Because of ongoing health problems, he was placed on the retired list on 5 April 1944, with the rank of Major General, closing a long and distinguished military career.



Major General Durrant with the Minister for Army, Mr F Ford. Brisbane 1941

Major General Durrant was President of the United Service Club from 1941 to 1943. As Immediate Past President he participated in a sub-committee that was appointed to revise the Club rules.

Major General James Murdoch Archer Durrant CMG DSO died in Concord NSW on 17 September 1963.

Sources included:

- Various web pages. For Army.
- United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992nby Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club meeting minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents
- Australian War Memorial Collection <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P11033289>