



Brigadier C A McEACHERN DSO, ED

[1905 – 1983]



Brigadier McEachern was President of the Club 1964 - 65

Cranston Albury McEachern was born on 9 September 1905 at Dongarra, Western Australia, only child of Archibald Hector Cranston McEachern, tailor, and his wife Lillian Emma (née Dumbrell). His father was born in New South Wales and his mother in Victoria.

Educated at Brisbane Grammar School, Cranston trained as a solicitor and, admitted on 2 May 1928, immediately established his own law firm.

On 24 April 1936 at St John's Anglican Cathedral, Brisbane, he married Clarice Jean Lynagh (née Smith). They had one son, Ian Cranston [1938-2009], and separated in January 1940. Shortly after his divorce was finalised—on 17 October at the Ann Street Presbyterian Church, Brisbane, he married Hazel Lawson (née Lyon) [1916-199x], a clerk. Their children were David, Ranald, and Margaret.

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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He had been commissioned in the Australian Field Artillery, Militia, in 1924; by 1936 he was commanding the 11th Field Brigade as a major (1929). In February 1937 McEachern had been promoted to lieutenant colonel. Following the outbreak of World War II, he gave up his law practice and on 1 May 1940 joined the Australian Imperial Force as a major. He regained his lieutenant colonelcy in October on being appointed to command the 2/4th Anti-Tank Regiment, which deployed to Malaya (Malaysia) with the 8th Division.

The unit saw action against the Japanese from 27 December 1941 until the surrender on 15 February 1942. When enemy tanks appeared, particularly at Bakri on the Muar-Parit Sulong Road on 18 January, they were promptly dealt with and positions saved.



A two pounder Anti-Tank Gun of the 2/4th Anti-Tank Regiment, 8th Australian Division, AIF, directed by Sgt Charles Parsons, of Moonee Ponds, Vic, in action at a road block at Bakri on the Muar-Parit Sulong Road. In the background is a destroyed Japanese Type 95 Ha-Go Medium Tank. The Anti-Tank Gun was known as the rear gun because of its position in the defence layout of the area. Sgt Parsons was later awarded the DCM for his and his crew's part in destroying six of the nine Japanese tanks during this engagement.

McEachern's superior, the redoubtable Brigadier (later Major General) Cecil Arthur Callaghan, CB, CMG, DSO, VD, reported that, throughout the operations, he was 'an inspiration to his Regiment owing to his outstanding ability, command and control which were exercised without regard for personal safety'. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (1947). From 6 February he commanded the divisional artillery in Callaghan's absence.

In captivity from February 1942, McEachern was assigned to command the Australian part (2,220 men) of 'D' Force, sent in March 1943 to work on the Burma-Thailand Railway. At the Hintok Road camp, Thailand, he commanded the whole formation (including Colonel "Weary" Dunlop's contingent) - some 5,000 Australian and British troops. His men worked on the 'Pack of Cards Bridge' and 'Hell Fire Pass'. He was promoted to colonel and temporary brigadier with effect from April 1942.

When Japan surrendered in August 1945, he was the senior Allied officer in Thailand. He took charge of repatriating approximately 30,000 troops. Claiming an authority he did not hold, he persuaded Japanese officers not to comply with Allied orders to concentrate their former prisoners in the Bangkok area. He knew that the already emaciated and malnourished soldiers would have been marched long distances, sometimes more than one hundred miles (161 km), and hundreds might have died. In November he returned to Australia. For his services while a prisoner of war he was mentioned in despatches. He transferred to the Reserve of Officers on 19 February 1946 as an honorary brigadier.

McEachern resumed his legal practice and Cranston McEachern & Co. became a major Brisbane law firm. The firm continues – Cranston's son David was a partner until retiring and now consults to the firm; and his son Toby manages the conveyancing operation of the firm.

Cranston was active in community roles. In the 1946 Senate election he was a candidate for the Service Party of Australia. He was president of the United Service Institute, Queensland (1946-61), and chairman of directors and honorary solicitor of the Queensland Vasey Housing Auxiliary of the War Widows' Guild of Australia, Queensland. In addition, he was president of the Young Men's Christian Association of Brisbane (1964-69) and honorary colonel of the Australian Cadet Corps, Northern Command (1966-70).

McEachern joined the Club in 1926. He first served on the Committee as one of two Vice-Presidents in 1960 - 61, as sole Vice-President in 1962 - 63, President 1964 - 65, and Immediate Past President 1966 - 67.



Hazel and Cranston McEachern (right) and family c.1970's

He continued in full-time practice until his death on 15 October 1983 at Bridgeman Downs, Brisbane. His wife and their daughter and two sons, and the son of his first marriage, survived him.

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents
- Dictionary of Australian Biography Vol18, 2012
- Service Records, National Archives of Australia
- Official History of Australia in the War of 1939-1945 Series 1 Volume IV *The Japanese Thrust*, Lionel Wigmore
- Contributions from Captain David McEachern - Cranston's son and a Club Member. June 2020