



History and Heritage Series

Carved Elephant and Table

Brigadier Hugh Wrigley CBE, MC, ED



These Background Notes have been prepared as 'bite-sized' light reading for our Members. The intention is to broaden understanding of selected aspects of the Club's rich history and heritage, and the remarkable people who have contributed to its development over the years. They are based primarily on a number of websites, with specific additional information in places. We acknowledge that there are probably errors and omissions. **Please contact the Club if you have additional information or comments that will assist to improve these notes.**

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed over time. They are intended as casual reading, for private use by Members only, and as they lack the rigor, attributions, and acknowledgements required for academic or public use, Members are requested not to reproduce or distribute them outside of our membership.

Carved Elephant and Table

Brigadier Hugh Wrigley CBE, MC, ED



One of the most beloved art pieces in the Club is the elephant and mahout carved from a single piece of mahogany capturing the actions and movement of logging work.

It has greeted Members and guests near the front door since it was presented to the Club in 1946 and the patterns of wear and its patina demonstrate that many have found giving the elephant an affectionate pat as they pass to be irresistible.

Our records are scant and we do not have the full detail readily to hand, but nevertheless, what we do know is intriguing. Given our affection for the carving, it is worthwhile to record the background here.

The donor had a rich history and unusual military service spanning both world wars and this story alone is worth recording. He saw active service in Gallipoli and the Western Front in the Great War, in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Waziristan in the interwar period, and in North Africa, Greece, Palestine and the Pacific theatres during World War II. He also had successful careers in the public and private sectors when no longer in uniform.

The piece is almost certainly a memento from his service in the Indian Army during the interwar period and was presented to the Club as a gesture of appreciation in recognition of the hospitality of the Club during his service in Brisbane in the late stages of World War II.

The Carving

The artist is not known but it is probable that it was done by a local craftsman in either Burma or the Sub-continent, and depicts an Indian elephant at work in logging operations under the control of its mahout.

The elephant, mahout, and log is from a single piece of mahogany and the artwork comprises the carving and the tabletop on which it sits.

A small brass plaque on the edge of the tabletop records that it was presented by Brigadier H Wrigley CBE MC in 1946.

Brigadier Hugh Wrigley CBE, MC, ED

Brigadier Hugh Wrigley CBE, MC, ED (1 December 1891 – 3 June 1980) saw active service with the Australian Army in World War I and World War II, and also served with the Indian Army and in Australia's Citizen's Military Forces in the inter-war years.

After returning to Australia in 1922, Wrigley worked as an oil company representative in New South Wales and Victoria and served in the Citizens Military Force.

During World War II he volunteered for overseas service. He was wounded when commanding 2/5h Battalion at Bardia (Libya) and later fought in Greece where he commanded the 2/6th Battalion. Wrigley commanded the 20th Brigade in North Africa, leading them during the Second Battle of El Alamein.

Later in WW II he commanded the 33rd Brigade in the Netherlands East Indies where he took responsibility for overseeing the repatriation of a large number of Australian and British personnel.

After the WW II, Wrigley worked as a public servant in the area of trade and commerce, serving in a number of overseas posts.

He died in 1980 at the age of 88.

Early life

He was born on 1 December 1891 at Scarsdale, Victoria, the sixth child of John Wrigley and Isabella (née McGeachin) and was educated at a number of public and private schools. After completing his education he gained employment as a military staff clerk at the Department of Defence in Melbourne in May 1911.

World War I

Following the outbreak of World War I, Wrigley volunteered for overseas service and enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 17 August 1914. Granted the rank of staff sergeant, he was allocated to 3rd Brigade headquarters.

Arriving at Gallipoli in April 1915 on *HMS Colne*, he was made temporary warrant officer in October. Following the Allied evacuation from the Gallipoli Peninsula in December 1915, he was returned to Egypt. For his service at Gallipoli he received a Mentioned in Despatches

On 20 February 1916 he was commissioned as a second lieutenant and posted to the 59th Battalion. In June 1916 he was promoted to lieutenant prior to deployment to France and posted to the 60th Battalion as adjutant.

He was severely wounded on 19 July 1916 during the battle of Fromelles while leading an attack against enemy trenches, for which he was later awarded the Military Cross. After spending two months in hospital in England, he was promoted to captain in November. He rejoined the 60th Battalion in January 1917 and was appointed Adjutant in May.

Inter-war Period

He transferred to the Indian Army in July 1917, and was appointed as a second lieutenant, and was later promoted to captain. He was initially posted to the 2nd Battalion, 123rd Outram's Rifles and served with them until 1921 when he was transferred to the 1st Battalion, 125th Napier's Rifles. In 1922, these two regiments were amalgamated to form the 6th Rajputana Rifles.

While serving in the Indian Army, Wrigley participated in the campaigns in Afghanistan during the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, in Iraq during the Iraqi revolt against the British between 1920 and 1921, and in Waziristan in 1922.

He returned to Australia in late 1922.

He purchased a grazing property at Balmoral, Victoria together with some Indian Army friends. He married Alison Grove Wilson on 8 January 1926 at Gardiner, Melbourne. They had a son before divorcing.

Moving to Urangeline, New South Wales, he gained employment with Vacuum Oil Co. Pty Ltd in 1930 and worked at Hay and later at Sale, Victoria.

Between 1933 and 1936 Wrigley was an active member of the Citizens Military Force. Following a break in service he rejoined in March 1939.

World War II

Following the outbreak of World War II, Wrigley volunteered for overseas service and enlisted in the 2nd Australian Imperial Force. Holding the rank of major, in October 1939 he was posted to the 2/6th Battalion as the unit's second-in-command.

Sailing for the Middle East in April 1940, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel in December and posted as Commanding Officer of the 2/5th Battalion.

While fighting at Bardia (Libya) he was wounded in the shoulder by shell-fire on 3 January 1941. After a period of convalescence in hospital, he joined the 2/6th Battalion in March as Commanding Officer and led the battalion in the Greek campaign in April.

Promoted to colonel in January 1942, he was posted as the officer in charge Australian Imperial Force Reinforcement Depot in Palestine in February.

He was later promoted to temporary brigadier on 28 September 1942, and placed in command of the 20th Brigade at the Second Battle of El Alamein (Egypt).

Relinquishing his acting rank, he resumed his post at the reinforcement depot on 27 October. He was Mentioned in Despatches and appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1943.

Returning to Australia in February 1943, he was commandant of various training depots and bases as a temporary brigadier. Appointed to the command of the 1st Base Sub-Area in September 1944, he deployed with the unit to Morotai, (Netherlands East Indies) in March 1945.

Following the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945, he was appointed in command of the 3rd Australian Prisoner of War Reception Group located in Manila and helped the return home of over 12,000 British and 3,000 Australian personnel.

He was appointed to command the 33rd Brigade on Ambon (Netherlands East Indies) until November 1945 when he returned to Australia in February 1946. He transferred to the Reserve of Officers on 30 April 1945.



Brigadier H. Wrigley, the Commander of 1st Base Sub Area, inspecting No 1 Company, 101 Convalescent Depot at Grovely, Brisbane, 5 April 1945

Later life

He was appointed to the Department of Commerce and Agriculture in November 1946 and later as a commercial counsellor at the Australian Mission in Japan.

He was the Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong and the Philippines (1949 – 1952), Bombay (1953 – 1955), and Vancouver (1955 – 1957).

After retiring from the Department of Commerce and Agriculture he became a company director and bought property at Bringelly and Wagga Wagga with his son.

He married Jean Stewart (née Pirrit) at Burleigh Heads, Queensland on 18 September 1968.

He died on 3 June 1980 at Caringbah, Sydney. He was survived by his wife and the son of his first marriage.

A portrait of Wrigley, painted by W. H. Parry, was submitted for the 1944 Archibald prize.