

Fergusson M.A.

Profile

Ruthless

D.S.O. M.C. Name: Fergusson M.A.[D.S.O. M.I.D.]

Service No: VX23

Rank: Brig.

Unit: 6 Div Cav Brief History Served WW1. 3rd. battery AFA rising to the rank of lieutenant 4th. division Artillery. Awarded MC and mentioned in Haig's dispatches (see anecdote: Incident at Messines-Wyschaete) . See story of in the Militia in 1926-32 as Major of Artillery Battery at Albury NSW. And again from 1936, Fergusson was given command of the 8th (Indi) Light Horse Regiment and promoted lieutenant colonel in 1939. He was seconded to the A.I.F. and took command of the 6th Divisional Reconnaissance (later Cavalry) Regiment on 13 October. 'A man who spoke only when necessary, and then forcefully', he was nicknamed 'Ruthless' after telling his troops that he would be ruthless with any soldier who appeared incorrectly dressed. He was firm and austere, trained the unit well, and set high standards of personal conduct and technical efficiency. The regiment reached the Middle East in February 1940. On 9 March 1941 Fergusson was seriously wounded in the siege of the Italian stronghold of Giarabub, Libya, Was given up for dead, but refused to succumb and was repatriated in June. For his services in Cyrenaica, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and mentioned in dispatches. After 25 years Army service, his military career concluded as Brigadier commanding 8th. Infantry Brigade in Wewak NG area. Two sons VX6545 Fergusson T.St.D.F.(Terry) and VX20665 Fergusson D.S.F.(Derek). both served under his command in the Middle East.

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Vale: Details Required

Name

FERGUSSON, MAURICE ALFRED Service Australian Army Service Number VX23 Date of Birth 5 Dec 1895 Place of Birth MELBOURNE, VIC Date of Enlistment 19 Oct 1939 Locality on Enlistment EUROA, VIC Place of Enlistment MELBOURNE, VIC Next of Kin FERGUSSON, M Date of Discharge 16 Oct 1945 Rank Brigadier Posting at Discharge HQ 8 AUST INF BDE WW2 Honours and Gallantry Companion of the Distinguished Service Order

INDOMITABLE RUTHLESS, EVEN AT EASE HE ALMOST SAT TO ATTENTION

Oil painting from Hopkins Barracks Officers Mess 1st. Armd. Corps. Courtesy Hon. Historian David Finlayson

Birth: 5 December 1895, Caulfield, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia Death: 27 September 1975, Dunedoo, New South Wales, Australia Occupation: army officer, dairy farmer, grazier (unspecified), local government councillor, local government head FERGUSSON, MAURICE ALFRED (1895-1975), army officer and grazier, was born on 5 December 1895 at Caulfield, Melbourne, third son of Ernest Fairchild Fergusson, a bank manager from Mauritius, and his Victorian-born wife Alfritha Elizabeth, née Turner. Educated at University High School, Maurice worked as a jackeroo and completed compulsory military training before enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force on 24 August 1914. He sailed for Egypt in October as a gunner in the 1st Field Artillery Brigade, was promoted bombardier in March 1915 and landed at Gallipoli on 25 April. While recovering from a bullet-wound, he developed enteric fever and was hospitalized in England from September.

In July 1916 Fergusson was sent to the Western Front and joined the 10th F.A.B. next month. Six feet (183 cm) tall and weighing 13 st. 4 lb. (84 kg), he was commissioned in December and promoted lieutenant in May 1917. He was wounded at Messines, Belgium, on 7 June and mentioned in dispatches. On 8 August 1918 near Cérisy-Gailly, France, he saved his battery's guns and the lives of many of his men; he was awarded the Military Cross. For his actions throughout the period February to August, he won a Bar to his M.C. In the latter month he was accidentally injured and transferred to

hospital in England. He was to be granted a disability pension for the injury, but voluntarily surrendered it in 1922. On 6 January 1916 at the Church of St Edward the Confessor, Hound, Southampton, Fergusson had married Effie Hazel Skinner who accompanied him to Australia where his A.I.F. appointment terminated on 25 March 1919. After working in the country in New South Wales and Victoria, he bought a dairy farm at Whittlesea in 1927 and was a member of the local shire council from 1930 to 1934 (president 1931-32). As an Independent United Australia Party candidate, in 1932 he unsuccessfully contested the Legislative Assembly seat of Evelyn. In 1934-39 he managed branches of a pastoral company in New South Wales and Victoria. Serving in the Militia in 1926-32 and again from 1936, Fergusson was given command of the 8th (Indi) Light Horse Regiment and promoted lieutenant colonel in 1939. He was seconded to the A.I.F. and took command of the 6th Divisional Reconnaissance (later Cavalry) Regiment on 13 October. 'A man who spoke only when necessary, and then forcefully', he was nicknamed 'Ruthless' after telling his troops that he would be ruthless with any soldier who appeared incorrectly dressed. He was firm and austere, trained the unit well, and set high standards of personal conduct and technical efficiency. The regiment reached the Middle East in February 1940. On 9 March 1941 Fergusson was seriously wounded in the siege of the Italian stronghold of Giarabub, Libya, and was repatriated in June. For his services in Cyrenaica, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and mentioned in dispatches. Fergusson returned to the Middle East in November. He commanded the 2nd/17th Battalion in January-February 1942 in Syria and embarked for Australia in March. Promoted temporary brigadier next month, in 1942-44 he successively led the 1st and 2nd Armoured and the 2nd Infantry brigades. In New Guinea, from August 1944, he commanded the 8th Infantry Brigade in operations around Madang and Wewak, and was once more mentioned in dispatches. Back home, on 16 October 1945 he transferred to the Reserve of Officers as honorary brigadier.

In 1946 Fergusson stood as a Liberal Party candidate for the Senate, but was defeated. That year he bought Corio station near Inverell, New South Wales; in 1949 he moved to Moreton Bay, a farming and grazing property near Leadville. He maintained his political interests, holding executive positions in the party, and enjoyed shooting, golf, tennis and billiards. Retiring to Sydney in 1966, he gave generously of his time to Legacy, the Big Brother Movement and the Girl Guides' Association. Fergusson died on 27 September 1975 at Dunedoo and was buried at Moreton Bay. His wife survived him, as did four of their six sons; three had served in the A.I.F., including Terence who was killed in action in 1942 in Papua. [VIEW ANECDOTE](#) : (here) [Select Bibliography](#)

G. Long, *To Benghazi* (Canb, 1952); G. Long, *The Final Campaigns* (Canb, 1963); S. O'Leary, *To the Green Fields Beyond* (Syd, 1975); 'What We Have—We Hold!' (Syd, 1990?); Sydney Morning Herald, 17 Aug, 30 Sept 1946; war diaries of 4th Division Artillery Headquarters, 6th Division Cavalry Regiment, 2nd/17th Aust Infantry Battalion, 2nd Aust Armoured Brigade Headquarters and 2nd and 8th Aust Infantry Brigade Headquarters (Australian War Memorial); Department of Veterans' Affairs records (Canberra); private information. More on the resources

Our thanks to Author: J. B. Hopley Print Publication Details: J. B. Hopley, 'Fergusson, Maurice Alfred (1895 - 1975)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 14, Melbourne University Press, 1996, p. 155.