

**Sir John
Monash
and World
War One**

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Sir John Monash

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- **Most successful Jewish soldier – rose to be the commander-in-chief of the AIF (Australian Imperial Force)**
- **He was the ultimate outsider, as a German, as a Jew and as a reserve soldier.**
- **Aware of his significance as a Jewish general – said after the war that he told himself:**

‘Remember that you are a Jew and that if you muck it up our people will always be blamed for it’.

Background



- Humble background- father, Louis, came from Prussian Poland in 1853, aged 25.
- A few years later returned to Germany where he met and married Berthe Manasse and in 1864 they returned to Melbourne.
- Monash was born in 1865. First of three children – had a younger sister and brother.

Youth and Career

- 1874 - father bought country store, but his teacher recognized his abilities – Melbourne – Scotch College
- Started an Arts degree, but suspended for two years for financial reasons – returned and graduated Arts & Civil Engineering
- Enjoyed playing the piano, participating in student politics and debating.
- 1892 – 4: Employed by the Melbourne Harbor Trust but retrenched due to the depression
- Worked as consulting engineer and patent attorney – specialized in reinforced concrete

Early military career

- **Military involvement began at university**
- **Civilian soldier – joined Fourth Battalion Victorian Rifles in 1884 and then the Military Garrison Artillery – with them for 21 years. Commander with the rank of lieutenant.**
- **1913 – 13th Infantry Brigade and at the outbreak of World War I he was a Lieutenant Colonel.**

War Years

- **World War I: Out break of war, Commander of the Fourth Infantry Brigade - in July 1915 promoted to Brigadier**
- **April – December 1915 – Gallipoli – end of campaign the only original brigade commander not killed or evacuated.**
- **Period in Alexandria, Egypt – 1916**
- **1917 – appointed Commander-in-chief of the Third Division (one of five) –Major General**

Early Victories 1917

- Battle of Messines – June 1917 – clever use of tunnels and mines using the largest man-made explosion in history. Only two of the mines failed to detonate. Devastating effect.
- Other major battles fought that year.
- Battle at Passchendale very important.
- Battle of the Somme – held off German offensive, 1918.

Commander-in-Chief

- **May 1918 – appointed Commander-in-chief**
- **Appointment opposed by C.E.W. Bean, the official Australian war correspondent, and Frank Murdoch.**
- **Bean argued:** ‘Yes – Monash will get there – he must get there all the time on account of the qualities of his race; the Jew will always get there, I’m not sure that because of that very quality Monash is not more likely to help win this war, but the manner of winning it makes the victory in the long run scarcely worth the winning.’ (Serle, p.322)
- **Monash’s response:** ‘It is a great nuisance to have to fight a pogrom of this nature in the midst of all one’s other anxieties.’ (Serle, p.325)

Commander-in-Chief

- May 1918 – appointed Commander-in-chief
- brilliance with tank battles
- 4 July first major operation, Battle of Hamel – predicted a victory in 90 minutes; took 85! Low casualties and 1000 Germans taken prisoner. Monash wrote:

The Operation is a striking example of the success which invariably results from careful preparation and coordinated action: and will serve as a model and the standard of the fighting efficiency of the Australian corps.

Commander-in-Chief



- 8 August combined Australian British and Canadian troops victory Ludendorff: 'black day of the German army
- 12 August King George V knighted him in the field

Commander-in-Chief



● http://museumvictoria.com.au/collections/itemimages/045/870/45870_large.jpg

After the War

- **Director of repatriation**
- **Chairman of Victorian Electricity Commiss'n 1920**
- **Doctoral thesis in engineering: the Australian victories in France in 1918**
- **1923 – vice-chancellor of University of Melbourne**
- **1927 became first president of the Zionist Federation of Australia**



Post war

- Monash's contributions not sufficiently acknowledged, Serle has argued that:
All Monash's wartime honours and decorations were imperial and foreign. The Australian government made no gesture. It would not promote him to general, or offer him any military or other national job, or even consult him informally about his future. They were so ungenerous and tactless partly, perhaps because they feared a military caste rising to power on the basis of its wartime success (p.412).
- He was not promoted to the rank of general.

Post war

- After the war, Monash continued to face anti-Jewish feelings and rhetoric.
- Billy Hughes stated about him: 'he has the ability, but he is out for himself all the time, like a Jew, showy...' Serle, p.373.
- Despite this anti-Jewish feeling, when Prime Minister Scullin allied to the King for the first Australian born Governor-General in 1930 he had only two names in his pocket: Sir Isaac Isaacs and Sir John Monash. However, Monash was suffering from ill health and Isaacs was chosen.
- He died in 1931.