

= H. C. McNeile =

Herman Cyril McNeile , MC ( 28 September 1888 ? 14 August 1937 ) , commonly known as Cyril McNeile and publishing under the name H. C. McNeile or the pseudonym Sapper , was a British soldier and author . Drawing on his experiences in the trenches during the First World War , he started writing short stories and getting them published in the Daily Mail . As serving officers in the British Army were not permitted to publish under their own names , he was given the pen name " Sapper " by Lord Northcliffe , the owner of the Daily Mail ; the nickname was based on that of his corps , the Royal Engineers .

After the war McNeile left the army and continued writing , although he changed from war stories to thrillers . In 1920 he published Bulldog Drummond , whose eponymous hero became his best @-@ known creation . The character was based on McNeile himself , on his friend Gerard Fairlie and on English gentlemen generally . McNeile wrote ten Bulldog Drummond novels , as well as three plays and a screenplay .

McNeile interspersed his Drummond work with other novels and story collections that included two characters who appeared as protagonists in their own works , Jim Maitland and Ronald Standish . He was one of the most successful British popular authors of the inter @-@ war period before his death in 1937 from throat cancer , which has been attributed to damage sustained from a gas attack in the war .

McNeile 's stories are either directly about the war , or contain people whose lives have been shaped by it . His thrillers are a continuation of his war stories , with upper class Englishmen defending England from foreigners plotting against it . Although he was seen at the time as " simply an upstanding Tory who spoke for many of his countrymen " , after the Second World War his work was criticised as having fascist overtones , while also displaying the xenophobia and anti @-@ semitism apparent in some other writers of the period .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

McNeile was born in Bodmin , Cornwall . He was the son of Malcolm McNeile , a captain in the Royal Navy who at the time was governor of the naval prison at Bodmin , and Christiana Mary ( née Sloggett ) . The McNeile family had ancestral roots from both Belfast and Scotland , and counted a general in the British Indian Army among their members .

McNeile did not like either of his given names but preferred to be called Cyril , although he was always known by his friends as Mac . After attending a prep school in Eastbourne , he was further educated at Cheltenham College . On leaving the college , he joined the Royal Military Academy , Woolwich , from which he was commissioned into the Royal Engineers as a second lieutenant in July 1907 . He underwent further training at the Royal School of Military Engineering before a short posting to Aldershot Garrison . He received promotion to lieutenant in June 1910 and was posted to Canterbury , serving three years with the 3rd Field Troop , until January 1914 , when he was posted to Malta .

In 1914 McNeile was promoted to the rank of captain . He was still in Malta when the war broke out and was ordered to France in October 1914 ; he travelled via England and married Violet Evelyn Baird on 31 October 1914 . Baird was the daughter of Lieutenant @-@ Colonel Arthur Baird Douglas of the Cameron Highlanders .

= = = First World War service = = =

On 2 November 1914 McNeile travelled to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force . Few details are known about McNeile 's wartime service , as his records were destroyed by incendiary bombs during the Second World War . He spent time with a number of Royal Engineer units on the

Western Front , including 1st Field Squadron RE , 15th Field Company RE and RE elements of the 33rd Division .

McNeile 's first known published story , *Reminiscences of Sergeant Michael Cassidy* , was serialised on page four of the *Daily Mail* from 13 January 1915 . As serving officers in the British Army were not permitted to publish under their own names except during their half @-@ pay sabbaticals , many would write under a pseudonym ; Lord Northcliffe , the owner of the *Daily Mail* , gave McNeile the pen name " Sapper " , as the Royal Engineers were commonly known as the Sappers . McNeile later confided that he had started writing through " sheer boredom " . Some of his stories appeared on page four of the *Daily Mail* over the following months . Northcliffe was impressed by his writing and attempted , but failed , to have him released from the army to work as a war correspondent . By the end of 1915 , he had written two collections of short stories , *The Lieutenant and Others* and *Sergeant Michael Cassidy , R.E.* , both of which were published by Hodder & Stoughton . Although many of the stories had already appeared in the *Daily Mail* , between 1916 and 1918 *Sergeant Michael Cassidy , R.E.* sold 135 @,@ 000 copies and *The Lieutenant and Others* sold 139 @,@ 000 copies . By the end of the war he had published three more collections , *Men , Women , and Guns* ( 1916 ) , *No Man 's Land* ( 1917 ) and *The Human Touch* ( 1918 ) . In 1916 he wrote a series of articles titled *The Making of an Officer* , which appeared under the initials C. N. , in five issues of *The Times* between 8 and 14 June 1916 . The articles were aimed at young and new officers to explain their duties to them ; these were collected together and published by Hodder & Stoughton later in 1916 .

During his time with the Royal Engineers , McNeile saw action at the First and Second Battles of Ypres ? he was gassed at the second battle ? and the Battle of the Somme . In 1916 he was awarded the Military Cross and was mentioned in dispatches ; in November that year he was gazetted to acting major . From 1 April to 5 October 1918 , he commanded a battalion of the Middlesex Regiment and was promoted to acting lieutenant @-@ colonel ; the scholar Lawrence Treadwell observes that " for an engineer to command an infantry regiment was ... a rarity " . 18th Battalion , Middlesex Regiment under McNeile saw action for the remainder of his command , and were involved in fighting during the Hundred Days Offensive in the St. Quentin @-@ Cambrai sector in September 1918 ; during the year , he was again mentioned in dispatches . On 2 October 1918 he broke his ankle and was briefly hospitalised , which forced him to relinquish his command of the regiment on 4 October . He was on convalescent leave when the war ended in November 1918 . During the course of the war , he had spent a total of 32 months in France , and had probably been gassed more than once . His literary output from 1915 to 1918 accounted for more than 80 collected and uncollected stories . His brother ? also in the Royal Engineers ? had been killed earlier in the war .

== = Post @-@ war years == =

McNeile had a quiet life after the war ; his biographer Jonathon Green notes that " as in the novels of fellow best @-@ selling writers such as P. G. Wodehouse or Agatha Christie , it is the hero who lives the exciting life " . Although he was an " unremittingly hearty man " , he suffered from delicate health following the war . He had a loud voice and a louder laugh , and " liked to enliven clubs and restaurants with the sight and sound of military good fellowship " ; his friend and collaborator Gerard Fairlie described him as " not everybody 's cup of tea " , and commented that " he was loud in every possible way ? in his voice , in his laugh , in his clothes , in the unconscious swagger with which he always motivated himself , in his whole approach to life " . McNeile and his wife had two sons .

On 13 June 1919 McNeile retired onto the reserve officer list and was confirmed in the rank of major . The same year he also published a short @-@ story collection , *Mufti* , in which he introduced a type of character as " the Breed " , a class of Englishman who was patriotic , loyal and " physically and morally intrepid " . Although well received by the critics , the book failed commercially and , by the end of 1922 , had only sold 16 @,@ 700 copies from its first print run of 20 @,@ 000 ; the unsold copies were pulped and the novel went out of print later that year .

In 1920 McNeile published *Bull @-@ Dog Drummond* , whose eponymous hero ? a member of "

the Breed " ? became his most famous creation . He had first written Drummond as a detective for a short story in The Strand Magazine , but the character was not successful and was changed for the novel , which was a thriller . Captain Hugh " Bulldog " Drummond DSO , MC was described in the novel 's sub @-@ title as " a demobilised officer who found peace dull " after service during the First World War with the fictional Loamshire Regiment . Drummond went on to appear in ten full @-@ length novels by McNeile and a further seven by his friend Gerard Fairlie . The character was an amalgam of Fairlie , himself , and his idea of an English gentleman . Drummond also had roots in the literary characters Sherlock Holmes , Sexton Blake , Richard Hannay and The Scarlet Pimpernel . Drummond was characterised as large , very strong , physically unattractive and an " apparently brainless hunk of a man " , who was also a gentleman with a private income ; he could also be construed as " a brutalized ex @-@ officer whose thirst for excitement is also an attempt to reenact [ sic ] the war " . The character was later described by Cecil Day @-@ Lewis as an " unspeakable public school bully " . Drummond 's main adversary across four novels is Carl Peterson , a master criminal with no national allegiance , who is often accompanied by his wife , Irma . Irma is described by Jonathon Green as " the slinky epitome of a twenties ' vamp ' " , and by Lawrence Treadwell as dark , sexy and from an oriental background , " a true femme fatale " . After Carl Peterson 's death in The Final Count , Irma swears revenge on Drummond and kidnaps his wife ? whom he had met in Bull @-@ Dog Drummond ? with the intent of killing him in the ensuing chase . Irma Peterson appears in six of McNeile 's books , and in a further five by Fairlie .

McNeile adapted Bulldog Drummond for the stage . It was shown at Wyndham 's Theatre during the 1921 ? 22 season , with Gerald du Maurier playing the title role ; it ran for 428 performances . The play also ran in New York during the same season , with A. E. Matthews as Drummond . Later in 1922 McNeile resigned his reserve commission with the rank of lieutenant @-@ colonel , and moved as a tax exile to Territet , Montreux , Switzerland , with his wife ; the Swiss countryside was later described in a number of his stories .

The following year McNeile introduced the character of Jim Maitland , a " footloose sahib of the period " . Maitland was the protagonist of the 1923 novel Jim Maitland ; he later appeared in a second novel in 1931 , The Island of Terror . Around the time McNeile killed off the Carl Peterson character in The Final Count ( 1926 ) , he also introduced the character Ronald Standish , who first appeared in " The Saving Clause " ( 1927 ) and " Tiny Carteret " ( 1930 ) before becoming the protagonist in two collections of short stories , Ronald Standish ( 1933 ) and Ask for Ronald Standish ( 1936 ) . The character also appeared in the final three Drummond novels , Knock @-@ Out ( 1933 ) , Bull @-@ Dog Drummond at Bay ( 1935 ) and Challenge ( 1937 ) . Standish was a sportsman who played cricket for England and was a part @-@ time consultant with the War Office .

In 1929 McNeile edited a volume of short stories from O. Henry , The Best of O. Henry ; the stories had served as models for him when he had started as a writer . The same year , the film Bulldog Drummond was released , starring Ronald Colman in the title role . Colman was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor at the 3rd Academy Awards ceremony . The film earned \$ 750 @,@ 000 at the box office , and McNeile received an estimated £ 5 @,@ 000 for the rights to his novel . The same year he wrote his second play ? The Way Out ? which was staged at the Comedy Theatre in January 1930 . About a year later he and his wife returned to England , and settled near Pulborough , West Sussex .

In 1935 McNeile , Fairlie , Sidney Gilliat and J.O.C. Orton collaborated on the screenplay Bulldog Jack , a " comedy thriller " with Jack Hulbert and Fay Wray , which was produced by Gaumont British .

= = = Death and legacy = = =

In 1937 McNeile was working with Fairlie on the play Bulldog Drummond Hits Out when he was diagnosed with terminal throat cancer . He came to an agreement with Fairlie for the play to continue after his death and for Fairlie to continue writing the Drummond stories . McNeile died on 14 August 1937 at his home in West Chiltington , West Sussex . Although most sources identify

throat cancer as the cause of death , Treadwell also suggests that it may have been lung cancer . It was " traceable to his war service " , and attributed to a gas attack . His funeral , with full military honours , was conducted at Woking crematorium . At his death his estate was valued at over £ 26 @, @ 000 .

Bulldog Drummond Hits Out was finished by Fairlie and had a short tour of Brighton , Birmingham , Manchester and Edinburgh , before opening in London at the Savoy Theatre on 21 December 1937 . The story was later turned into a novel by Fairlie , with the title Bulldog Drummond on Dartmoor . Fairlie continued to write Drummond novels , seven in total .

Drummond , McNeile 's chief literary legacy , became a model for other literary heroes created in the 1940s and ' 50s . W. E. Johns used McNeile 's work as a model for his character Biggles , while Ian Fleming admitted that James Bond was " Sapper from the waist up and Mickey Spillane below " . Sydney Horler 's popular character " Tiger " Standish was also modelled on Drummond .

= = Writing = =

McNeile 's works fall into two distinct phases . Those works published between 1915 and 1918 are his war stories , and relate directly to his experiences during the First World War , while the later works are largely thrillers . His war stories were marketed by the Daily Mail and Hodder & Stoughton as a soldier 's eyewitness accounts . When he started writing thrillers , Hodder & Stoughton advertised McNeile as a " light and entertaining " writer , and began publishing his works in the " Yellow Jacket " series .

= = = Style and technique = = =

McNeile 's early works , the war stories published before 1919 , are either " plot @-@ driven adventure narrative [ s ] " , such as the short stories " The Song of the Bayonet " and " Private Meyrick , Company Idiot " , or " atmospheric vignette [ s ] " , such as " The Land of Topsy Turvy " and " The Human Touch " . McNeile would write about 1 @, @ 000 words every morning in a routine that was rarely disturbed ; he took no breaks while writing and would do no re @-@ writes until he completed his work . The academic Jessica Meyer has criticised his style as having " little aesthetic merit , being stylised , clichéd and often repetitive " ; Richard Osborne agreed , adding that the female characters were " cardboard " and that McNeile was " wonderfully forgetful " about characters dead in one book and alive in the next . In the Bulldog Drummond stories , Watson identifies the central character as " a melodramatic creation , workable only within a setting of melodrama " . The academic Joan DelFattore points out that while the characters and plots cannot be considered to be unique , credible or well @-@ rounded , his books " make no claim to literary excellence " , and are instead , " good , solid thrillers " . Osborne agrees , and believes that McNeile wrote good stories that were flawed but well told . Meyer classifies the non @-@ war stories as middlebrow , with " sentimental plotlines and presenting a social message about the condition of England " . His early novels , particularly Bull @-@ Dog Drummond and The Black Gang , were structured loosely and in some ways as short stories . The academic Hans Bertens blamed this on McNeile 's lack of experience and self @-@ confidence , noting that in his later novels , McNeile " mastered the tricks of his trade " .

DelFattore outlines the use of double adjectives to reinforce feelings towards enemies in both his war stories and thrillers , such as " filthy , murdering Boche " , and " stinking , cowardly Bolshevik " . She and the scholar Lise Jaillant also comment on the dehumanisation of the enemy , comparing them to animals and vermin . Watson noted the frequency of the use of the word " devil " ? and variations ? when discussing antagonists .

= = = Major themes = = =

= = = = First World War = = = =

The major theme running throughout McNeile 's works is the First World War . Between 1915 and 1918 he had five collections of short stories published about the war , while his post @-@ war fiction can be seen as an extension of those stories , as " both treat the war as a trial with manhood at stake " . His war stories were considered by contemporary audiences as anti @-@ sentimental , realistic depictions of the trenches , and as a " celebration of the qualities of the Old Contemptibles " . McNeile 's view , as expressed through his writing , was that war was a purposeful activity for the nation and for individuals , even if that purpose was later wasted : a " valuable chance at national renewal that had been squandered " . The positive effects of war on the individual were outlined by McNeile in *The Making of an Officer* , his series of articles in *The Times* , in which he wrote about " the qualities of leadership and selflessness essential to ' inspire ' subalterns " , a theme he returned to in his war stories ? particularly *The Lieutenant and Others* and *Sergeant Michael Cassidy* , R.E ? and then afterwards in his fictional stories , notably the *Bulldog Drummond* works .

McNeile 's fictional work ? particularly his *Drummond* series of books ? shows characters who have served in the war and have been affected by it ; Jaillant comments that *Drummond* 's war @-@ time experience " has shaped his social identity , his skills , and even his physical appearance " . The *Drummond* character has been " brutalized by war " , which accounts for his physical approach when dealing with Peterson and others .

= = = = England = = = =

McNeile provided *Drummond* with a " flamboyantly aggressive patriotism " towards England , which *Drummond* defends physically against those who challenge its stability or morality . Hans Bertens argued that the patriotism demonstrated by *Drummond* was closer to nationalistic pride and a paranoia about threats directed at the upper middle classes , of which *Drummond* was a member . *Drummond* 's nickname ? *Bulldog* ? is symbolic of England , and he and his English gentlemen friends ? " the Breed " ? fight the conspiracy of foreigners threatening England 's stability . McNeile 's thriller stories do not often pit Englishman against Englishman as the main characters ; most of the foreigners in his books are the villains .

= = = = Sport = = = =

Running throughout McNeile 's books is the metaphor of warfare as sport . His war stories include descriptions of fights between individuals that carry a sporting motif : in *Sergeant Michael Cassidy* , R.E. , he writes , " To bag a man with a gun is one thing ; there is sport ? there is an element of one against one , like when the quality goes big game shooting . But to bag twenty men by a mine has not the same feeling at all , even if they are Germans " . The motif was continued into the *Drummond* novels . McNeile reinforces this theme through his use of the language of public school sports , or of boxing , poker or hunting . The titles of his books also use sporting imagery : *The Third Round* , *The Final Count* , *Knock @-@ Out* and *Challenge* .

= = = Reception = = =

McNeile 's war story collections sold well ; nearly 50 @,@ 000 copies of his first book , *Sergeant Michael Cassidy* , R.E. , were purchased in its first year , and nearly 58 @,@ 000 copies the following year . His thrillers were also popular , with *Bulldog Drummond* selling 396 @,@ 302 copies between 1920 and 1939 , exceeding the 100 @,@ 000 @-@ copies benchmark for " best @-@ sellers " . At his peak in the 1920s , he was the highest paid short story writer in the world , and it was estimated that in the last five years of his life he was earning around £ 10 @,@ 000 a year ; the *Daily Mirror* estimated that during his writing career he had earned £ 85 @,@ 000 .

McNeile 's war stories were seen by reviewers as honest portrayals of the war , with British and American reviewers in the mainstream press praising his realism and avoidance of sentimentality in dealing with his subject matter . Reviewing *Men* , *Women* , and *Guns* for *The Times Literary*

Supplement , Francis Henry Gribble wrote that " Sapper has been successful in previous volumes of war stories ... When the time comes for picking out the writers whose war fiction has permanent value , his claim to be included in the list will call for serious examination . " The reviewer of Sergeant Michael Cassidy , R.E. for The Atlanta Constitution reminded its readers that McNeile " has been called the foremost literary genius of the British army . " Jaillant observes that once McNeile moved from war stories to thrillers , with the concurrent re @-@ positioning of advertising and marketing by Hodder & Stoughton , the reviewers also treated him differently , and presented him as " a writer of thrillers , without any pretension to literary seriousness " . When reviewing Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back for The New York Times , the critic observed that " if you like a good knock @-@ down @-@ and @-@ drag @-@ out yarn with excitement and violence on nearly every page , you can 't go wrong on Bulldog Drummond " ; for the novel Bulldog Drummond at Bay , the reviewer considered that " as a piece of fictional melodrama , the book is first rate " . In the British market , The Times Literary Supplement also characterised him as a mass @-@ market thriller writer , which contrasted with its consideration of his earlier works .

= = = = Controversy = = = =

From the 1950s on , McNeile 's work came to be viewed in the light of events of the Second World War , and journalists such as Richard Usborne highlighted aspects of the stories which he considered were " carrying the Führer @-@ principle " . DeFattore agrees , and considers that the second Bulldog Drummond novel ? The Black Gang ( 1922 ) ? is when the fascist element was introduced . Jaillant notes that the accusations of fascism only came about after the Second World War , while the academic Ion Trewin considers that through the Drummond stories , McNeile was seen at the time as " simply an upstanding Tory who spoke for many of his countrymen " .

Throughout the Drummond stories , much of the language used by McNeile relating to ethnic minorities or Jews is considered by DeFattore to be " intensely conservative by modern standards " ; Green observes that while the characters of other contemporary writers , such as Agatha Christie , " exhibit the inevitable xenophobia and anti @-@ semitism of the period , McNeile 's go far beyond the ' polite ' norms " . J. D. Bourn considers his language to be " rather distasteful " , while the academic Michael Denning observed that " Drummond is a bundle of chauvinisms , hating Jews , Germans , and most other foreigners " .

= = Works = =