

= Colin Hall Simpson =

Major General Colin Hall Simpson , CBE , MC , VD ( 13 April 1894 ? 23 August 1964 ) was an Australian Army officer who rose to the rank of major general as Signal Officer in Chief during the Second World War . He was one of the founders of Amcal , the largest retail pharmacy chain in Australia .

Simpson joined the First Australian Imperial Force in 1916 , and served on the Western Front in the Battle of Messines and Battle of Passchendaele . He was twice wounded , and was mentioned in despatches and awarded the Military Cross . After the war he worked as a pharmacist , and rose to the rank of colonel in the Militia . He transferred to the Australian Corps of Signals on its formation in 1925 .

During the Second World War he participated in the campaigns in Greece and Syria as Chief Signals Officer of the I Corps . He returned to Australia in 1942 to become the Australian Army 's Signal Officer in Chief . He also became the first Australian Corps of Signals officer to reach the rank of major general .

= = Early life = =

Colin Hall Simpson was born in St Kilda , Victoria , on 13 April 1894 , the son of Colin Simpson , a plumber , and his wife Elizabeth Fulton Simpson , née Jordan . He was educated at St Kilda Primary School , and , from 1911 , at Caulfield Grammar School . While at Caulfield Grammar , Simpson joined the Australian Army Cadets , rising to the rank of sergeant . After leaving school he became an apprentice pharmacist . He served with the 49th ( Prahran ) Battalion in which he was commissioned as a second lieutenant on 1 March 1914 . He became its assistant adjutant on 12 April 1915 and was promoted to lieutenant on 1 July 1915 .

= = First World War = =

Simpson was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the First Australian Imperial Force ( AIF ) on 1 May 1916 , and posted to the 3rd Pioneer Battalion , part of the 3rd Division , which was then being raised in Australia . He embarked from Port Melbourne on the transport HMAT Wandilla on 6 June 1916 , arriving in England on 26 July 1916 . The 3rd Division trained on the Salisbury Plain in England , where he was promoted to lieutenant on 13 October 1916 . He was transferred to the 3rd Division Signal Company on 16 November 1916 . Soon after , the 3rd Division moved to the Western Front , moving into the line near Armentières . Simpson was mentioned in despatches on 4 January 1917 .

The 3rd Division carried out its first offensive at the Battle of Messines in June 1917 . For his part in the battle , Simpson was awarded the Military Cross . His citation read :

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty . He organised the Brigade Signal Service so thoroughly that communication was maintained with every unit throughout . He was continually under shell @-@ fire , but personally supervised all repairs , by his vigorous and cheerful manner impressing all ranks in the highest degree .

Simpson participated in the Battle of Passchendaele where he was gassed and wounded . He was evacuated to England on 22 October 1917 . While in hospital he applied for nine months ' leave to return to Australia and complete his pharmaceutical studies . He had passed the Intermediate Examination before leaving Australia but not the Final Examination . This was granted , and he embarked for home on the transport HMAT Persic on 21 December 1917 . He passed the Final Examination , and was registered as a pharmacist on 10 July 1918 . He never returned to the front , and his AIF appointment was terminated on 9 August 1918 .

= = Between the wars = =

Simpson remained in the Army as a reservist . He was posted to the 2 / 14th Infantry on 1 October

1918 , and was promoted to captain on 16 April 1920 . In the post @-@ war reorganisation of the Army , the 2 / 14th was absorbed into the 14th Infantry Battalion in March 1921 . In May , he transferred to the Royal Australian Engineers and joined the 3rd Division Signals Company . He was promoted to major on 1 July 1922 , and became its commander , with the rank of lieutenant colonel , on 1 September 1922 . On 1 January 1925 , the signal units were separated from the Engineers to form the Australian Corps of Signals , and he was transferred to the new corps . He commanded the 39th Infantry Battalion from 1 July 1929 to 30 June 1933 , after which he was on the unattached list for two years before resuming command of the 3rd Division Signals Company . On 1 May 1939 , he assumed command of the 6th Infantry Brigade , with the temporary rank of colonel .

Simpson opened his own chemist shop in Brunswick West in 1918 . On 12 August 1919 he married Jean Elizabeth Watson at the Congregational Church in Ascot Vale , Victoria . Their marriage produced two children , a son who died in infancy and a daughter , Jean Marjorie . One of the witnesses at their wedding ceremony was a fellow Militia officer , Alan Ramsay , who later married Jean 's sister Edna . In 1937 , Simpson banded together with D. E. Robertson and A. E. Moore to create the Allied Master Chemists of Australia Ltd , today better known as Amcal . They invited other pharmacists to join them to compete against the growing market power of major retailers . The business grew from 12 members in 1937 to over 100 by 1946 . Today Amcal is the largest retail pharmacy chain in Australia .

= = Second World War = =

= = = Middle East = = =

Simpson joined the Second Australian Imperial Force on 15 October 1939 with the rank of lieutenant colonel . He was allocated the AIF service number VX79 , and assumed command of the Australian Corps Signals . When the I Corps was formed in April 1940 , Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Blamey was appointed its commander , and Simpson its Chief Signals Officer , with a promotion to the rank of colonel .

Simpson embarked on the transport Nieuw Holland on 15 September 1940 , arriving in Kantara , Egypt , on 12 October . He met with his British counterparts , and discussed arrangements for the creation of an AIF Signals School in the Middle East . Some negotiation was required before this proposal was finally accepted . He was disappointed at the standard of training that had been achieved by the I Corps and 6th Division signals units in the Middle East , and just as disappointed with the reinforcements arriving from Australia . Both the standard of training of the units and the establishment of the schools intended to remedy the situation were hampered by a serious shortage of equipment . The 6th Division 's list of critical shortfalls ? by no means restricted to signals equipment ? included 120 telephones and 120 miles ( 190 km ) of electrical cable . Not until January 1941 ? after the 6th Division had been committed to battle in Libya ? did the cable become available in Australia . Some units equipped themselves with captured enemy materiel .

Simpson arrived in Greece on 7 March 1941 as part of the I Corps advance party . The Battle of Greece presented a major challenge for Simpson 's signals units , as rugged terrain , enemy action and frequent troop movements conspired to frustrate their efforts to maintain reliable communications . The news that Yugoslavia had offered to surrender reached Blamey from a BBC broadcast on 15 April picked up on a receiver built into a kerosene case that Simpson had insisted that he take . Much signals equipment was lost during the fighting , and some had to be destroyed following the order to evacuate Greece . Simpson embarked for Crete on HMS Phoebe on 25 April . From there he took a flying boat to Alexandria . His first priority on arrival was arranging for the lost equipment to be replaced .

The shortage of signals equipment was an important factor in the delay in committing the I Corps to the Syria ? Lebanon campaign until it became clear that General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson could not adequately control operations from his headquarters at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem . Once again , the signallers had to battle with inhospitable terrain . The hills and atmospheric

conditions made reception difficult for the radio operations , and those same hills , along with shortages of cable , made the linesmen 's task no less difficult . He was mentioned in dispatches , and made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for " maintenance of communications under difficult conditions in the Grecian campaign " .

Simpson was promoted to the rank of brigadier on 11 September 1941 , becoming the first officer of the Australian Corps of Signals to reach that rank . He was involved in a serious motor vehicle accident on 13 September 1941 and suffered severe lacerations , a concussion , and a broken collarbone , rib and finger . He was taken to the 2 / 1st General Hospital , and was evacuated to Australia on the hospital ship MS Wanganella . He returned to the Middle East by air , arriving back on 20 January 1942 .

= = = South West Pacific = = =

Within days , Simpson was heading east again , taking a flying boat to Batavia , where he joined the advance party of the I Corps , which was being sent from the Middle East to the Dutch East Indies to counter the Japanese threat . He met there with the local authorities regarding signals arrangements for the defence of Java . These were soon well in hand , but the tactical situation rapidly deteriorated to the extent that the I Corps was ordered to leave Java on 21 February 1942 . Simpson departed on the troop ship Orcades , which arrived in Adelaide on 14 March .

Blamey was appointed Commander in Chief of the Australian Military Forces on 27 March . He instituted a sweeping reorganisation of the Army , replacing officers with men who had experience in the Middle East . Simpson became the Signal Officer in Chief on 6 April , with the rank of major general , the first Australian Corps of Signals officer to reach that rank .

One of Simpson 's first tasks was to confer with the Chief Signals Officer at General Douglas MacArthur 's General Headquarters ( GHQ ) South West Pacific Area , Brigadier General Spencer B. Akin . The two established mechanisms to divide responsibility for the theatre 's communications between the two armies , which often worked together on the same projects . An important outcome of their first meeting was the creation of the Central Bureau as a combined signals intelligence organisation . Simpson had been thinking about such an organisation while on the Orcades . Blamey had an appreciation of signals intelligence from his time as Deputy Commander in Chief in the Middle East , and readily gave his support . After a slow start , signals intelligence became an important element of the war in the South West Pacific .

Perhaps Simpson 's most ambitious project was the laying of a submarine cable between Cape York and New Guinea . A cable laying ship , the SS Mernoo , was chartered , and two old cables that ran across the Bass Strait were lifted and re @-@ laid across the Torres Strait in October 1943 . When the land connections were completed in December 1943 , it became possible to send a message all the way from Melbourne to Port Moresby . Simpson , who was on an inspection tour of New Guinea , was on hand for the receipt of the first message . In November 1944 , he visited the front in the Netherlands , Belgium and France , returning to Australia via the United States and Canada .

To man his signals units , Simpson sought to obtain some 4 @,@ 000 Australian Women 's Army Service ( AWAS ) personnel . Two special signal training battalions were activated to cater for them , and Simpson inspected the 2nd Signal Training Battalion ( AWAS ) at Ivanhoe Grammar School with Lieutenant Colonel Sybil Irving on 6 July 1942 . By 1945 , the Australian Corps of Signals numbered some 25 @,@ 000 men and women . The large numbers of women serving in Signals units caused friction between Irving and Simpson over what degree of control he exercised over them .

Aware that signals is usually forgotten when the signallers are doing their best work , Simpson attempted to obtain various accolades for his corps . He held ceremonial parades through Melbourne to celebrate VE Day on 10 May 1945 , and VP Day on 20 August 1945 . He attempted to get the title " Royal " granted in recognition of its wartime service . This occurred on 10 November 1948 .

= = Later life = =

Simpson handed over the position of Signal Officer in Chief to Brigadier A. D. Malloy on 23 May 1946 . He was placed on the retired list with the honorary rank of major general on 19 December 1946 . He served as Colonel Commandant for the Australian Corps of Signals in Southern Command from June 1958 to June 1963 , and was Colonel Commandant of the corps from September 1959 to December 1960 . In 1946 he was appointed director of the Columbia Graphophone Company ( Australia ) .

Simpson was a keen supporter of the Essendon Football Club , serving as its vice president from 1947 to 1964 . He was awarded a life membership in 1957 . He was elected Victorian State President of the Australian Legion of Ex @-@ Servicemen and Women in 1948 . He resigned in October after a dispute with the State Council over its suspension of two members for being communists , which Simpson opposed . Yet Simpson was no communist sympathiser ; far from it . He organised The Association , a clandestine right wing paramilitary organisation headed by Blamey which was established to counter a possible communist coup . The Association disbanded in 1950 .

= = Death and legacy = =

Simpson died of cancer in Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital on 23 August 1964 . He was survived by his wife and daughter . He was buried in St Kilda Cemetery after a funeral service at St Cuthbert 's Church in Brighton , Victoria . His pall bearers included Lieutenant General Sir Edmund Herring and Major General Alan Ramsay .

Simpson Barracks at Watsonia in Melbourne was named in his honour in 1986 . It is considered the home of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals , and contains the Defence Force School of Signals and the Royal Australian Corps of Signals Museum .