

= Richard Hutton Davies =

Major General Richard Hutton Davies CB (14 August 1861 ? 9 May 1918) was an officer of the New Zealand Military Forces during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries , the first New Zealander to command an independent force overseas and one of the most senior New Zealand officers during the First World War .

Born in London , he emigrated to New Zealand after leaving school , where he worked as a surveyor . He joined a volunteer militia unit in 1893 , and went to South Africa as an officer with the first New Zealand contingent sent to the Boer War in 1899 . He later commanded the third , fourth and eighth contingents , becoming the first New Zealand officer to command an independent unit on active service overseas . Following his return to New Zealand , he became inspector @-@ general of the New Zealand Military Forces , and in 1909 was attached to a British Army brigade to gain staff experience .

This led to him being offered command of 6th Brigade , a regular infantry brigade of British troops , in 1910 ; he was the first colonial officer to hold such a position . In the summer of 1914 the brigade was mobilised with the British Expeditionary Force , and he commanded it at the Battle of Mons and the First Battle of the Aisne before being invalided back to England due to exhaustion . He was given command of the newly formed 20th (Light) Division , which he took to France in 1915 , but was relieved of command early in 1916 . After a period in command of a reserve centre in Staffordshire , he was sent to hospital suffering from both mental and physical ill health , and committed suicide in May 1918 .

= = Early life and family = =

Davies was born in London , the son of a journalist , and was educated at Hurstpierpoint College . After leaving school , he emigrated to New Zealand , where he spent two years working for a relative before settling at Taranaki , setting up a farm and practising as a surveyor . He married Ida Mary Cornwall in February 1886 ; they had two sons and a daughter . One son , Henry Cornwall Davies , served with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force during the First World War , and , like his father , transferred to the British Army in 1915 , becoming a captain in the Royal Engineers . Ida died in pregnancy with their fourth child in December 1906 ; he remarried , to Ida 's sister Eileen Kathleen Cornwall , in May 1908 .

In October 1887 Davies became the surveyor to the Manganui Road Board . On 10 April 1893 , he joined the Hawera Mounted Rifle Volunteers , and was commissioned as a lieutenant in May 1895 ; he was quickly promoted to captain six weeks later , becoming the commander of the unit . He was also active in local government , and in February 1897 was elected a member of the New Plymouth Harbour Board , representing Taranaki North .

= = South Africa = =

On 3 October 1899 Davies transferred into the Permanent Force of the New Zealand Militia , where he was made responsible for the training of volunteer mounted units . The Boer War , however , was declared a week later ; Davies was quickly seconded to command a company of the volunteer First New Zealand Contingent being sent to the Cape . The contingent sailed on 21 October , arrived in late November , and was on active service within a week . Davies was promoted to Major in May 1900 , and in the same month was given temporary command of the Third New Zealand Contingent . He was transferred to the Rhodesian Field Force , where he commanded the Fourth New Zealand Contingent in August 1900 .

He established a high professional reputation commanding the unit , and was promoted to lieutenant colonel and made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) , as well as winning the respect of his men ? one described him as " not only liked but loved " . A soldier wrote home calling Davies , who stood five feet six inches tall , " a grand little chap " , whilst another noted with pleasure that Davies objected to " Imperial ideas of discipline " being forced upon his men .

After being mentioned in despatches in May 1901 he returned home to command the Auckland Military District , but was ordered back to South Africa in command of the eighth New Zealand Contingent , in February 1902 , with the brevet rank of colonel . The contingent operated as a single unit , unlike its predecessors , and Davies became the first officer from New Zealand to command an independent force on active service overseas .

= = Military reform = =

Returning to New Zealand in late 1902 , Davies resumed command of the Auckland military district . He held command until 1906 , when he was appointed inspector @-@ general of the New Zealand Military Forces and became a member of the Council of Defence , the body responsible for controlling the dominion 's military forces . The position of inspector @-@ general , newly created that year , was originally expected to go to an " Imperial " ? that is , British ? officer , but the government had announced it planned to rotate New Zealand officers in the role , on up to five @-@ year terms , so as to allow them to gain experience .

Davies threw himself into the role , travelling around the country and inspecting local units to gain an overall idea of their efficiency . Even under favourable circumstances , however , he found that only 54 % of the volunteers attended parades in 1906 ; at the annual camps , the proportion was as low as 45 % . He pressed for greater use of active day @-@ time tactical training rather than evening indoors drill , which he felt was key for a part @-@ time volunteer force , and for a greater emphasis on the training and standards of officers . By the end of his second year in office , he had organised local selection boards for appointing officers , and a central promotion board for senior field officers , as well as mandatory regular fitness and efficiency tests .

As a member of the Council of Defence , he strongly supported the movement for universal military training ? not conventional conscription , but rather a form of basic military training on a part @-@ time basis for all adult men ? arguing that it would mean " the flower of the nation would be the soldiers , not the weeds " .

= = British service = =

After three years as Inspector @-@ General , and in order to gain staff experience , Davies was attached as an observer to a number of units in the United Kingdom in 1909 ? 10 . During this time , he also attended the Imperial Defence Conference and represented the New Zealand forces at the funeral of King Edward VII . At the end of the one @-@ year attachment , he had so impressed the British Army that they offered him an appointment as commander of 6th Brigade in October 1910 , with the temporary rank of brigadier general . As such , he became the first overseas officer to command a regular brigade , only eleven years after taking up a permanent military commission .

Davies ' tenure in command of 6th Brigade was due to expire in October 1914 , when he was to hand over command to John Keir , and it was rumoured in New Zealand that he might be appointed as General Officer Commanding the Home Forces in 1915 , succeeding Alexander Godley . However , with the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 , his command was mobilised as part of 2nd Division in the British Expeditionary Force and sent to France . The brigade saw heavy combat at the Battle of Mons , where Davies was mentioned in despatches , but he was quickly worn down by his habit of always marching at the head of his brigade , which put him under heavy physical and mental strain , and from the lasting effects of an attack of pneumonia earlier in the year . One report described him as " much changed , full of nerves ... very jumpy " . He was relieved of command after the First Battle of the Aisne in September and ordered home , being replaced by Colonel Robert Fanshawe , formerly GSO 1 of 1st Division , on 20 September .

He was appointed a divisional commander , with the rank of temporary major general , on 19 October 1914 , and took command of the newly raised 20th (Light) Division at some point in September ? October . This made him the first New Zealand officer to command a division in the war . On 18 February 1915 , he was formally transferred to the British Army , and promoted to major general . The 20th Division moved to France in July 1915 , and he commanded it during a minor

operation in September , but handed over command on 8 March 1916 due to ill @-@ health . He was appointed to command a reserve centre at Cannock Chase , Staffordshire , where the arrival of elements of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade in September 1917 meant that he once again had the opportunity to command his own countrymen . He was relieved of command by General Robert Wanless O 'Gowan in March 1918 , and on 9 May 1918 , after a prolonged period of physical and mental ill health , he committed suicide at the Special Neurological Hospital for Officers , Kensington .