

A sepia-toned portrait of Major-General Sir Andrew Russell, a man with a mustache wearing a military cap and uniform, looking slightly to the left. The background is dark and textured.

New Zealand's  
World War I Commander  
MAJOR-GENERAL  
SIR ANDREW RUSSELL

*The*  
**FORGOTTEN  
GENERAL**

JOCK VENNELL





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Painting of Major-General Sir Andrew (Guy) Russell KCB, KCMG, 1918.

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GENERAL**

New Zealand's World War I Commander  
Major-General Sir Andrew Russell

**JOCK VENNELL**

  
ALLEN & UNWIN

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## *Preface*

‘A born leader of men, with natural gifts for the military art which fell little short of genius.’<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Colonel Hugh Stewart, the official historian of the 20,000-strong New Zealand Division that fought in France and Belgium in World War I. His subject: the division’s commander, Major-General Sir Andrew (Guy) Russell. Seventy-seven years later, prominent military historian Dr Chris Pugsley went much further, rating Russell as not only the outstanding divisional commander among the British armies that fought on the Western Front, but the one military commander of genius that New Zealand produced in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

Under Russell’s leadership, Pugsley wrote, ‘New Zealand produced the finest fighting division of all the British and Dominion divisions among the British armies in France, and perhaps the consistently finest division of any of the armies—British, French, or German—that fought on the Western Front.’<sup>3</sup>

Bold claims indeed, given that the New Zealand Division was only one of 60 British and Dominion divisions fighting on the Western Front by 1918, and there were many more French and German divisions. Many of these were first-class formations commanded by men of great military ability, among them Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash, who rose to command the Australian Corps; and General Sir Clive Currie, who led the four Canadian divisions.

There is no doubt, however, that by 1918 Russell had established himself as one of the outstanding divisional commanders on the Western Front. Under his leadership the New Zealand Division developed a reputation as one of the finest in the British armies that fought in World War I. In the last year of the war, and in recognition of his outstanding abilities, Russell was offered command of a full British Army corps (three to four divisions). For health, and perhaps other reasons, he was unable to accept.

Given his accomplishments, the larger question is why Russell is the forgotten general of New Zealand’s military history. In part it is because of the dominance of World War II history in general, and of Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg in particular. In part it is because of the neglect of the historians themselves. This biography aims to restore Major-General Sir Andrew Russell to his rightful place as one of this country’s finest military commanders.

War service, however, occupied only a few years of Russell’s long life, whether as a divisional

commander in World War I or as inspector-general of military forces and member of the War Council in World War II. His other careers as successful farmer, businessman, NZRSA president and prominent defence lobbyist spanned the Depression years of the 1920s and 30s, and finally the 1940s when war came much closer to home. By any measure, Russell's achievements in these years, and the qualities of character and intellect that drove them, were extraordinary.

This project has been a challenging one. Apart from his diaries, Russell kept no personal records of his campaigns, wrote only one discoverable dissertation on military subjects, made few public speeches that have survived, and left no memoirs. By contrast, Sir John Monash, Russell's much better known Australian equivalent from World War I, left a vast collection of personal papers, articles and lectures on military subjects, a collection of his war letters, a book on Australian victories in France, and at least two biographies. Russell, however, was a prolific letter writer. This book is based on these letters; material provided by the National Library and Archives New Zealand; research at the Imperial War Museum, the Army Museum, and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Studies in London; and on family memories. Dr Chris Pugsley's work has been of great assistance, too, in examining Russell's commands, both at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. In addition, 'The Russell Family Saga', an unpublished collection of letters and other family material compiled by Colonel Robert Gambrill in the 1970s, was an invaluable starting point.

The Russell story, however, is more than his alone. It is about the men he led for four unbroken years of war, starting with the raw and inexperienced brigade that arrived on Gallipoli in May 1915 and finishing with the élite division at the spearhead of the British counter-offensive that finally ended the war on the Western Front. In four years of war over 100,000 young men from a colonial nation of just 1.1 million—20 percent of its male population—fought overseas, and nearly 60 percent of them were killed or wounded.

Too many of them would have been the leaders of New Zealand's first post-war generation—its outstanding politicians and civil servants; its doctors, lawyers, teachers and other professionals; its successful farmers, entrepreneurs and tradesmen; its nation-defining writers and thinkers. This is the story, as much as it is that of their commander, Major-General Sir Andrew (Guy) Russell. Proud of the men he led and dedicated to their welfare, he would have expected no less.

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## *Introduction: 'A Magnificent Feat of Arms'*

As darkness fell on 6 August 1915, 1900 men of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, under the overall command of Brigadier-General Guy Russell, slipped quietly out from the northern end of Anzac Burnu on the Gallipoli peninsula.

Their task was to capture key Turkish positions in the foothills of the Sari Bair range, allowing two columns of infantry to advance unopposed up three valleys (deres) and take the main Sari Bair ridge. Speed and surprise were vital, as the foothills had to be cleared by 11 pm to give the main assault columns enough time to reach the ridgelines before dawn.

It was Russell's first offensive operation at Gallipoli, and an extremely difficult and hazardous one. His troops would have to advance in total darkness, over steep, broken country and against a Turkish garrison of unknown strength. To ensure surprise and to avoid his men firing on each other in the dark, the attack would have to be delivered in complete silence, and it was all to be done by men weakened by months of dysentery and enteric fever. Careful planning and attention to detail were critical, and Russell ensured in advance that everyone, from squadron commander to trooper, knew what their role was to be.

The mounteds' first objective, Old No. 3 Post, was an immensely strong position protected by barbed-wire entanglements and buried mines. Two lines of trenches and several strongpoints protected the southern face of the outpost, and several hundred Turkish troops were camped on the far side of the position. Right on 9 pm and as planned, the patrolling British destroyer *Colne* switched on its searchlight and shelled the outpost for 30 minutes, while the Auckland regiment crept up the precipitous south side of the hill, the noise of their approach muffled by the exploding shells.

At 9.30 pm exactly the bombardment stopped and the mounteds stormed the post before the Turks could detonate the protecting minefield. Waikato mounteds and Turks fought hand to hand in the darkened, roofed-over trenches while the Aucklanders attacked the rest of the garrison who were encamped behind the hill. They scattered wildly, leaving behind most of their weapons.

The next major objective, Table Top, was a steep-sided, flat-topped hill approached by difficult ridges and ravines, all overlooked by enemy trenches. Table Top was in turn shelled for 20 minutes before the mounteds cut their way with bayonets and entrenching tools up its precipitous side, reaching the summit shortly before midnight.

Luck and surprise were with them. Misled by firing at Old No. 3 Post and Bauchop's Hill, most of the Turkish garrison had moved down a gully towards the fighting, leaving their trenches on Table

Top unguarded—except for a trench on the southwestern edge which the mounteds quickly overran. When the Turks returned in groups to their positions, 150 of them were taken prisoner.

Further north, the Otago and Canterbury regiments met much stronger resistance at Bauchop's Hill which, like Table Top, was a mass of ridges and ravines, entrenched everywhere. The mounteds advanced up the hill, charging enemy machine guns in the scrub head on, taking row after row of Turkish trenches before finally reaching the summit around midnight. By 1 am on 7 August Russell's force was in occupation of Old No. 3 Post, Table Top, and Bauchop's Hill. Eighty troopers were dead and 230 wounded, but the vital entrances to three valleys were now in Allied hands and the way cleared for the infantry to advance on the Sari Bair ridge. Russell's report of the operation was terse and unadorned; not so that of his superiors. Generals Hamilton and Birdwood commended the thoroughness with which Russell and his brigade commanders had planned the assault and the 'determination and vigour' with which an operation critical to the success of the Allied attack had been carried out.

Australian war correspondent Charles Bean agreed, describing the night assault of the mounted brigade as a 'magnificent feat of arms, the brilliance of which was never surpassed, if indeed equalled during the campaign'. The taking of Bauchop's Hill by the South Islanders, Bean wrote, was 'a feat of arms of which it is perhaps not too much to say that it has no parallel in British military history'.<sup>4</sup>

The fighting qualities of the mounted riflemen were a critical factor in their success; the other was the calibre of their commander. Like most World War I commanders facing the grim realities of trench warfare, Russell was learning on the job. But here for the first time he was able to display his planning and tactical skills, and his ability to manage colonial troops under exceptionally difficult conditions. He would repeat the performance as commander of the rearguard in December 1915 when 48,000 Australian and New Zealand troops were evacuated from Gallipoli without losing a man.

On the foothills of Sari Bair Russell laid the foundations of a reputation that would survive the Gallipoli campaign and earn him a knighthood, along with command of the 20,000-strong New Zealand Division that he took to France in 1916. Under his leadership, it would become one of the elite fighting divisions in the British armies that fought on the Western Front in World War I.

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## Chapter 1

### *The Frontier of Debt*

‘Are you going to be satisfied in the future with the position of a small farmer running a thousand sheep on 2,000 acres [809 hectares], and leading a solitary life in the bush, when you might be commanding a regiment?’—Colonel A.H. Russell, writing to his grandson, Guy Russell, then a second lieutenant in the British Army on garrison duty in India.<sup>5</sup>

Guy Russell was born into a pioneering Hawke’s Bay family with a long tradition of military and political service. His great-grandfather, Andrew Hamilton Russell the first, enlisted in the Black Watch regiment as a private in 1788 and saw active service under the Dukes of York and Wellington. He fought in the Napoleonic Wars at the Battle of Copenhagen in 1807, took part in the ill-fated Walcheren Expedition of 1809, and died of fever after the Battle of Salamanca in 1811. In recognition of his 23 years of active service, the Duke of Wellington granted his son, Andrew Hamilton Russell the second (Guy’s grandfather), an army commission at the age of 16.

Guy’s grandfather first came to New Zealand as a captain in the 58th Regiment (Northamptonshires) on the outbreak of the New Zealand Wars in the 1840s. In 1859, he resigned from the army with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, bought Mangakuri station on the Hawke’s Bay coast and farmed it for the next 15 years. During this time, he was appointed a civil commissioner and resident magistrate for Hawke’s Bay, served in the Stafford Ministry as Minister of Native Affairs and was appointed to the colony’s Legislative Council. For some years he was also employed as superintendent of military roads and was responsible for the construction of the Wellington to Paekakariki section of the main route north.

Guy’s father, Captain A.H. Russell the third (Ham), and his uncle William (later Sir William Russell), followed their father into the 58th Regiment before selling their commissions in the British Army and emigrating to New Zealand. In 1862, they went into partnership to farm 14,000 hectares of Maori leasehold land located in rolling hill country between the Tutaekuri and Ngaruroro rivers, 32 kilometres northwest of Hastings. Two other brothers, Herbert and Arthur, would later join them.

from England, Herbert taking up land near present-day Palmerston North and Arthur a bush property at Ohingaiti in the central North Island.

The brothers, however, had little capital and less farming experience, which made their early years hard going. They had raised some money from the sale of their commissions and had borrowed from family members. Each partner was also entitled to 140 hectares of freehold land as a result of their army service, and they were helped in the early years by advances against their wool clips from the banks that had lent them money. At the time of occupation, their vast holdings were mostly covered in scrub and swamp, which had to be turned by hard manual labour into grass for sheep.

Life on the new runs was primitive. Ham lived communally with two farm labourers in a two-roomed raupo hut on the banks of the Tutaekuri River, subsisting on a diet of wild pork, bread and tea. William joined him in 1862 and together the brothers worked to clear enough land to graze the first small flocks of sheep. Wool was then their sole source of income, and prices—reflecting the general boom-and-bust nature of the late nineteenth-century colonial economy—were erratic. It was also labour-intensive, as bales had to be hauled 50 kilometres downriver by horse-drawn dray to the port of Napier and there loaded onto ships moored off the beach.

In 1864, another 1416 hectares was added to the Russell holdings with the purchase of the Flaxmere lease, but it brought no relief from the problems of pioneering farming. Major floods in 1867, 1876, and 1880 caused much damage to the two properties and many others in Hawke's Bay. They also lost large numbers of lambs to wild pigs; pasture to the newly introduced rabbit pest; and crops and grass seed to rust disease and an expanding population of introduced birds.

But this was frontier New Zealand and there were other challenges to overcome, including a threat to the very lives of the Russell brothers and their families. By 1860, the settler government, backed by British troops and colonial militia, was at war with the Maori tribes of the Waikato and Taranaki over land. In October 1866, the Russells were forced to abandon their homestead for the shelter of Napier when a war party of 200 Maori from Taupo and Tarawera arrived at nearby Oamaranui pa with the clear intention of attacking and capturing the town.

Two days later, a force of settler militia and 'friendly' Maori under Colonel George Whitmore made the first move, attacking the pa on the banks of the Tutaekuri River after its defenders refused his call to surrender. Forty Maori were killed, including their chief Kepa and the prophet Panapa, and another 40 taken prisoner. Whitmore's staff officer in that engagement was Ham Russell, who narrowly escaped death himself when his horse reared and threw him into the line of fire.

In 1870, the Russell brothers began negotiations to buy the two leasehold blocks from their Maori owners. William expected no opposition to this because the land was well removed from existing Maori settlements and surrounded by Crown land. A pragmatic man, he observed that many Maori had 'taken to drink' and were heavily in debt to local merchants. This made him think that they were even more likely to sell.

Lack of capital was the immediate problem. William told his brother that if they could not raise enough money from other sources—presumably the banks—he would return to England and marry the daughter of the Hodgskin family of Sherenden in Sussex. The union, however, depended on the father making a good settlement on her—'my choice to be reserved until the articles are inspected'. With

two years, William had inspected Harriet Hodgskin and married her, accepting a settlement of 500 pounds from her presumably willing family. In 1864, his brother likewise returned to England and married Katherine Sarah Tinsley of Sedgley, daughter of a wealthy nail manufacturer, in Staffordshire.

With the capital raised from the two marriages the two properties were finally bought, but the former Maori owners—assisted by European ‘native agents’ and lawyers—made repeated efforts to repudiate the sale. Their grounds were that neither the agreed commission nor the 3000-pound purchase price had been paid, that the certificate of title had been obtained by fraud, and that there were defects in the original deeds of conveyance.

The Russell brothers saw these claims as attempts by local Maori and their agents to extort money from them as legal owners of the land, and fought them vigorously through the courts. In the end, they won the case, but it was not until 1885 that they were finally guaranteed legal title to Tunanui and Flaxmere.

Their financial position was eased, however, by the steady development of the land. By 1873, large tracts of manuka and fern had been cleared, ploughed and sown, and a new homestead and woolshed built. By 1875, the Tunanui and Flaxmere stations were shearing 20,000 sheep between them. In 1880 refrigerated shipping revolutionised the colony’s trade with Britain, enabling farmers like the Russell brothers to export sheepmeat as well as wool. A year later, the new manager of Tunanui could claim, with some exaggeration, that the run was now ‘like the Garden of Eden in a wilderness’.



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## Chapter 2

### *The Reluctant Schoolboy*

‘Off he went as bold as a lion and did not want me to accompany him . . . He began Latin and looked grave over it; gave a boy a bloody nose in his first scrimmage.’—Ham Russell recalls his son Guy’s first day at school in England.

Guy Russell was born on 23 February 1868, the elder son and second of a family of seven (Mildred, Guy, Gwen, Gertrude, Muriel, Claude, and Evelyn) born to Ham Russell and his wife, Katherine, over the next 10 years. By the time of Guy’s birth, Ham and William had moved from their primitive wharves on the banks of the Tutaekuri and were farming the Russell blocks from Redclyffe, an ample two-storey homestead further down the river towards Napier.

As with most of the New Zealand frontier in the 1860s, settlement in Hawke’s Bay was sparse: the roads were unpaved tracks, the rivers mostly unbridged, and social life was limited. The Russell’s nearest neighbours were the Maori at Omaranui pa and a few scattered settlers at Taradale, now a suburb of Napier. Deprived of the companionship of children their own age, the Russell children turned to each other, and it was here that the foundations of Guy’s close and lifelong relationship with his sisters, Milly and Gwen, were laid. It was at Redclyffe, too, that Guy and his grandfather forged the bond that endured until the colonel’s death in 1900—a bond that helped to mould Guy’s character and his career.

Although he was now a resident magistrate in Hawke’s Bay, by 1874 Ham had had his fill of the hardships, isolation and crudities of life in Britain’s most remote colony. That year he took his family back to England. They settled in Sedgley, the home of his widowed and wealthy mother-in-law Elizabeth Tinsley.

The voyage home, however, was marred by tragedy when their youngest child, Mary, died of dysentery in New York. Guy was then just six, but already the traits that would define the man were beginning to appear. Family members recalled that he played a leading part in the arrangements for the funeral of his infant sister. His father noted that his son did not flinch when asked to go down into

a dark cellar in Sedgley; and that he endured a burn to his foot from a firecracker without complaint. After a visit to the Polytechnic in London, Guy showed 'a good deal of cool courage' in withstanding an electric shock from one of the exhibits. He had also asked to venture down in a diving bell—presumably in a deep-water tank.

In March 1876, Guy attended his first school, the Miss Hills School at Lynmouth. For the first time he was in the company of boys his own age, and his education out of the hands of governesses. His stay was to be shortlived. In 1877, bored with the staid life of Victorian England and thinking the future of his family still lay in the Antipodes, Ham Russell brought his wife and children back to New Zealand.

They settled at Moorlands, the home originally built by his father at Flaxmere, where the family enjoyed a social life considerably better than that at Redclyffe three years earlier. There were dinner parties and luncheons, many guests and callers. Ham organised shooting parties, which Guy, now aged nine, was allowed to join.

The return lasted just 16 months. Beset by worries about finance, low returns from farming, and the 'rascally lawyers and native agents' who were challenging the title to the Russell lands on behalf of their former Maori owners, Ham sent his family back to England, settling finally at Lausanne in Switzerland. Here, supported by income from the family properties in Hawke's Bay, Ham lived for most of the next 35 years as a so-called 'gentleman of leisure'. The task of managing the Russell estates now fell largely on William, who was already heavily involved in colonial politics.

Guy remained in England to complete his education, first as a boarder at Twyford preparatory school, near Winchester—a school described by author Thomas Hughes, the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, as 'a rough, badly managed, bullying place'. From a close-knit, affectionate family and an adventurous open-air life in the colonies, he was now confined within the rigid structures of the British public school system. He hated it. Letters to his parents at this time reveal an unhappy and bewildered 10-year-old boy desperate to be out of boarding school and back home with his family in New Zealand.

'I would rather than anything be out in New Zealand and riding to the post on a message or to get the letters and it always makes me sad to think of them,' he wrote to his father. 'Are all the little birds that I used to try and shoot gone away now. Is the drain running well and I hope that the fat cattie paddock's fence is getting put up better. I suppose that the hawkes [*sic*] have stopped trying to kill the lambs.' To his unbending mother, he wrote: 'I have not had one happy day since I came here. I so often feel sad.' By the last term of his incarceration, Guy's attitude to boarding school life had not changed: '[I] will be glad to leave this Black Hole of Calcutta.'

Guy gradually overcame his homesickness—if not his dislike of boarding school—and his intelligence and capacity for leadership began to surface. He passed out top of the fifth form at Twyford, and in his last year there was head of house. Guy's grandfather, whose home at Winchester was his out-of-school base, had by now formed a high opinion of his grandson's intellectual capabilities and felt that he was fitted for a career other than the traditional ones of army officer or farmer. He favoured a scientific career after taking a degree at Oxford or at the higher levels of the British civil service. Ham, equally ambitious for his son, thought a career in law the better option.

alternatively a study of 'agricultural theory' and then practical experience running the family farm back in New Zealand.

Both were to be disappointed. In 1882, Guy went on to Harrow, one of England's elite public schools. Founded in 1572, Harrow had already produced many eminent men, including Captain James Cook's botanist, Sir Joseph Banks; the Romantic poet Lord Byron; novelists Anthony Trollope and John Galsworthy; playwright Richard Sheridan; prominent reformer Lord Shaftesbury; and Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel, founder of the modern police force and the British Conservative Party.

Guy Russell was now part of a world of rigid tradition that included the wearing of morning suits, straw boaters and top hats, and a curriculum focused on English history, French, the Classics (Greek and Latin), and mathematics. Social life was bounded by 'houses', each of which competed fiercely against all the others for sporting trophies. None of it made any noticeable difference to his attitude towards boarding school life. 'I get to dislike this place more and more,' he wrote to his father. 'I believe I have heard you say that Uncle Arthur disliked it. I certainly detest it.'

Not surprisingly, Guy performed poorly at Harrow—to the chagrin of his father, who wanted him to be the school's leading boy and to excel academically. School reports refer to him being slovenly and neglectful, inconsistent in performance, surly in demeanour and self-centred in his approach to his duties. His form master's report in May 1885, two months before he left Harrow, commented: 'A poor creature, I am sorry to think. Won't do his best or anywhere near it.' Guy's housemaster, J.A. Cruickshank, with whom he clashed often, described him as 'a nice manly boy' but inclined to be rebellious and too easily led. Guy's comment on Cruickshank after one of their frequent rows: 'He's a mean beast at best.'

In later years, Guy would admit to a dislike of schoolmasters—probably, he admitted, because he recognised some of the same critical, controlling instincts in himself. His apathy and poor academic performance he would blame on chronic indigestion, a condition that continued to blight his life until the age of 21, when he 'pretty well overcame it'.

Guy's experience of Harrow, however, was not entirely negative. He enjoyed football and cricket, although he didn't claim to be outstanding at either. Significantly, he took a keen interest in the school cadet corps; and he read constantly, mostly novels, to the displeasure of his masters, who regarded this sort of activity 'as sinful in one so young' and positively 'criminal' if done in class. When he left Harrow he took 100 books with him, many of which had been confiscated by his form masters.

Now in his mid-teens, Guy relished the term holidays at his Uncle George's farm in Wales and at his father's new home at Lausanne. There he played tennis and went fishing, boating, horse riding, and climbing in the Swiss Alps with his father, Ham, who was a keen mountaineer, and occasionally with his sisters. Among these expeditions was a father-and-son ascent of the Matterhorn (4478 m), one of the highest and deadliest peaks in the Alps, and a severe test of skill and nerve for any but the most experienced mountaineers. With his father's encouragement, Guy was beginning to indulge his penchant for extreme risk-taking.

Along with this physical activity, Guy had an active social life of amateur theatricals, parties and dancing, which he enjoyed to the full but only increased his dislike of boarding school. In the words of his family biographer, Colonel Reg Gambrill: 'The very thought of school was anathema to him, yet I

had a brilliant mind and a very strong sense of filial duty to his parents. These two factors seem eternally at war within him.’<sup>6</sup>

Guy Russell emerges from his school days as an intellectually able but uncommitted student—was his near contemporary, Winston Churchill. Churchill entered Harrow three years after Russell, but there is no evidence that they were aware of each other. The similarities of character and experience, however, were marked. Both hated their prep schools and neither did well academically at Harrow, although both read voraciously and at a level beyond their years. Both were confirmed individualists and uncomfortable with the constraints and disciplines of boarding school life.

In one of history’s smaller ironies, Churchill would go on to head the Royal Navy as First Lord of the Admiralty and devise the strategy that became the disastrous Gallipoli campaign of 1915. Russell would emerge as one of the few effective commanders in that campaign, lead the rearguard that saved nearly 50,000 Australians and New Zealanders evacuated safely from its beaches, and blame his fellow Harrovian for what he considered an avoidable military disaster.

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## Chapter 3

### *The Making of a Soldier*

‘I understand your father to say that in going into the Army you do so with the intention of becoming a real soldier and not a drone which is content to plod on and see himself passed by men of more pluck and energy than himself. If so, the sooner you take to work the better.’—Guy Russell’s grandfather, ‘the Colonel’, writes to him on his entry to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, in September 1886.

When Guy Russell entered Harrow, he carried with him his family’s ambitions for a career in law, science or the civil service. However, there was the management of family properties in Hawke’s Bay to be considered, as well as grandmother Eliza Tinsley’s business interests in England. In the event, the reports from Harrow destroyed any hopes of Guy’s entrance into Oxford to study for a law or science degree, and he opted—like his father and grandfather before him—for a military career.

It was an inspired, if not unpredictable choice. After spending several months in Germany sharpening his command of the language, Guy sat the entry examination for the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He passed with the second-to-top marks in his intake, unlike Douglas Haig, the man destined to command all British and Dominion forces on the Western Front in World War I. Haig scraped into Sandhurst a few years before Russell with the greatest difficulty; and Henry Wilson, who would eventually rise to be chief of imperial general staff, failed the entrance exam three times before being finally admitted.

At that time, physique and prowess at games rather than intellectual ability tended to be the standard by which officer cadets of the time were selected and later promoted. Russell, at 5 feet 6 inches in height (1.72 metres) and not particularly good at games, would seem to have been disadvantaged, but a family tradition of service to the military, proficiency in French and German, and high marks in the entrance examination would have been hard to ignore.

Given the emotional turmoil of his life that year, however, Guy showed considerable mental toughness in passing at all. He was besotted with his tennis partner, Violet Brooke, who was alleged

playing him off against her other male friends, and the 'devil of jealousy' had raised its ugly head. More seriously, he had for several months watched the slow decline of his mother's health and was compelled to sit the examination just two days after her death from tuberculosis at the age of 43.

In September 1886, Guy took his place at Sandhurst and at last found his niche. With his interests now fully engaged, the young New Zealander relished the college routines and disciplines, the company of his fellow cadet officers, and his courses, both academic and practical. Among these were military history and tactics and Russell excelled in both. His overall performance was rated by his examiners as 'exemplary'.

Sandhurst in the 1880s, however, was an unpromising environment for young officers soon to face the grim realities of twentieth-century warfare. Training still focused on solid line formations, mechanical precision, a rigid dependence on order, and firing strictly in volleys on the word of command. Artillery doctrine had not moved forward since the Crimean War 30 years before, and machine guns could be written off as 'suitable only for the destruction of savages and hardly suitable for use against white men'.<sup>7</sup> Russell's near contemporary, Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, remembered being taught a lot of obsolete tactics and doing 'a tremendous lot of useless drill'.<sup>8</sup>

Although a staff college had been established to remedy the deficiencies exposed by the Crimean War, officer training had a distinctly anti-intellectual cast. Polo and pig-sticking (in India) were the occupations of choice, and any sort of book work 'quite beyond the pale'.<sup>9</sup> As for leadership at unit level, 'Officers were still so busy being gentlemen, in or out of gorgeous uniforms, that they had little time for their men and a total lack of concern for the latter's welfare.'<sup>10</sup>

Arrayed in such uniforms, Russell and his fellow cadets paraded at Buckingham Palace in June 1887 as an honour guard during ceremonies to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign. It was all too much. After standing in the sun for five hours without food, Guy and several other young soldiers collapsed and had to be revived with the help of 'two bottles of brandy and smelling salts, a camp stool and two umbrellas, all the gifts of a sympathetic crowd'.

Guy Russell emerged from Sandhurst in August 1887 with the Sword of Honour, awarded as the best cadet of his course—the first New Zealand-born officer to achieve that distinction. In January 1888, as a freshly commissioned subaltern, he was posted to the 1st Battalion of the Border Regiment, in which two generations of Russells had already served, then stationed at Sialkot some 350 kilometres from India's volatile North-West Frontier.

Thirty years earlier, the Indian Mutiny, involving mainly Hindu troops of the British Indian Army, had plunged much of north and central India into rebellion against British rule. The uprising was eventually defeated, but Russell's intended regiment was now part of the network of garrisons that would underpin imperial control of India. They would remain until Britain's most prized overseas territory ('the Jewel in the Crown') was finally granted independence in 1947.

Russell sailed from Portsmouth bound for Bombay via Suez where he spent an uneventful two hours ashore seeing nothing but 'dirt a la Orient'. Back aboard ship he relieved his boredom by pelting the Arab boatmen with oranges. Subsequent visits to Suez would not be so mundane. In 1915, Russell returned in command of a mounted rifles brigade defending the Suez Canal against an attack by Turkish troops, and went on to command the brigade at the debacle that was Gallipoli. A year later, he

went back to Suez to form and train his country's first infantry division for service on the Western Front.

The regiment that Russell joined in northern India would have been typical of the British Army in the 1880s—officered by the sons of gentlemen who had attended elite public schools, its soldiers drawn mostly from the industrial and rural working classes. 'A rough lot,' Fuller put it, 'simple, tough, illiterate, largely recruited from down-and-outs, men who had got into trouble, vagabonds, and a sprinkling of the sons and grandsons of NCOs and private soldiers.'<sup>11</sup>

The reality of service with the British Army, however, did not match its early promise. In 1888 there were no major rebellions in India to suppress, or border wars to fight. For the troops there was little to fill their off-duty hours except drinking and sports; for the officers, polo, race-riding, and leave back in England for those who could afford it. Russell found the company of his fellow officers tedious and there was no socialising to be had with 'the natives' who were 'not of gentlemen standard anyway'. The dull routines of peacetime soldiering were broken only by regular pig-hunting expeditions and polo tournaments.

The young subaltern took both very seriously, relishing the thrill of the chase and the hard riding in rough country. He bought a wild, hill-bred pony—'a splendid pig-sticker but an awful man-eater'—from a fellow officer who had found him too unruly to ride. It repaid him by ripping off his little finger while he was feeding it, but it could have been worse: 'He might have got me down and trampled on me,' Guy wrote to his family, 'which might have been an awkward business as these country hill-bred ponies are like the natives, regular savages.' Of his growing fondness for polo Russell observed: 'I think the game keeps one up to the mark . . . there is more risk and [it] requires more nerve and dash than any other game.'

As in his schooldays, Russell's leave was spent mostly with the family at the Château de Perre overlooking Lake Geneva, where his father Ham now lived with his new French wife, Stephanie Lagier. Here Guy met Lili de Saugy, a wealthy and well-connected young Frenchwoman, and embarked on the first serious relationship of his life. Details of the courtship are scarce, but Lili remembered him as 'a serious young man, at the same time gay, lively, and likeable . . . probably the best tennis player of our set, and the best dancer'. Guy attended church every Sunday, rode regularly, and participated in bathing parties at the lake, where, Lili recalled, the women were kept 50 metres away from the men 'for decency's sake'.

In May 1888 came a demonstration of the self-sufficiency and independence of mind that would mark Russell's later years in senior command. He passed up the chance of leave with his fellow officers at Murree or Dalhousie, where there was female company aplenty but little else to do to pass the time. Instead, he went hunting red and black bear, musk deer and chamois in the mountains of Kashmir, accompanied only by his Indian shikari (guide) and two 'coolies' to carry essential food and gear. The all-day hunting delivered not only several trophies but a considerable boost to his self-confidence. Camped in the snow at 3000 metres, he wrote to his sister: 'I have enjoyed the whole thing immensely, and feel as if I was worth twice as much as before I came.'

However agreeable in parts, the life of a peacetime soldier did not suit the ambitious young New Zealander. From the start, he itched to be on active service—preferably on the volatile North-West



Frontier—and away from the tedious garrison life of drills, company inspections, the issuing rations and checking of accounts. He wrote to his grandfather: ‘I am bound to say that all I care about is service. I don’t care a straw for the sword at my side, I only care for it in the hand.’ Guy’s frustrations were not helped by low army rates of pay, and what he considered to be slack standards of discipline and turnout in his regiment. ‘For those who want soldiering pure and simple,’ he complained to his father, ‘this service is no good.’

For intellectual stimulus and emotional relief, Guy turned to a study of the Hindustani and Persian languages, and to his beloved cello. There was even the promise of another romance, for the woman accompanying him on the piano was Miss Warburton, a young woman of mixed English/Afghan origins—‘her father being the son of an Afghan princess who ran away with a Colonel Warburton during our last occupation’.

The racism and snobbery prevalent amongst the British ruling élite in India at the time was no deterrent to Guy’s pursuit of Miss Warburton; nor, it seemed, was his ongoing engagement to Lili de Saugy. In a letter to a sister, he hinted that he expected soon to announce a new engagement, but for reasons unknown the promised liaison did not come to pass.

In December 1888, the Border Regiment left India for garrison duty at Mandalay in Burma, which had been declared a province of British India in 1886. Here at last was the promise of real soldiering against elusive bandit gangs called ‘dacoits’, which had begun a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the country’s colonial rulers. Again it was not to be. Another unit was preferred over the Borders for service on the subsequent Chin Hills expedition, and Russell now expected the regiment to be confined permanently to ‘chowkidar’ (watchman) duty, as it had been for the last 15 years in India.

When a column of the regiment was finally deployed against the dacoits, his colonel refused to let him go because the young lieutenant was now responsible for training its mounted infantry and could not be spared. In a minor skirmish, however, Russell’s company attacked a jungle village and took some prisoners, but achieved little more. The so-called ‘shadows in the forest’ would go on fighting the British until 1890, when they finally gave up the unequal struggle.

In May 1889, Russell was sent to join five other British officers commanding a regiment of Indian troops at Miajuri in the ruby mines district of Bernardmyo, some 200 kilometres northwest of Mandalay. He remembered it as ‘a small wretchedly built little village of bamboo huts and wooden shanties perched 6,000 feet [about 2000 metres] high in a hollow surrounded by fern hills . . . of the most uninteresting and ugly description’.

The region thoroughly depressed him with its eternal rain, fever and atrocious food. The situation was not improved by his feelings towards the native troops (sepoys) of his regiment, whom he described as ‘a miserable apology for soldiers’. The compensations were cheap living and card games at night with his fellow officers, but he also made time to grow a rose garden and press on with his language studies. The damage, however, had been done. By March 1890 Guy was writing to his sister Milly: ‘My ambition, never a strong feature, is dead, though I manage to get through a certain amount of work, more because I hate being left behind than from any wish to be in front.’

Seeing no hope of active service unless he got into one of the best regiments, Guy was tempted to leave the army. In June 1890, a bout of malaria gave him a temporary escape: too sick to continue

duty at Miajuri, he was sent home to New Zealand for six months to recuperate. Returning to the country of his birth was a deliberate choice because he knew it would give him a chance to compare his present life in the army with career options in New Zealand.

Money appears to have been a major concern, although as a beneficiary of his grandmother Tinsley's will, Guy was now receiving an extra 1500 pounds a year. Even so he considered his pay as a serving officer insufficient; and the pension he would receive on retirement from service would also be inadequate if he had to depend on it to support a family.

There was the worry, too, that he would never accumulate enough capital to later take up farming in New Zealand, or anywhere else. He rated his prospects for promotion to senior rank, and therefore better pay, as poor—'nearly 20:1 against commanding a battalion'. The only way to get ahead in the army, he concluded, was being on active service or 'having friends at the War Office'.

But if the peacetime British Army offered Guy Russell few financial rewards and outlets for his energies and talents, he still preferred the military life to any other. Also, by this time other qualities that would help shape the future battlefield commander were beginning to surface—among them a passion for efficiency and good discipline. From India, he had written criticising the slovenly discipline in his battalion; and from Burma, of his determination to have the smartest company in the regiment. A sense of his fitness for higher command was also emerging: 'I am sure I have more ability to command than the average fellow, and that I am more practical,' he wrote to his father. These qualities, he felt, had been largely dormant until now.

Meanwhile, sick leave in New Zealand was beginning to pall and the prospect of staff college in England held no attractions ('this eternal theory without practice'). Guy Russell wanted to be where there was some prospect of real soldiering, possibly in South Africa: 'I see the makings of a squabble with the Boers by today's telegrams and wish I was at home [England], for it would have been a good opportunity should anything turn up, as my health is now quite right.'

In December 1890, Guy's sick leave came to an end and he was ordered to rejoin his regiment now home from Burma, at Dover. As expected, he found life as a barracks soldier in England unbearable, and over the next few months applied, unsuccessfully, to join the British East Africa Company, the British South Africa Company, and the Bechuanaland Border Police. Finally, seeing no hope of action abroad unless he was posted to one of the 'best' regiments, Russell decided to resign his commission in the British Army and return to farming in New Zealand.

His grandfather, who had done so much to shape his character and ambitions, tried to dissuade him. He doubted whether Guy, accustomed to a privileged life in the army, would be mentally and physically tough enough to endure the primitive and lonely life of a colonial small farmer 'living on sour, heavy bread and often ill-cooked mutton'. His grandson would do better, he wrote, investing whatever capital he had in mortgages and 'living the life of a gentleman'. Better still, he should stay in the army, where he would at least have 'a clean shirt every day, his boots blacked, and the prospect of one day commanding a regiment'. In similar vein, Guy's Uncle Arthur warned him that 'the bush on the West Coast abounds with young gentlemen, chiefly "Army failures", who get small sections, do their own cooking, and whom no one sees or wants to see'.

In June that year Guy Russell was appointed to the Indian staff corps and sent, as he had asked

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