

Brigadier James Learmonth Melville



Brigadier Melville was born and educated as an engineer in Glasgow, Scotland. He enlisted in the ranks of the 6th Field Company NPAM in 1915, qualified as a sergeant a few months later and was granted a commission in the Canadian Engineers in 1916. Lieutenant Melville went to France in 1916 with the 12th Field Company. While in France he became adjutant to the CRE, Canadian Corps Troops Engineers. Later he became the Field Engineer in charge of the bridging under the Chief Engineer, First Canadian Corps. During the war he was awarded the Military Cross and Bar, the latter for conspicuous gallantry during the bridging operations at the Canal du Nord.

When looking for someone to write the chapter on the Canadian sappers for the official war history committee, General Lindsay lighted once more on this maid-of-all-work Melville, who promptly went to work on the job.

After World War I Brigadier Melville was very involved in rehabilitation work for veterans. He was principal of the Vocational Training School for Veterans, and then District Administrator for Soldier's Civil Re-establishment for Eastern Ontario. Later he returned to Ottawa as Director of Orthopedic and Vetcraft Services. In 1938 he was appointed Commissioner of the War Veterans' Loan Board.

During the years between the World Wars he continued to serve in the NPAM, and when war broke out in 1939 he became Honourary Lieutenant-Colonel of 3rd District Engineers. However, wanting an active role, he was selected to organize and take overseas the 1st Pioneer Battalion RCE (later became 1st Engineer Battalion RCE). From Officer Commanding 1st Battalion in England he was appointed CRE 1 Canadian Corps Troops. From this job he was soon after promoted and appointed Chief Engineer, 1 Canadian Corps. Early in 1943 he replaced Major-General Hertzberg as Chief Engineer of the 1st Canadian Army. He was awarded a CBE during this war.

Later in 1943 the Prime Minister appointed him Chairman of the Canadian Pensions Commission. The Engineers hated to see him go but because of "his long experience and peculiar knowledge of veterans problems he was the best man for the job". He remained in this post for 15 years.

In 1946 Brigadier Melville was appointed Honourary ADC to His Excellency the Governor-General of Canada. In 1948 he became the first honorary Colonel-Commandant of the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers, retiring from this post in 1968 at the age of 79. He was president of the Military Engineers' Association of Canada.

Brigadier Melville passed away on the 23rd January 1980 at the age of 91.