

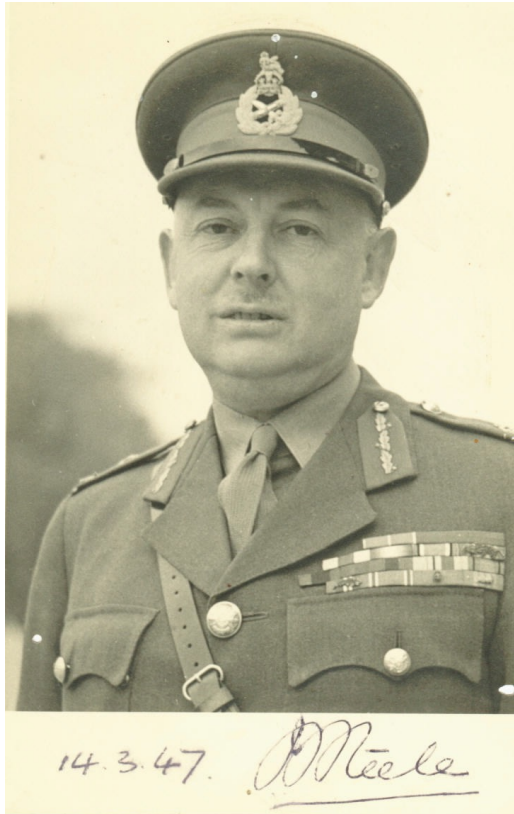
remembrance ni

Daddy Steele - the NI General who mobilised the Army for WW2



Gen Sir James Steele conducts inspection of 2 RUR upon amalgamation

General Sir James Stuart Steele GCB, KBE, DSO, MC, MiD, was born at Leefield Farm, Ballycarry, County Antrim, on 26/10/1894. into a humble farming family.



According to the 1901 Census of Ireland, Steele's father Samuel died before his son was six years old, leaving the widowed Rachel (née Stuart) to look after the household which included two children (James and elder sister Elizabeth

'Bessie') and two young adults (Margaret and Bailey), presumably adopted from Rachel's family, given their surname being recorded as Stuart.

He was educated at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution and at Queen's University Belfast. James Steele was studying for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. War



intervened and his studies at Queen's were cut short. As a member of the QUB OTC, he applied for a Temporary Commission in the army.

The 19-year-old served in the 7th (Service) Battalion, the Royal Irish Rifles in Messines, the Somme, and Ypres. Steele was gazetted as a temporary second lieutenant in the Royal Irish Rifles, on 26/09/1914 and posted to the 7th (Service) Battalion.

He served on the Western Front from 1915 to 1917. He served at the battles of Messines, Somme and at Passchendaele (Third Ypres).

Such was Steele's bravery, skill, and tenacity that he was awarded a Regular Commission in the RIR in June 1916, and both mentioned in dispatches in April 1917 and awarded the Military Cross in August 1917. Steele served the rest of the war in India where he was mentioned in despatches again. He saw action on the North West Frontier in 1920/21.

He stayed in the army and attended the Staff College in Quetta, India in 1926. He continued to serve in India, Egypt (where he married an Australian Janet Gibson Gordon), Pakistan, Jamaica, Palestine, and later in France, Belgium, and the Middle East.

He attended Staff College at Camberley 1930 - 31. Promoted to brevet Lt. Colonel, he commanded the First Battalion, the Sherwood Foresters from 1937 - 39 : the battalion was deployed to Jamaica in 1937 and to Palestine 1939. He was promoted to colonel in 1939.

His impressive service accelerated his promotion. In 1939 he was in the mobilisation branch of the War Office. When war broke out in 1939 his hand signed the Mobilisation order for GB forces. However, Steele was not to delay long in the Mobilisation Branch of the War Office.



On Saturday, February 6, 1954, over 20,000 gathered at the front of the City Hall, Belfast to watch the The Royal Ulster Rifles receiving the Freedom of Belfast, the first regiment to do so. The Lord Mayor, Sir Percival Brown, inspected the parade and then presented the Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir James Steele, with a silver casket containing the Certificate of Freedom. General Sir James Steele then signed the Register of Freedom. The Lord Mayor took the salute as the Regiment marched past.

There is a newsreel at -

<https://www.royal-irish.com/events/freedom-of-the-city-of-belfast-for-the-royal-ulster-rifles>



He took over command of the 132nd Infantry Brigade in November 1939. He served in France and Belgium in 1940. In May, 1940 he was admitted to the Distinguished Service Order for his involvement in the engagement

on the River Escaut immediately prior to the subsequent withdrawal to Dunkirk and the battle there.

He became General Officer Commanding (GOC) 59th (Staffordshire) Infantry Division in February 1941. The 59th Division was mostly a reserve force. He commanded II Corps as an acting lieutenant general in 1942. He became Deputy

Chief of Staff for Middle East Command in 1942, where his responsibilities included El Alamein.

He was then appointed Director of Staff Duties at the War Office in 1943. He was promoted to major general in 1944.

He returned to the War Office as Director of Staff Duties where he was deeply involved with the planning and operation of the D-Day landings in Normandy in 1944.

In 1946 he became Commander-in-Chief and High Commissioner in Austria, and the following year Adjutant-General to the Forces, a role which saw him partly manage the Army's transition from war to peace.

Steele was promoted to lieutenant general in 1946. He was appointed Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) and High Commissioner in Austria in 1946. In that capacity he signed a treaty with Marshal Tito. He was promoted to general in 1947. He was Adjutant-General to the Forces from 1947 to 1950 when he retired from the British Army.

He was awarded the CB in 1943, Amongst his many notable accolades, Steele was a Knight of the Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (1950) and a Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (1949). His personal banner now hangs in the Regimental Chapel of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast.

Retirement

In the post-war period James Steele continued his devotion to the army, undertaking vital and sterling work in helping the army cope with the new challenges of peace-time. He also firmly established the Army Benevolent Fund.

He received an honorary LLD from Queen's University, Belfast in 1947. He was Colonel Commandant of the Royal Ulster Rifles from 1947 to 1957. He was the President of the Army Benevolent Fund from 1954 to 1964. In 1966 he became Chairman of the Northern Ireland Government Somme committee.

Retiring from the regular army in 1950, James Steele became Colonel of the Royal Ulster Rifles from 1945 to 1957. He was also a National President of the Dunkirk Veterans' Association

and in 1966 became chairman of the Somme Committee established by the Northern Ireland government and that year led the 50th anniversary pilgrimage to France. Speaking at the time he underlined how the memory of the Somme would never fade in Ulster, because of the great sacrifice which had been undertaken there by so many of her sons.

In March 1950, following his retirement, Gen Sir James S. Steele was made Aide-de-Camp to King George VI, which led to a lasting close personal relationship with the late Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

Roots

He was admitted as the fourth Freeman of the Borough of Larne on September 5, 1949. Three years earlier, unable to extend such an honour, the people of Ballycarry and district presented him with an illuminated address as a token of their esteem. The address was given a place of honour over his desk at his home in England, yet perhaps one of the most poignant honours for Steele, who never forgot his native village, was his role in the official opening of the new Ballycarry Primary School in 1953.



The memorial to General Sir James Steele in Ballycarry.

On the village green, the General Steele Memorial stands not far from where the man was born. The community created the General Sir James Steele Memorial Trust to help benefit young people.

Family and regiment

General Sir James Steele married Janet Gibson Gordon and together they went on to have two daughters. The General died peacefully on



Floor plaque in the Regimental Chapel at Belfast Cathedral - Overhead is the personal banner of General Sir James Steele as a Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath

24/07/1975 in the sleepy village of Stourpaine (Dorset) following a short illness.

The news of the death of the man known affectionately as 'Daddy Steele' was relayed to the 5th Battalion of the Royal Ulster Rifles as pipers were playing 'The South Down Militia' at a guest night in their camp.

There were many within the army who wanted to put on record their appreciation of his service. Writing in the London Times, Major-General Eric Goldsmith said that: 'Daddy Steele' was truly a father to those who served him. He demanded high standards and he attained them by

guidance, by kindness and by good humour. He will be remembered.'

The funeral was impressive. 1,000 men escorted the coffin. In its scale the event was similar to the funeral of Winston Churchill.

But the final chapter had not yet been written. They did not bury James Stuart Steele in England.

They brought his ashes home to Ballycarry because Gen Sir James Steele remained mindful of his origins and his final wish was that his remains were to be returned to rest in his home village, which still fondly remembers its national soldier - statesman.

In 2018 the interment of the ashes of his daughter Rachel Stuart Caldwell took place at Ballycarry, in the Steele family plot at Templecorran cemetery. Mrs. Caldwell, who passed away aged 87 years lived in Shaftesbury in Dorset. Family members travelled from Australia to be present. She had visited the village on a number of occasions, including the unveiling of the memorial to General Steele in the 1990s. Mrs. Caldwell was also supportive of the local charity trust, the General Steele

Memorial Trust Fund, which assists local young people and supports the village primary school.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

David Hume, article in “New Ulster”, Spring 1993

Carrickfergus Times

Nick Smart, Biographical Dictionary of British Generals of the Second World War. Pen & Sword., 2005

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The **remembrance ni** programme is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD who served as Chaplain to 102 and 105 Regiments Royal Artillery (TA), as Hon. Chaplain to RNR and as Chaplain to the RBL NI area and the Burma Star Association NI. Dr McKelvey is a

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