

A VISION  
OF STEEL

*The life of G. D. DELPRAT, C.B.E.*  
*General Manager of B. H. P. 1898-1921*



PAQUITA MAWSON



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THE LIFE OF *G. D. Delprat*, C.B.E.

GENERAL MANAGER OF B.H.P. 1898-1921

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*With a foreword by* R. G. MENZIES, C.H., Q.C.

*and an introduction by*

ESSINGTON LEWIS, C.H.



F. W. CHESHIRE

MELBOURNE

GUILLAUME DANIEL DELPRAT, C.B.E., Melbourne, 1919.



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## FOREWORD

THIS BOOK possesses a double interest. It brings together two celebrated names. It is written by the wife of one of the very greatest of living Australians, that modest but stalwart leader and explorer, Sir Douglas Mawson. It is written about the life of her father, G. D. Delprat, one of the limited number of men who can properly be regarded as the founders of Australian industry.

It is perhaps our habit too frequently to form our assessments of greatness on the basis of headlines. It therefore very frequently happens that the true builders of the nation are either relatively unknown or quickly forgotten.

The truth is that G. D. Delprat, like his celebrated son-in-law, was an explorer. He had imagination which enabled him to see over the horizon. He regarded difficulties as things to be surmounted. He worked for the future. His personal interests were subordinate.

The celebrated movement of the Broken Hill Pty. Co. Ltd. from silver to steel was in large measure G. D. Delprat's achievement. He had associated with him, of course, men of great talent and outlook, but he it was who possessed the special kind of genius needed for such a revolutionary development. It is not easy for those who see the tremendous expansion of industry in Australia today, and who know that the whole foundation of that industry is in iron and steel, to realize that for all substantial purposes steel manufacture in Australia goes back no further than the First World War. In that war, Australia's munitions production extended only to small arms and small arms ammunition. In the Second World War, Australia produced a huge variety of munitions great and small which made her for all practical purposes self-sufficient.

When the Broken Hill Pty. Co. Ltd. first began to make steel at Newcastle, there was the usual fear expressed that such an infant industry, faced by tremendous world competition, would require such extraordinary protection that the general Australian community would suffer. This prophecy was not fulfilled. For some time now, and notwithstanding Australia's high cost structure, Australian steel has been produced more cheaply than in



almost any other country and is successfully exported. With the growth of steel production has gone, of course, the most phenomenal development in the engineering trades and in construction. It is safe to say that if G. D. Delprat had not seen his vision very little more than 40 years ago, Australia would not today be sustaining anything like a population of 10 millions in busy employment and with rapidly rising standards of life.

There are some foolish people who attack successful enterprises as if all they do is to line the pockets of a few rich shareholders. If they will study the life of G. D. Delprat they will see vividly that no man can help to create a great essential industry without conferring untold benefits upon thousands or, as in this case, millions of people.

I am sure that Lady Mawson has written this book with pride and affection. I hope that it will be read by many, many Australians with the same emotions.

R. G. MENZIES

Canberra,  
June, 1957

Prime Minister,  
The Commonwealth of Australia

## P R E F A C E

IN THIS chronicle concerning my father, Guillaume Daniel Delprat, to whom I have alluded throughout as GDD, I have tried to present his life as much as possible from his own diaries and letters. As the diary entries are short, except where they concern fires and strikes, explanatory additions have had to be made.

Without hesitation I have given prominence to my mother, HM as I have called her—the majesty implied in her first two initials seems to me quite apt: tall and shapely she moved swiftly about her home, a perfect complement to GDD with his sturdy figure and deliberate movements. I feel he would not have made such a success of his life had he not been able to leave so much to his partner.

The anecdotes are as I have heard them told and as they live in the memories of the family. The letters have necessarily lost a little in the translation but nothing has been altered or added. I am grateful for the help given me by my brothers and sisters in what has been written for the grandchildren of our parents.

To Professor J. G. Cornell I tender deep appreciation for the trouble he took in translating and transcribing the letter written to GDD in 1885 by the French engineer, in the setting up of which he was helped by Mr. W. H. Schneider.

My thanks are due also to Professor FitzHerbert for his interest and help in first reading the manuscript—correcting grammatical and spelling errors.

I have the deepest appreciation of the kind way Professor A. N. Jeffares, with his encouragement and suggestions, guided me in the difficulties that beset the writer of a "first effort".

To the Broken Hill Proprietary Company my thanks are due for considerable help in the interpretation of technical terms and for help in checking dates relating to B.H.P.'s early history. Mr. R. G. Newton, the Company's General Manager Commercial, has been a particular help in these matters. In addition I would like to thank my two friends, Neville Wills and Brian Rowe, of B.H.P.'s head office, both of whom have helped me in many matters of detail.



My warm thanks are due also to Mr. Essington Lewis, C.H., for his Introduction. There was never any doubt in my mind as to who should be asked to write this. In carrying on and developing the work of GDD he, more than any man, will have realized the onerous character of it, and the careful planning and the attention to detail which brought the Broken Hill Proprietary Company's undertaking to such success. In Mr. Lewis' expert hands this success was sustained and developed in an inspiring manner.

That the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies, has written a Foreword to this book seems to me to place it in a greater perspective. No Australian is more familiar with those stirring years of expansion during which Australia emerged as an industrial nation of consequence. Few know better than he the contribution which the pioneers, including my father, made to our present greatness. I am indeed grateful to Mr. Menzies for his Foreword, clearly indicating the consequence of G. D. Delprat's "Vision of Steel".

Finally my thanks go to my husband whose encouragement at all times has given me confidence.

PAQUITA MAWSON

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