



The Australian

# Boer War Memorial



How long ago is 106 years? An eternity in the minds of some. Many wars have been fought by Australian Military Forces in the last 106 years. But, how many wars have there been? How many can you name? My guess is that WW1, WW2 and Vietnam will be the first that comes to mind for most Australians followed by the current conflict in Iraq.

In our nation's capital Canberra, a very special place exists, stretched out like a terracotta ribbon between the Australian War Memorial and the Old Parliament House. On this ribbon of dedication the Australian people have erected Monuments to our nation's finest warriors, remembering and commemorating the past sacrifices of those Australian men and women, especially those who paid the supreme sacrifice. Other nation's are also remembered so that we may appreciate what they have contributed to this nation in times of war and peace.

Why the history lesson you may ask? There is a part of our history that has been long forgotten by most, and never represented in our avenue of remembrance. I speak of the Anglo Boer War which ended 106 years ago on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2008. There are monuments to this conflict in many cities and towns around this country, however no memorial currently exists in our nation's capital to the Anglo Boer War.

Why is this? I cannot answer that question, but what I can tell you is that currently there are volunteers in each State and Territory working on committees to bring this oversight to the attention of the Australian public, to hopefully raise enough funds to erect a monument to those men and women who left these shores and proudly represented this country.

As part of this endeavour, we also wish to include the descendants of the Boer War service personnel, providing the means by which to keep their ancestors' legacy alive. In doing so, we are looking to create an associate status (by subscription) for these descendants so that they may become involved in the building of this memorial, and actively contribute in a personal way to its establishment.

It is hoped that raising awareness and funds in this manner will assist us in our goal of having a Boer War Memorial realised. Furthermore, on our web site ([www.bwm.org.au](http://www.bwm.org.au)) interested parties can make donations (contributions of \$2 or more are tax-deductable) to assist us, and descendants can register their family members and leave their military history/details, as well as interesting stories/letters and photographs. This will, we hope, build substantially over time, and with time will come due recognition.

Indeed, a very proud day for Victorian descendants was Anzac Day this year. On this day they led the march through the streets of Melbourne. How proud they must have been to be representing their family members, and hopefully next year all states can follow their lead.

Our primary goal is to maintain the memories of the Boer War veterans, not only by establishing a memorial, but also by sharing the stories and memories they have left behind. The following are two such stories from the Boer War – one quite humorous, the other sad and touching – both of which give us a window into the past, a time so different from how we live today:

*“...A Colonel was the officer in charge of the First Contingent while the boat was preparing to sail from Pinkenba [Queensland]. He was dashing about praising the gallantry of his force and not forgetting to mention his own courage and pluck. He seemed to suggest that the only brave men in the State were those aboard. His behaviour caused visitors, especially soldiers, to have pretty red faces. While the boat was moving out he gave “them there cowards” a might more oratory. He said they were going off to fight and shouted to those on the wharf to stay at home and grow pumpkins.*

*Quite a number of the offended folk were still smarting about the farewell when news came from South Africa that the Regiment, when in action, had discovered that they were in grave danger of being encircled and obliged to retreat at full gallop. The Colonel was well in the lead, galloping as fast as his horse could go intent on escape. However, he fell off and landed right in a tangled mass of barbed wire which gripped him by the seat of his pants and held him like a trapped rabbit. As his men galloped past he yelled and pleaded frantically for help. On second thoughts a few dashed back and rescued the frantic refugee. From then on his reputation for bravery was zero...”*

[Source: Samford Museum Library]

*“...Towards the end of the War, our side was having a bad time with the enemy and making little progress, so a new idea was put into practice that of breaking the enemy morale. Parties of soldiers were directed to visit homes and smash all furniture and household effects, etc. To them it seemed to be a very silly and useless way of waging war. However, orders had to be obeyed. A narrator described how his party entered a nice home and set about wrecking everything. The mother protested and pleaded for her property. She received the Officer’s sympathy but was informed that he was obliged to obey orders. In no way could he oblige her. The last item to be destroyed was a nice piano. Again she pleaded and declared it to be her greatest treasure.*

*She was directed to stand aside. Resigned to its destruction, she asked to be allowed to play it once more. Leave was granted. She seated herself and the party realised they were in the presence of a fine musician. She played and sang the aria from Handel’s Messiah “I know that my Redeemer Liveth”. On conclusion, she arose from her seat. The men were so upset no one spoke. They bowed and walked out, leaving the lady with her smashed furniture and the undamaged piano. Whenever I hear sung that particular aria, I think of the foregoing incident...”*

[Source: Samford Museum Library]

We have quite a challenge ahead of us to bring to the minds of the people of Australia the legacy of these forgotten men and women we are seeking to commemorate. Let us make a proud addition to “The Terracotta Ribbon”. They rose to that challenge, and served this country when called upon. We can do no better than to rise to this challenge, and remember them.

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