

## **National Boer War Memorial Site Dedication**

The Boer War, a forgotten war, is to be remembered on Anzac Parade, Canberra. On the anniversary of the signing of the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902, Saturday, May 31, a ceremony of dedication was held at the chosen site opposite St John's Church on this national memorial avenue that leads to the Australian War Memorial. It is on the western side between the existing New Zealand and Light Horse memorials.

A Catafalque Party was mounted by representatives of the Federation Guard surrounding the site marked by sandbags, an upturned rifle and bayonet bearing a cork foreign service helmet of the Boer War era.

The ground was held by two mounted soldiers from the Light Horse Association uneasily standing guard as a backdrop to the dedication and blessing of the site. Major Robert Morrison was the Master of Ceremonies and the Member for Canberra, the Hon Bob McMullen, representing the Prime Minister, officially launched the National Boer War Memorial project.

The National President of the Project and Federal President of the Royal Australian Armoured Corps Association, Colonel John Haynes stressed that the Boer War was the first full commitment of troops by all Australian Colonies to a foreign war. Twenty three thousand Australians went to the war.

With the formation of the Australian Commonwealth on January 1, 1901 it became Australia's first military involvement as a nation.

Colonel Haynes spoke of the Australian soldier relying on an "unarmed personnel carrier", the horse. Thirty-five thousand horses were transported from Australia to the war.

He made mention of the Australians who served in South Africa, who even when they arrived as infantry were quickly mounted, and the men and women of the Medical Corps.

Colonel Haynes gratefully acknowledged the support of Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, Chief of Army, and of the Australian Defence Force.

Nigel Webster, of the Boer War Study Group, gave an historical appreciation of the South African War and the part it played in the positive development of the Australian fighting tradition. He spoke of the results of the conditional peace 106 years ago for South Africa and Australia.

In a war that in the end was marked by armed blockhouses guarding a grid of forts, railway lines and barbed wire across the veldt, the Australians were used as frontline troops. "Every bushman is worth three soldiers because they can take care of themselves besides fighting" was the opinion of British commanders.

Major Robert Morrison quoted from poet and war correspondent Banjo Patterson's Ballad, With French to Kimberley.

It included the lines:

“ . . . From far New Zealand’s flax and fern, from cold Canadian snows,  
From Queensland plains, where hot as fire the summer sunshine glows –  
And in the front the Lancers rode that New South Wales had sent:  
With easy stride across the plain their long, lean Walers went,  
Unknown, untried, those squadrons were, but proudly they drew  
Beside the English regiments that fought at Waterloo.  
From every coast, from every clime, they met in proud array  
To go with French to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.”

Five hundred members of the Queensland Mounted Infantry and the NSW Lancers took part in the forced march to relieve Kimberley.

Those present included 90 year-old Mrs Valerie Howse, and her three sons, descendents of Captain Neville Howse, the first of six Australians to be awarded the Victoria Cross in the Boer War.

Mr Stuart Braga, Howse’s biographer in *Anzac Doctor*, described the act, saving a wounded trumpeter through a hail of bullets, that won Howse his VC at Vredefort in 1900.

Five hundred and eighty-nine Australians lost their lives in South Africa, the greatest number of dead after the lengthy casualty lists of the World Wars. More Australians were lost than in Vietnam, making the Boer War our third most costly war.

The memorial will ensure that those who fought in South Africa are commemorated in a way, which will preserve this aspect of our heritage and military history for the education and benefit of future generations of Australians.

This war and the deeds of those Australian volunteers is the only major war not to be commemorated in Anzac Parade, Canberra.

National Boer War Memorial Committee  
[www.bwm.org.au](http://www.bwm.org.au)