



# National Boer War Memorial Association Inc Victoria

Vol. 1 Issue 1

June 2010

Welcome to the first edition of 'The Victorian Contingent', journal of the National Boer War Memorial Association -Victoria.

The Association has been formed to generate interest in, and raise funds for, the erection of a National Memorial to recognise the Australian soldiers and nurses who served in the War in South Africa from 1899 to 1902. **This was the first conflict in which Australia served as a nation.**

Anyone who has been to Canberra will be aware of the magnificent memorials lining ANZAC Parade to commemorate the service of our countrymen and women in many parts of the world. There is even a memorial to our most respected adversary in Kemal Attaturk, the Turkish commander at Gallipoli, and a new memorial to our National Servicemen is to be dedicated in September this year.

Whilst there are a number of local community memorials to honour Australia's contribution to the Boer War there has been NO such National recognition.

There are no surviving members of that conflict therefore it is up to us, their descendants and friends, to seize this last opportunity to erect a lasting memorial.

## If we do not act now, the opportunity may well be lost forever.

A site has been obtained and dedicated in ANZAC Parade in Canberra - the second on the left as one drives from Lake Burley-Griffin towards the Australian War Memorial. A most appropriate and fitting location.

A Memorial Design Competition has been arranged and 193 expressions of interest were received by the closing date on 18 May 2010. These have now been judged and four applicants have been invited to participate in the next stage of the process.

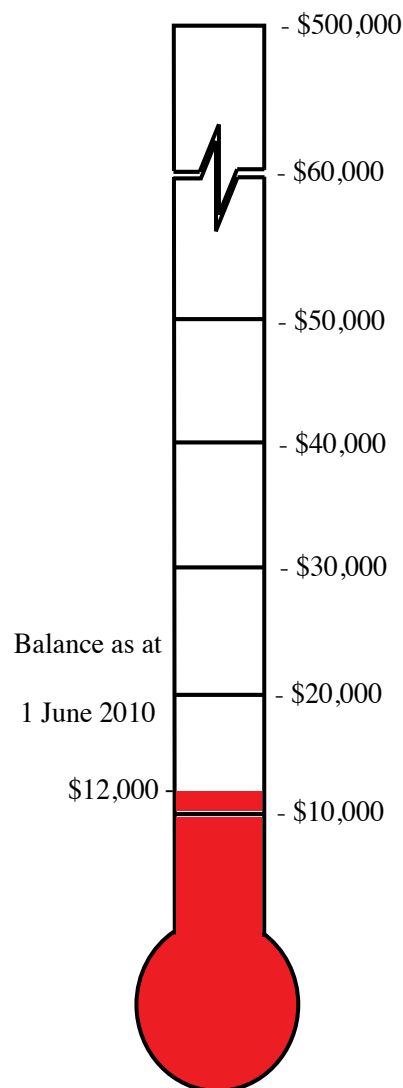
### Government Support

*“ ..... support (for a National Memorial) of the Government is contingent on a number of factors, including that the organising committee demonstrate that it has the ability and capacity to raise sufficient funds for the design, construction and dedication of a major memorial ..... organisers need to pursue a range of funding sources including subscriptions from the public and the corporate sector.”* - Allan Griffin, Minister for Veterans Affairs, 2009.

## Victorian Target

**\$500,000**

**by 31 May 2011**



# National Boer War Memorial Association Inc

(ABN: 29 293 433 202)

## Victoria

Mail: P O Box 2006, Blackburn South, Victoria, 3130

Web Site: [www.bwm.org.au](http://www.bwm.org.au)

**Patron-in-Chief:** Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

**National Patron:** Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston AO AFC, Chief of Defence Force

## Committee

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|                   | Diana Wilmot                 |              |                           |

## Promotional Merchandise

To promote the Association and assist in fund raising, the following items are available for purchase. Contact the Secretary at the above address. Please add \$2.50 for postage of badges, \$1 for sticker only.



Car Sticker \$2.00  
(10cm x 10cm)



Lapel Pin \$7.50  
30 x30 mm



Lapel Pin \$10.00  
25 x 25 mm

### **DISCLAIMER:**

Opinions and views expressed in editorial and contributed articles are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the National Boer War Memorial Association (hereinafter called "the Association"). The Editor reserves the right to publish abridged articles / special features due to space constraints. The Association and Editor of this Newsletter expressly disclaim all and any liability to any person, whether a member of the Association or not, who acts or fails to act as a consequence of reliance upon the whole or part of this publication. No responsibility is accepted by the Association for the accuracy of information contained in advertisements. Publication of any advertisement does not constitute endorsement by the Association of any product, nor warrant its suitability. Advertisements are published as submitted by the advertisers.

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The project is estimated to cost approx. \$3,000,000 (ex GST) of which Victoria has been asked to raise \$500,000 and our target date is 31 May 2011.

### **What you can do to help**

1. Send your donation today.
2. Purchase a badge or car sticker.
3. Become a Friend of the Victorian Association and be kept up to date with progress.
4. Spread the word - tell your friends and business colleagues and particularly anyone you know who may have a Boer War ancestor.
5. Arrange for our presentation team to address your club or organisation.
6. Seek corporate sponsors - these are a MUST in order that we can achieve our goal.

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### **ANZAC Day**

The ANZAC Day march in Melbourne was a great success with approximately 74 people marching behind our banner. People came from across Victoria to show support for their forebears who participated in the Boer War between 1899 and 1902.

The reception of the marchers was amazing. The applause, photos and cheers made all present feel it was worth the effort.

New acquaintances were made and family stories exchanged with many expressing an interest in maintaining future contact.

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### **Boer War Day Commemoration**

at the  
Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance

A lot of hard work put in by an enthusiastic committee produced a well deserved result on Sunday 30th May when an estimated 400 people attended the Commemoration Service at the Shrine of Remembrance. The service was preceded by a short march along the Shrine forecourt lead by the Victoria Police Pipe Band. Amongst those who attended was 102 year old Mary Sadler whose father L/Cpl Abedi M Bourke served in South Africa with the 2nd VMR. Mary was determined to march the distance, and march she did, cheerfully waving off the vehicle which had been arranged to transport her.

Colonel Michael Annett CSC (Retd), CEO R.S.L. (Vic) opened the ceremony with the words:

***"I welcome all descendents of our Boer War soldiers***

***and nurses, their families and members of the public that wish to commemorate this day. We are gathered to honour their service, and all it has meant to Australia and especially to remember those who paid the supreme sacrifice"***.

The Honourable Michael Baden-Powell read messages from Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC Governor-General of The Commonwealth of Australia, our Patron in Chief and from Air Chief Marshall Allan Grant (Angus) Houston AO, AFC Chief of the Defence Force.

The Commemoration Address was delivered by Mr Tony Charlton.

A plaque to the memory of Boer War Veterans was unveiled by Jill Miles, great niece of Lieutenant (later Captain) Leslie Cecil Maygar VC, DSO of the 5th Victorian Mounted Rifles. This plaque will be placed at the base of a tree adjacent to the Shrine, at a ceremony to be held later this year.

The service closed with the firing of three rounds from a replica Boer War cannon.

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### **Friends of the National Boer War Memorial Association Victoria**

Become a "Friend of the National Boer War Memorial Association - Victoria" for an annual subscription of \$20 (distinct from donations to the Memorial fund) due 1 July. For this you will receive 'The Victorian Contingent', by email or post, and be kept up to date on the progress of fund raising for the Memorial. 'Friends' social activities are also being considered. You are also invited to submit stories of your Boer War ancestor(s) for consideration for publication in this journal - contact the Editor

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### **Fund Raising**

A major part of our campaign to raise funds consists of a team of speakers who address businessmen and community groups such as RSL's, Rotary and other organisations. We request these organisations to arrange the meetings and publicity with our assistance. We can also help with press releases.

If you know of any group which would be prepared to sponsor such a meeting please contact our publicity Officer, Peter Kemp (9560 3972). He is waiting to hear from you and happy to assist with the planning.

The following is what we hope will be the first of several stories on Boer War Soldiers. If you have an interesting story please send it to the Editor (preferably by email, if possible) for consideration for publication.

## Richard Edward “Ted” Topham

A New Zealander, 33 year old unmarried Richard Edward Topham, “Ted” as he was known, was working as a boundary rider in Mildura when he decided to move to Melbourne and volunteer for the War in South Africa. While living in a boarding house in South Melbourne he was accepted into the Fifth Victorian Mounted Rifles on 15th January 1901. Shortly afterwards Ted was aboard the ship “Orient” heading for South Africa. Some months later, at dusk on the 12th June 1901, the troops were bivouacked on the Middleburg-Ermelo Road close to Wilmansrust. Their orders were to attack Commandant Biljoen’s commandos at 4.30 am next morning, but Boer intelligence had been alerted.

The men lay in their make-shift tents reading mail from home by candlelight, their horses grazing nearby. Four hundred burghers left their ponies in a nearby gully and stalked towards the camp. At 7.45 p.m. the Boers attacked, killing many horses. Most of the 5th Victorian Mounted Contingent rifles were stacked and whilst men scrambled to grab their weapons, those who could returned the fire. Two hundred Boers rushed the position and Topham along with the Medical Officer and seventeen others were killed. About fifty men escaped but the rest were forced to surrender.

Topham and the men of the 5th Victorian Mounted Rifles were buried at the battle site but later shifted to a proper cemetery beside the road near Middleburg.

Ted Topham’s memorial incorrectly (in South Africa) states that he was killed on 7th June 1901. His actual date of death is recorded as 12th June, 1901.

Under the date June 10, Ted Topham wrote from South Africa to Mr J W Green and the letter was probably the last he penned. It had not been dispatched before the fatal fight and was forwarded by Private Theo Smith, who (having been an employee on the Paddle Steamer “Clyde”) knew the deceased in Mildura and appended the words “Topham wrote this letter to you the night before he was shot”.

*Dear Will,*

*As I had a few minutes to spare, I thought I would write you a few lines to let you know that I am still in the land of the living and in good health. I have not had any sickness yet and I think a man that has roughed it out there can*

*get on here alright. I have travelled since I arrived right up the line to Middleburg and then trekked nearly up to Petersburg and from what I saw of the country I do not think much of it. Everywhere you go is full of ticks and I do not see how to get rid of them. The stock we get is full of them and the wool I have seen is not worth taking off the sheep. But of course they are a very bad class – allowed to run with goats and Cape Sheep all is inbred so you could not expect much of them, the cattle are the same. I think there is plenty of gold in the country, as I have seen three reefs that carry gold and coal; in fact, there are small mines all over the place. I think the soil will grow anything, at the farms you see Oranges and Lemons without any looking after. The chief thing they grow is maize, in fact, that is the only flour they have got now. All we are doing now is cattle and sheep “duffing” (at least that is what you would call it in a civilized country) and taking the wagons and families away. We have captured about 200,000 pounds worth in two months, so we have not done badly. At present we are having a few days spell till Botha gets his men together, he is down at Pretoria interviewing Lord Kitchener to see if they can come to terms. But it has been tried too often and I think it is time they started to strike at the main bodies and send some of these highly-paid men home that have never seen or heard a*

*Boer bullet yet, but stick out of reach. They are the men who are keeping the war going as long as it is. We got into a trap the other day – led like sheep by a Kaffir into an ambush and as soon as we got in they welcomed us with hot fire on three sides and before we got under cover we lost one officer and three men. We gave them a lively time after that. The big guns always seem to stay away when they are wanted, as we have had about three sharp fights and no guns to help us and the Boers will stand rifle fire fairly well. But big guns they cannot stand, the first shot and they are off as fast as their horses will carry them. I think I have told you all this time.*

*With kind regards to all members and friends.*

*Yours*

*R E Topham*

On June 12th 1902, the first Anniversary of his death, the Mildura Workingman’s Club unveiled a memorial plaque in the reading room. The origin of this memorial — Mildura’s first to Honour a fallen soldier — remained a mystery, until after extensive research in 2009 by the writer. Local identity Mr J W Green — the recipient of the letter above was a foundation member and possibly the first Secretary of the Mildura Workingman’s Club and a friend of Ted.

*Thanks to John Searle, Mildura for this story.*

