

**Bungendore & District War Memorial
South African (Boer)War 1899-1902
Roll of Honour**

Dedication Ceremony Address 29 May 2011

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It is easy today to think of the Boer War of 1899-1902 as some long ago conflict fought in mysterious places with names like Cape Colony, Transvaal, Natal and Rhodesia, by men on horseback armed with swords and lances. But the Boer War was more than that. It was, in its time, a large modern war with wide implications.

In fact the Boer War was a big war. It involved most of the British Empire, caused nervousness among the great powers of Europe, severely strained the British Government and its army, caused terrible suffering and grief, and remains a contentious topic in South Africa still.

In terms of the losses suffered by Australia, it remains our third largest war, overshadowed only by the enormity of the two world wars.

More than 15,000 Australians went to the Boer War drawn from every state; almost every one of them served on horseback. Over 600 Australian men, and a woman, were killed in action, or died from the Victorian soldier's greatest enemy – disease. For the first time Australian nurses went to war. Six men received the Victoria Cross.

Until the last year of the war, the various units were state-raised; Commonwealth troops were first sent in 1902.

It was usual for men to serve for a year in South Africa before, at the completion of their tour, returning home. Each of the Australians was a volunteer. It was a harsh experience, taking a heavy toll on men and horses. Those horses that survived did not accompany the men home. Troops rode over vast open distances, pursuing an elusive enemy. From 1900 the Boers, in groups called 'commandos', mainly employed guerrilla tactics.

A quick look at the names of those who went to the war from Bungendore shows more than a dozen came from an existing cavalry regiment called the First Australian Horse; a few served in the other units especially raised for the war; a couple served in South African irregular units; and several men served more than once. In addition to the Australian Horse, we find men in other units, included the NSW Mounted Rifles and NSW Imperial Bushmen.

The First Australian Horse had existed before the war, and it continued for many years afterwards to eventually evolve into the 7th Light Horse. It was a regiment of part-time volunteers, raised across New South Wales a year or so before the war began. It was essentially a 'bush regiment' drawing on men from beyond the cities who could shoot and ride. Often a leading pastoral family gave support beyond what the army provided. Men would parade regularly through the year, and when the Boer War began there were some willing and ready to go to the war.

The regiment was well represented in this region of the state. It did not go to the war complete, but instead provided a composite service squadron totalling about 150 men. Trained as cavalry – that is to fight from horseback with carbine and sword –in South Africa their role was more as mounted rifles, using their horses for mobility and fighting on foot.

James Osborne from *Currendooley* was not more than a youth when he was made a lieutenant in the Australian Horse and accompanied the first troops to leave from New South Wales for the war. He was accompanied by locals Jack Haydon and Curtis Masters. They were soon followed by others from the local troop, W. Bell, W J James, W.V. McJannett, E.L. Moody, H.D. See, G.W. Stackpoole, Owen Taylor, J. Wells and J. Winter, and they were all came together in South Africa.

Another Australian to go early to the war was A.B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson who went as a war correspondent. His early dispatches from the front are the best record of that early period. Several times he writes of being with the Australian Horse squadron and young James Osborne. There was one fascinating report as the British Army closed in on Bloemfontein, one of the Boers’ capitals.

Paterson wrote:

Out on the veldt we saw a cape cart drawn by a couple of slashing horses ... and Lieutenant James Osborne (now ... on General French’s staff) was the first man to intercept the fugitive. The occupier of the cart turned out to be a Mr Palmer, a member of the (local Boer) legislature. He was given an ultimatum, signed by Lord Roberts, calling on the town to surrender within 24 hours.

The surrender did not go quite as smoothly as that, never-the-less the British Army soon entered Bloemfontein on 13 March 1900. It was at this time that enteric fever swept through the British army causing many deaths and halting the advance in its tracks for many weeks. The hospitals filled with sick men. Among those to die of enteric was a station overseer from Bungendore, Trooper Walter Joseph James, whose name is here on the memorial.

Among men who gave outstanding service, Samuel Curtis Masters is notable. Not content with accompanying Lieutenant Osborne with the first troops, he served his tour of duty taking part in the battles at Paardeberg, Driefontein and the Relief of Kimberley. Invalided home in November 1900, he wasted no time and soon returned to the war as a member of the NSW Mounted Rifles. After serving with that unit he transferred to the 3rd NSW Bushmen regiment, fighting on until the war’s end.

Another to give remarkable military service was Jack Haydon, a local farmer, who I’ve already mentioned was among the first to go to the war. Comrades described him then as “brave but reckless” and “a real soldier and a staunch and true friend”. He remained with the Australian Horse after the war and would be part of the Australian military contingent to London to attend the coronation of King Edward VII, and he also went to Melbourne as a member of the regiment’s party to accept the King’s Banner in recognition of its service in the war. He later fought with the light horse on Gallipoli, but was invalided home later in the year. He died in Bungendore before the end of the First World War. The local light horse troop, descendant from the Australian Horse, erected a handsome headstone over the ‘old soldier’s’ grave.

Each man that went to South Africa faced a tough ordeal in harsh circumstances against a determined enemy. Some did not return, others suffered wounds, injuries, or had their health affected. Many would go on to serve in the First World War. All of them played a part in establishing the fine reputation of Australia’s fighting soldiers that would be confirmed in later conflicts.

Bungendore is a long way from the veldt of South Africa. And 2011 is a long time from 1901. Yet it is appropriate to remember those men who went from Bungendore to the Boer War. Doing so pays tribute to their service and sacrifice; it acknowledges the part of a small town in events of international significance; it records a part of our proud military history; and it reminds us of our heritage.