



WESTERN AUSTRALIA SUPPLEMENT

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the National Boer War Memorial Association
Newsletter for NSW, SA, WA and ACT

National Boer War Memorial Association. National Patron:
Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC

WA Committee of NBWMA Inc
Chairman: Maurice Kissane



Boer War Day



Perth

Our annual Boer War Commemoration and Reconciliation Service was held at the South African War Memorial Kings Park, Perth on 31 May 2015 in the presence of Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson AO, Governor of Western Australia.

The service commenced at 1100 with the mounting of a catafalque party. Addresses were given by Her Excellency, Brigadier Phil White AM RFD, Mr Maurice Kissane, Mr John Sweetman and Brian

Ross who remembered the Boer side of the campaign.

"My grandfather Commandant George Walter Ross signed the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging on this day in 1902. At last it established peace for the people of his district and country.

This peace led finally to a united country of two republics and two colonies. My grandfather fought to defend a country that welcomed him as a new settler, where he succeeded in business.

The new country benefitted my family. My mother was the first woman to graduate from the University College of the Orange Free State. The growing family business was able to spread into the neighbouring province of Natal.

In the First World War one of my uncles, Claude, died serving with the Royal Flying Corps. In 1916 my father rode into German South West Africa with the Natal Carbineers.

Now we are Reconciled. We Remember."

WA Committee of NBWM Association Inc



Fathers of the ANZACs

An extract from the Boer War Day address by Brigadier Phillip White AM, RFD at Kings Park, Perth

The reputation won by the Australian soldiers in WW1 clearly had its genesis in the small battles and skirmishes of the Boer War, where the foe was smart - and as tough as the land they defended. One such action was the so called Battle of West Australian Hill which took place on the 9th of February 1900 near Slingsfontein in the Colesberg area on the northern border of the Cape Colony adjoining the Orange Free State.

On the 6th of February 1900 the Boer commander, General de la Rey, took the opportunity created by the replacement of his opposing commander to try and outflank the British position and thereby threaten the town of Colesberg with its important rail and telegraph link between Port Elizabeth on the coast and Johannesburg in the Transvaal. On the 9th of February 1900 a strong force of Boers pinned a British reconnaissance force consisting of a squadron of the Inniskilling Dragoons and a troop of the 1st West Australian Mounted Infantry, under the command of Capt H G Moor, along a line of low hills south of the small settlement of Slingsfontein. The Inniskilling Dragoons held a feature known as Hospital Hill on the right flank of the British position. A few kilometres south the West Australian troopers were ordered to hold the ridge-line and farm complex later named West Australian Hill. Both forces were supported by two guns from the Royal Horse Artillery.

Capt Moor was determined to draw the Boers from their position and trigger a daylight rather than a night assault. In what we would now call a pre-emptive attack, Capt Moor accompanied his troop of twenty-six soldiers forward from their prepared positions and in small sections they probed the area to their front



CSM Johnston Burley

in an attempt to discover and then disrupt the Boer laager. Eventually succeeding in this tactic, Moor's troops found themselves confronted by three to four hundred Boer commandoes who charged from their encampment and forced the West Aussies back towards West Australian Hill.

This fighting withdrawal is described by A G Hales who was a war correspondent with the Daily News. He takes up the account:

"Whenever an Australian found himself in a tight place he simply dug his spurs into his horse's flanks, lifted his rifle and blazed into the ranks of the foe. If his horse was shot dead under him he 'coo-eed' to his mates and kept his rifle busy; and every time the 'coo-ee' rang out over the whispering veldt the Australians turned in their saddles and, riding as the men from the South-land can ride, they dashed to the rescue and did not leave a single man in the hands of the enemy. Many a gallant deed was done that day by officers and men. Captain Moor gave one fellow his horse and made a dash for liberty on foot but he would have failed in his effort had not Lieutenant Darling, a West Australian boy, ridden to his aid and together the two officers on the one horse got back to the shelter of the guns".

From the relatively safety provided by the ridges of West Australian Hill the heavily outnumbered troops defended from dawn to dusk to such good effect that repeated Boer attacks were unable to displace them. Had the Boers been successful the British position around Colesberg would have been 'flanked' and thus untenable. To quote from Lieutenant General John Coates, a former Chief of the Australian General Staff:

"It was a classic example of a handful of troops in a key position exercising an influence on the outcome out of all proportion to their numbers."

In the Battle of West Australian Hill, which saw three West Australians killed in action and five wounded, were two soldiers who each survived the Boer War only to sign up to fight for 'King and Country' again in WW1. The first was Cpl, later Sergeant Major, Samuel McWhirter



Brigadier Phillip White

who was killed in the assault on Hill 60 at Gallipoli while serving with C Squadron of the 10th Light Horse Regiment on the 29th August 1915. His death was reported by Lieutenant, later Major, Tom Kidd who served with the 1st and the 5th Western Australian Mounted Infantry in the Boer War. The second was a 27 year old LCpl named Johnston Burley. LCpl Burley was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the then second highest medal for individual bravery, for outstanding gallantry in the defence of Slingsfontein. He was among the first West Australians awarded this honour.

Surviving the Boer War, Burley joined the WA Government Railway as an engine driver and, after serving as a training Sgt in the Australian Military Forces, on the 19th January 1917 lowered his age so he could join the AIF. Recognising his previous military and indeed his civilian experience Burley was promoted to Company Sergeant Major and posted to the 5th Broad Gauge Railway Operations Company where he served in Belgium and France for the balance of WW1. In June of 1917 CSM Burley DCM was in charge of a train moving to the front when a wagon containing explosives was set on fire by enemy shelling. CSM Burley uncoupled the rest of the train from the explosive laden wagon and, after moving it along the line to a safe distance, tried to put out the fire. The wagon exploded but his actions saved the train. He was awarded a bar to his DCM and was the only Australian to win a DCM in both the Boer War and WW1.