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National Boer War Memorial Association. National Patron:
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Captain (later Brigadier General) Alfred Bessell-Browne DSO, CB, MID, VD

Alfred Bessell-Browne; A Western Australian Gunner 1877–1947

Alfred Bessell-Browne was born in Auckland, New Zealand, on 3 September 1877, the son of an insurance inspector. The family immigrated to New South Wales where Bessell-Browne attended Camden Grammar (Camden NSW). They later moved to Western Australia where he attended Perth High School. Bessell-Browne's first job was as a clerk in the patents office in 1896. Bessell-Browne enlisted in the Perth Artillery Volunteers and held the rank of sergeant in 1899 when he volunteered for South Africa, enlisting in the 1st Western Australian Contingent as a private.

The first contingent was originally an infantry unit but was converted to mounted infantry whilst part of the Australian Regiment in February 1900. At this point he was listed simply as Alfred Brown, it is not clear if this was

his choice or if the administrators presumed that Bessell was a given name. He subsequently amended this to Bessell-Browne later in the war as this appears to be the correct family name.

His unit reached Cape Town in November 1899 and took part in the Kimberley Relief Force and



operations at Colesberg, Hoot Neck, Zand River, Klipps River and many other actions. Bessell-Browne was quickly promoted through the non commissioned ranks and was commissioned as a lieutenant on 21 April 1900. He returned to Australia in March 1901 and immediately joined the 5th Western Australian Contingent as a lieutenant serving as

adjutant to the combined 5th and 6th contingents and then second in command, the CO being Lt Col J R Royston DSO (in World War One known as 'Galloping Jack').

Bessell-Browne was promoted to captain in June 1901 and in July was Mentioned in Despatches 'For Conspicuous Gallantry at Brakpan 16 May 1901'. At the same time he was also reported dangerously ill with Enteric fever.

He received a second Mention in Despatches in the London Gazette, 31 September 1902, for 'Conspicuous good service in General Bruce

Hamilton's operations in the Ermelo District December 1901 and January 1902' and this time was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO).

From March to May 1902 he was attached to the staff of Colonel Frederick Wing, the British Column commander.



We're getting closer but we still need funds

He was awarded the Queen's South African Medal with four Clasps and the King's South African Medal with the clasps South Africa 1901 and South Africa 1902.

Bessell-Browne returned to Australia in May 1902 and rejoined the 1st Western Australian Field Battery with the rank of lieutenant and honorary captain. He was promoted to captain in 1908 and the following year took the Diploma of Military Science course at the University of Sydney. He was promoted to major on 28 August 1911, and took command of his battery, now known as the 37th Field Battery.

On 28 August 1914 Bessell-Browne was appointed to the AIF with the rank of major and given command of the 8th Field Artillery Battery. When he called for volunteers from his battery the whole parade stepped forward. Bessell-Browne and his battery departed Fremantle for Egypt on 2 November 1914 and arrived there on 12 December 1914.

Bessell-Browne arrived at Anzac on 1 May 1915. His unit was restricted by a lack of good gun positions. Bessell-Browne and his unit saw repeated action on Anzac both in support of Australian troops and by direct fire on Turkish positions. On 2 August 1915, Bessell-Browne took over as commander of the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade. He was switched to the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade on 27 August, back to the 3rd again on 8 September and then back to the 2nd on 13 September. During the evacuation of Anzac he commanded the Rear Party Artillery.

For his services at Gallipoli, Bessell-Browne was made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG) and Mentioned in Despatches. Bessell-Browne was promoted to temporary lieutenant colonel on 15 October 1915, a promotion made permanent on 1 January 1916. He was evacuated to Egypt sick on 12 January 1916. He rejoined the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade in Egypt on 19 February 1916. It embarked for France on 12 March. Bessell-Browne's brigade participated in the attack on the Pozzières which saw first use of a creeping barrage by Australian troops. On 8 September 1916 he was



attached to the 1st Division Artillery and took command of that from 28 September 1916 to 18 January 1917 in the absence of Brigadier General Hobbs.

On 18 January 1917, Bessell-Browne became commander of the 5th Division Artillery. Two days later he was promoted to colonel and temporary brigadier general. He commanded the 5th Division Artillery at Bullecourt and Third Ypres, where he employed artillery to cover the flank.

In the mobile warfare that followed the German offensive of 1918 Bessell-Browne showed himself flexible and adaptable and pioneered new tactics to provide close support for infantry. In the attack on Bellecourt he was able to put down an accurate barrage at ninety degrees from the line of sight to cover the attack at Le Catelet.

From 16 to 24 October 1918, Bessell-Browne commanded the US 30th Division's artillery, for which he was awarded the American Distinguished Service Medal.

On 8 November 1918 Bessell-Browne took Anzac leave to return to Australia on furlough. The war ended three days later so he rejoined the 5th Division artillery on 1 December 1918. He finally returned to Australia in 19 April 1919 and was demobilised in July. For his services in France Bessell-Browne was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) and had been Mentioned in Despatches no less than seven times during World War One. He finished the war as a brigadier general. He also held the C&AFLS medal as well as the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Officers Decoration (VD).

He was Honorary Colonel to the 28th Battalion as well as 3rd Field (Artillery) Brigade and from 1917-1920 was Aide de Camp to the Governor General. After the war, he established an indent agents' firm. Retiring initially in 1935 he returned during World War II to command the Volunteer Defence Corps in Western Australia. He retired finally as a brigadier in 1942.

Bessell-Browne died on 3 August 1947 and was cremated with full military honours.

Sources:

Merrilyn Lincoln, 'Bessell-Browne, Alfred Joseph (1877-1947)': Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, with additions and amendments by David Deasey.

Be There!

Dedication of Australia's First National Boer War Memorial in Canberra

Anzac Parade Canberra ACT at 10.00 am for 10.30 am Wednesday 31 May 2017

Construction and landscaping work on the first National Boer War Memorial site in Canberra is now well under way, and its official Dedication to the memory of all those affected by the Boer War of 1899-1902 is scheduled for the morning of Boer War Day -- Wednesday 31 May.

On behalf of the National Boer War Association I would like to express our sincere thanks to our many supporters in every State and Territory of Australia who have raised funds or made donations enabling us to complete a Memorial of impressive quality in our National Capital.

It is anticipated that the short Dedication Ceremony on 31 May will be presided over by the Governor-General, His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd), and any of our supporters or well-wishers will be most welcome to witness the Dedication.

If you or your family or friends may wish to be present, I would like to suggest you send us an application for reserved seating at the Memorial site, using the form overleaf. It would be best to make your application as early as convenient, as space at the site is naturally limited.

Yours faithfully



Colonel John Haynes OAM (Retd)

President

National Boer War Memorial Association Inc.

