



# National Boer War Memorial Association

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

National Patron : General David Hurley AC DSC  
Chief of the Defence Force

## BOER WAR DESPATCHES

MARCH 2013 - VICTORIA & TASMANIA

VICTORIAN EDITOR PO Box 2006, Blackburn South 3130

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### THE DEFENCE OF ELANDS RIVER 4 to 16 AUGUST 1900

“When the ballad makers of Australia seek for a subject,  
let them turn to Elands River,  
for there was no finer fighting in the war”

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

**M**ore than a century has passed since the famous war surgeon and creator of the gripping detective yarns about Sherlock Holmes, was moved to make that comment about the epic defence by the Elands River garrison on the road between Mafeking and Rustenburg in the Transvaal. Elands River was an Army staging post as the British extended their grip on the Transvaal and it contained a large and valuable quantity of stores which were coveted by the Boers.

The Boer General, De la Rey, attacked the post on 4th August with a vastly superior and well armed force which possessed many modern artillery pieces while the defenders possessed one small 7 pounder

muzzle loading piece, ammunition for which proved to be faulty.

The defending garrison of just over 500 men, mostly Australian Bushmen included representatives from all the Australian Colonies, although they were mostly from Queensland and New South Wales with a sizeable group of Victorians. Some 200 Rhodesians also made a magnificent contribution to the Defence.

The iconic defence continued for 12 days while Lord Robert's Army Headquarters considered that the garrison must have surrendered.

During the bombardment of the first few days some 1,500 head of cattle and horses were killed within the perimeter adding

a foul stench to the ever present dangers and discomforts. By the second day of the bombardment the men of the garrison had managed to dig out shallow trenches in the hard slaty ground and these were progressively deepened during the siege.

A Surgeon Captain in charge of a medical team with the Queensland Mounted Infantry quickly set up a hospital surrounded by biscuit boxes and other store materials and with a canvas roof in the centre of the perimeter. Here the wounded were treated and operations performed while shells burst overhead.

At night our dead were buried and the men also conducted forays towards the enemy under cover of darkness creating enough havoc to keep the enemy on edge. Water parties had to take advantage of the darkness to obtain water for the garrison and these were regularly fired upon.

We should never forget what these brave men did and how the Australian soldiers in general served our country in South Africa between 1899 and 1902.

The Siege of Elands River was finally lifted by a very large column commanded by General Lord Kitchener himself and the relieving force could hardly believe the devastation they witnessed. An officer with the column was moved to write to the London Times:

"I visited the place yesterday, and Cronje's laager was a joke to it. Yesterday was the 13th day and they lost 77 men. It is impossible to give you anything like an idea of what they must have gone through. I do hope that Great Britain will show its gratitude to those Australians for the brightest page in the history of the war."

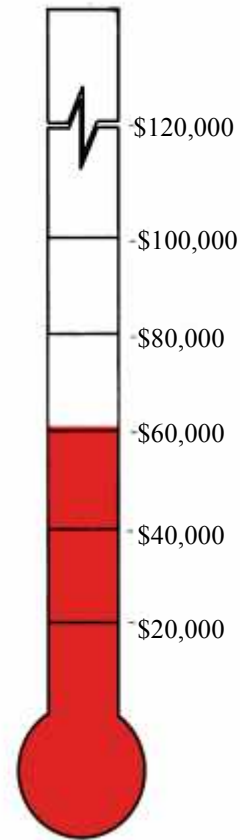
**In honour of that great chapter in our military history the National Boer War Memorial Association has made the Defence of Elands River the Australia wide Boer War theme for 2013.**

## FUND RAISING

### VICTORIAN TARGET

\$600,000

### COMMONWEALTH FUNDING BOOST



The Government recently announced a seeding grant of \$200,000 to the Association for the Boer War Memorial as well as granting us our own DGR status.

With money already raised our National Association now have close to half a million dollars towards the Memorial. This will enable us to make a prompt start on the first 1.5 times life size bronze horseman.

Melbourne sculptor Louis Laumen has been engaged to create the sculptures and they will be all that our supporters could have wished for.

We must now redouble our fund raising efforts. We can put on an excellent presentation for your social group. If you belong to Rotary, Lions, RSL, sporting club etc. please contact us at the address or phone number on the front of this newsletter. Our Secretary will be away in South Africa from mid March to early May so please use phone 97640314 (or 0408 137874) during that time.

Boer War Commemorative 'Descendant. and 'In Memory' Medallions are still available. Write to Major Frank Woodhams Treasurer RFDC 3/800 Military Road Mosman NSW 2088.



Elands River: Trooper Fortune cutting loose the living oxen under a heavy fire. [from Wilson, *After Pretoria*, Vol.I, p.60]

# Promotional Merchandise

WHEN ORDERING PLEASE USE FORM ON NEXT PAGE AND COMPLETE ALL DETAILS



Vinyl Car Sticker  
10mm X 10mm, \$2.00 ea.



Pens— Black & Gold \$10 each



Boer War Day Badge \$8



Metal Lapel Pin 25mm \$2



Key Rings \$8



Queen Victoria Chocolate Tin \$25  
It is 204mm X 60mm X 26mm and contains 8 slouch hat chocolates and a brief history of the slouch hat in the Boer War



Attractive Wooden Plaque:: Please provide details below. The central motif can be replaced with a photo or a badge if arranged when ordering. Price \$60 (+ \$15 if photo used). Phone 03 98902465 for more details and order form.



Clear Crystal Glass Memorial—Laser Etched 130mm X 155mm X 30mm....Weight 880 grams In lined presentation case. (Image has been shown with dark background to highlight engraving. Please provide details below with order. Can be supplied without badge or with the April 1902 pattern ACH Badge instead of that shown. \$120 +PP&I \$22 in Victoria (may be slightly higher in other States).

<b>VETERAN INFORMATION</b>		(Please print)
Given Names .....	Surname:.....	
Rank:.....	Regimental number: .....	
Unit: .....		
Second tour if applicable		
Rank:.....	Regimental number: .....	
Unit: .....		

### Merchandise Order

- .....Pens—Black & Gold @ \$10 each \$.....
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- .....Car Stickers @ \$2 each \$.....
- .....Lapel Pins (circular metal) @ \$2 \$.....
- .....Enamel BW Day badge \$8 \$.....
- .....Key Ring \$8 \$.....
- .....Chocolate Tin \$25 each \$.....
- .....Wooden Plaque  
Supply details as per reverse page \$.....
- .....Crystal Glass Memorial \$130 each  
Please complete details on reverse \$.....

**POSTAGE**

- Badges (up to 4) \$2.50
- Pens (up to 2) \$2.50
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- Wooden Plaque \$10 (+ \$5 for each additional if mailed together) \$.....
- (if purchasing multiple items contact 03 98902465 for P&P savings)

Sub-total \$.....

(Circle one) Mr Mrs Dr Ms Miss  
Other .....

Given Names: ..

Surname: ..

Address: .

Suburb: .....State :.....

Postcode: .....H Phone: .....

Mobile: .....

Email: .....

I enclose a cheque for \$ .....

Payable to:

National Boer War Memorial Association- Vic,  
P O Box 2006, Blackburn South, 3130.

**Please do NOT send cash in the mail**

Office Use Only

Date Received: .....

Despatched.....

### Tax Deductable Donations To The Boer War Memorial Fund

I would like to donate -

\$10	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$250
\$1,000	\$2,000	\$5,000	\$10,000	
Other .....				

(Circle one) Mr Mrs Dr Ms Miss Other .....

Given Names:

Surname:

Organisation / Business (if applicable):

Address:

Suburb: .....State : .....

Postcode: .....Phone: Home: .....

Mobile: .....

Business: .....

Email: .....

I enclose a cheque for \$ .....

Payable to:

National Boer War Memorial Fund,  
C/o P O Box 2006, Blackburn South 3130.

**Please do NOT send cash in the mail**

Office Use Only

Receipt No: .....

Date Received: .....

#### Public Recognition of Donors

To recognise larger donations certificates will be awarded as follows -

Bronze	\$1,000 to \$9,999
Silver	\$10,000 to \$49,999
Gold	\$50,000 to \$99,999
Platinum	\$100,000 and above

Recipients will be permitted to use that level of donor logo on their stationery. Gold and Platinum donors will also have their logo placed on future BWM promotional materials and the National website.

# HERO OF ELANDS RIVER

Surgeon Captain Albert Theophilus DUKA , DSO  
3<sup>rd</sup> QUEENSLAND MOUNTED INFANTRY

**C**aptain Duka was born on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1866 and was educated at Cheltenham College and Cambridge University (MA). He was a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians (London).

His father, Lt.Col.Theodore DUKA MD, FRCS of H.M.Indian Medical Service, had been ADC to General Gorgey during the Hungarian Revolution 1848-49 and was awarded the Hungarian Order of Valour (1849). He was later made a Knight of the Iron Crown of Hungary (1883).

Surgeon Capt. Albert Duka migrated to McKay, Queensland in 1897. He was commissioned in the Queensland Army Medical Corps on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1899. On 20<sup>th</sup> January 1900, as a Captain in the AMC, he wrote from McKay to the Assistant Adjutant General, Brisbane, volunteering for special duty as a Medical Officer with the 3<sup>rd</sup> contingent for South Africa. He was engaged for the voyage to South Africa only and embarked with the 3<sup>rd</sup> QMI from Brisbane on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1900 aboard the 'Duke of Portland'. Fortunately for all concerned, the military authorities in South Africa attached him for duty to his own contingent.

The third Queensland contingent was landed at Beira in Portugese East Africa and then made their way through Rhodesia to become part of Plumer's force marching to the relief of the besieged town of Mafeking. Surgeon Captain Duka rode with this force and his charges included a small ambulance section and medical team from the Queensland Army Medical Corps.

Following the Relief of Mafeking the 3<sup>rd</sup> QMI were engaged protecting the lines of communication between Rustenburg and Mafeking. On 19<sup>th</sup> July 1900 the 3<sup>rd</sup> QMI became part of a small force at Elands River guarding a large build up of stores which had become attractive to the Boers.

The Elands River Post was besieged by De la Rey from 4<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> August, with a vastly superior Boer force armed with modern artillery. The defenders had only one outdated 7 pounder muzzle loader with limited supplies of faulty ammunition. They were severely battered by the besieging Boers in what was to become the first major gallant defence by Australian forces.



Surgeon Captain A. T. Duka DSO

Throughout the 12 day siege Surgeon Captain Duka operated a hospital under canvas in the center of the camp. While the command and the troops were relatively safe in their hastily dug trenches, Duka had to openly move around the siege area. He was much admired by the garrison for the way he fearlessly went about his work tending the wounded and overseeing the health of the garrison.

During the siege he performed many operations under fire in the hospital including a number of amputations.

Lord Roberts and the Army had given up on the Elands River Post believing they could not hold out and assuming they had surrendered. When they finally realised that this garrison of Australians and Rhodesians had not surrendered the siege was lifted by a large column led by Lord Kitchener himself.

When the relief force arrived the Elands River garrison gathered round the flag and sang 'God Save the Queen'. They then gave three cheers for 'the Doctor' as a mark of their appreciation for his efforts during the 12 day siege. Many of the Elands River garrison felt the 'the Doctor' should be awarded the Victoria Cross. He was Mentioned in Despatches by Lord Roberts and awarded the only **DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER** for the Elands River Siege.

Some months later Surgeon Captain Duka was granted leave to proceed to England to tend to some urgent family business. This may have had something to do with his father who died in 1908 or his former wife and son, Robin.

He was presented with his DSO during a parade at McKay, Queensland, for King Edward's coronation in 1903. His 10 year old son, Robin was standing on the dais with him.

In 1903 his second marriage took place in Melbourne to Jean Helpman, the daughter of Major Walter Helpman of Warrnambool, Victoria. Her nephew was to become the

famous Australian dancer/actor, Sir Robert Helpman(n).

At the outbreak of World War 1 Albert Duka and his wife were in England. He joined up where he could and became an RAMC surgeon with the British Expeditionary Force in France although he was still listed on the Reserve of Officers for New South Wales. He earned the 1914 Star and Bar and was 'Mentioned In Despatches' by General French. He rose to the rank of Surgeon Major and served out the war as Senior Medical Officer for Southampton – a major port for the return of wounded soldiers from the Western Front.

ELANDS RIVER - THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM  
Extract from a letter home by Lieutenant Richard E.Zouch, 'A' Squadron, NSW Citizens Bushmen

"This place cannot be made very strong, as there is very little good material for that purpose, the ground being a mass of slaty chips, but it is the general opinion that the enemy will hardly attack us at present. I am writing this letter on the walls of an old Zulu fort; there are many such about here. This is a poor country in the winter, but evidently a fine place in summer. The cattle are a very common lot; their horns are the largest part of them and I really think the animals are made of leather as the meat is something awful. We get enough of this so-called beef but other articles of diet are scarce - often no sugar nor tea - and all of a most inferior quality. Tobacco is a great luxury, and we have been compelled to use the Boer production, which is as coarse and dry as chaff. A message has been forwarded to Mafeking for our mail to be forwarded here. When it arrives it will be a "red letter day" indeed. It is heart-breaking not to hear from, one's relations and friends, and far harder to bear than all we have gone through. I will send this letter by our cyclist, but it may never reach you, perhaps, as one of our postmen was captured yesterday, and this may share the same fate." July 1900

## ELANDS RIVER. CAPTAIN HAM'S STORY.

'ARGUS 4th June 1901'

Captain J. Ham who is also on the Morayshire, when interviewed described the doings of the third Victorian contingent, which proceeded to Beira, and which had anything but a pleasant sojourn of six weeks at Bamboo Creek before beginning the long march down through Marrandellas and Bulawayo. The Elands River siege was the incident which Captain Ham specially referred to.

"I came in," he said, "with some men from Mafeking, and joined the camp there under Colonel Hore. I wanted to go on, but was prevented. The Colonel was surprised that I got so far with my men without serious mishap. We had come through some dangerous country. On the 4th August the enemy shelled us at daylight, and engaged us persistently for 13 days. Our garrison was numerically weak, for we numbered only a little over 400 [actually over 500], and the strength of the enemy was estimated at 2,800. It was a pretty severe encounter, and at times our position was critical. I had charge of about 50 Victorians and was the first officer to lose a man. This was Corporal Norton who was shot early in the siege. In all about 70 men were killed or wounded. Unfortunately, we had no big guns but the Boers used nine big guns and threw a lot of lead at us.

"On the third morning General De La Roy sent in a message to surrender, but we determined not to do this, although we were admittedly in a hot corner. The men laughed at the idea. We lost 800 horses and cattle. When we wanted water we had to fight for it. Once the enemy came within 300 yards of our trench. but we showed a bold front and drove them back.

"Things were getting serious when the relief force arrived. Our camp only covered 125 yards, so you can get some idea of our position. General Carrington tried to relieve us, but his men were driven back. At last General Kitchener and Lord Methuen put in an appearance with 16,000 to 20,000 men, and the Boers cleared."

Captain Ham continued:—"Without being egotistical, I consider the Bushmen did the bulk of the work in South Africa,"



Captain David Ham

## RELIEF ARRIVES

.....General Kitchener, at the end of a long and unsuccessful pursuit of de Wet and his commando, learned that the Elands River garrison was undefeated. Kitchener's columns, already weary after weeks of chasing and failing to catch the elusive de Wet, then turned to march nearly 50 miles to the relief of the garrison. Before their approach De la Rey's commandos packed up and melted away.

.....At 3am on 16 August the camp outposts challenged two riders, one of these being Corporal J.E. Tratham, a West Australian. The scouts had ridden ahead of the main relieving force through the dissolving Boer lines. Almost four hours later Kitchener and his staff rode in with the main column. For the next day or so the approaching British columns continued to converge on the Bushmen's battered post, littered with the wreckage of wagons and the debris from smashed cases of meat and jam, biscuit tins and flour bags. The surface of the hill was scarred with the deep lines of hastily dug trenches and the clear air had become fouled by the putrefying carcasses scattered and rotting outside the trenches under the warm August sun.

On the plain around the colonial's post the columns of Generals Kitchener, Hart, Smith-Dorrien, Broadwood and C.P.Ridley lay camped—in all 25,000 troops. In the darkness of the night their widespread campfires flickered incessantly. ....

When Kitchener's officers inspected the site some were so impressed that they began to pick up pieces of shell for souvenirs. Seeing this the Bushmen, who had already done some souveniring themselves, started a ready trade with the English officers, getting as much as 5 pounds for an unexploded pom-pom shell.

Lt.Col R.V.Kelly, NSW Army Medical Corps wrote from Krugersdorp on 22 August 1900 "You will read in the papers of the defence of Elands River Post last week. The Australian Bushmen held a laager for 12 days and nights, exposed to an artillery fire from eight to ten guns. More than 600 shells were poured into them during that time. They were offered the right to march out with their arms and join us if they would surrender. It was as grand a defence as the

Residency of Lucknow and, in that these men would have been safe if they gave in, it was a plucky performance. We were marched to their relief and they cheered when we came in sight....."

From "THE AUSTRALIANS AT THE BOER WAR" R.L.Wallace





This beautifully crafted display is now available to supplement the memorabilia on offer to descendants of Boer War veterans to pass onto future generations. The Boer War Association has entered into an understanding with Vic Medals & More, an established medal mounting and heritage framing business, to supply these displays to descendants. They will then make a donation for each display produced to the Memorial Fund.

You will need to supply your own Boer War Descendent and In Memory medallions, if you require them to be included in the display. You are welcome to vary the display, perhaps with the inclusion of a photograph or additional medals or clasps, and you can discuss this with Vic Medals & More.

If you would like to purchase one of these displays at a cost of \$355, plus delivery, contact: Vic Medals & More  
15 Stirling Crescent, Glen Waverley, Victoria 3150  
Phone 03 9590 0052, Web: [www.vicmedals@bigpond.net.au](http://www.vicmedals@bigpond.net.au)

## ANZAC DAY MARCH

We are hoping for a great turn up by all our Boer War descendants and supporters on ANZAC Day. Above is the official RSL plan for the start of the march. The Boer War section will be at the front of the GREEN area almost up to the Yarra River (Princes Bridge) Assembly is 8.30 am to form up and move off for the Shrine at 9.03am. You will see the Boer War banners on display. Please make yourself known when you arrive and please wear family medals on the 'right' side of your jacket. After the Shrine Service many of the committee will go across to the La Venice Coffee Shop, 360 St.Kilda Road, so please join us there if you wish.

## BOER WAR DAY

Do visit the Shrine for our Boer War Day Service on Sunday 26 May 2013. The Australia wide theme for this year honours that very proud episode in Australia's military history 'The Defence of Elands River Post'. Try to be at the lower end of the Shrine forecourt by 11am. As usual our information tent will be there.

If you have family medals, especially the Queens and Kings South Africa please wear them—but on the 'right' side of your chest.

The Creswick Light Horse will be there as well as the Victoria Police Pipe Band. This year you will see a film crew who are making a documentary about the Boer War and wish to include footage of our Service