

NATIONAL BOER WAR MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION



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Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

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Queensland Patron

The Right Honourable, The Lord Mayor of Brisbane,
Councillor Campbell Newman



1899



1902

MONUMENTALLY SPEAKING

- Queensland Edition -

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Quarterly Newsletter of the National Boer War Memorial Association – Queensland



OUTNUMBERED BUT NOT OUTDONE

5th Queensland Imperial Bushman The Battle of Onverwacht, 4th January 1902

[Photo Source: Brisbane Courier-Mail, 25th April 2002]

Qld Chairman's Report

Welcome to the seventh Queensland National Boer War Memorial Association newsletter.

Each newsletter is the committee's way of communicating to the members what is happening.

Where are we nationally with the Memorial?

- The 1st stage of the design competition and its judging is now complete.
- The 2nd Design Stage of the competition is now complete, where the 4 preferred designs have been further advanced and have been presented for judging.
- These designs are to be presented to the National Monuments Committee meeting in Nov. which is chaired by the PM. No announcement on the design can be made until that meeting has been held and the final design has been approved.
- Latest advice is that meeting has been deferred until the first quarter of 2011. We will be in limbo until the meeting is held.

State News

National Boer War Day to Commemorate the Signing of the Peace Treaty

- o **31st May 2011.** A Commemoration Ceremony will be conducted in ANZAC Square Brisbane, at the base of the Boer War Memorial on Sunday the 29th May. There will be similar ceremonies all over Australia.
- o **Banner.** The Queensland banner is now complete and will be on show publicly for the first time on the 20th Nov. as part of 2nd/14th Parade through the city.

- o **BWM Supporters, Qld.** Details of our new BWM Supporters, Qld are shown elsewhere in this newsletter.

Where to For the Remainder of the Year

- We propose to raise the profile of the project by addressing interested community groups. If you are aware of any such groups please contact us. Miles Farmer has already addressed one group in Toowoomba.

Next Year 2011

- The first event for 2011 will be a Commemoration Ceremony at Sherwood Cemetery on the 4th February, commencing at 10:00am. This ceremony commemorates the last major battle of the conflict at Onverwacht Hills.
- There is a memorial in the cemetery to two local men who were killed there and the ceremony will be conducted by the Sherwood Indooroopilly RSL with the support of the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment [QMI]. A history of the battle is included in this newsletter.

Descendents Register

- Don't forget the descendant's register. There are many more people who would qualify, so please pass the word to friends, relatives and acquaintances. We need the names of the direct descendants and relatives on the register to prove to the Government the community support for the project.

Financial Situation

- Qld. has so far raised \$41,067 towards the memorial. This includes grants and donations of \$35,042.

A very special thank you to all of our supporters for your continued commitment. This task will take time, great effort and financial support to complete.



Ron McElwaine
Chairman



State Contacts

Interstate correspondence should be addressed to the appropriate representative on the list below:

Polo Shirts

Embroidered black BWM polo shirts. Ranging in sizes from Small to 4XL, polo shirts are \$30 [short sleeved] or \$36 [long sleeved] each [+ Postage].



Stickers

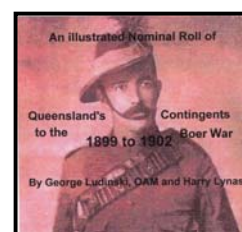
Stickers can be purchased for \$2 each [+ Postage].



Illustrated Roll Of Qld Units CD

See Editorial for details.

CD's can be purchased for \$15 each [+ Postage].



BWM SPEAKERS AVAILABLE



Several of our committee members are very conversant with the History of the Boer War. If you belong to a school or organisation that would like a speaker to talk about the many aspects of the Boer War, please give our chairman Ron Mc Elwaine a call on [m] 0419 678 721.

Merchandise

Badges

These lapel badges are available for \$7.50 each [+ Postage]



Editorial

The Battle of Onverwacht was chosen as this edition's feature story, to not only highlight this tragic event, but to remind you of the Service to commemorate this battle is held on the 4th February 2011 at the Sherwood Cemetery – followed by a morning tea at the Sherwood/Indooroopilly RSL Sub Branch. We would love to see many descendants and supporters join us on this day. It also gives us a chance to meet you. For further information about times etc please contact Mr Ron Mc Elwaine on 0419 678 721.

2010 has been a busy year, and our committee numbers have increased to 10. We have enjoyed working hard towards our final goal and can see “a light at the end of the tunnel”. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my husband, Paul, for his assistance with the newsletter – his attention to detail has been very helpful.

Next year the work load will “again” increase, once the memorial design is announced. A little further nearer the end of this newsletter I have added some photos of the events the committee has organised and/or attended this year.

Would you like to be a member of our new Boer War Supporters Group Qld? If so read all about it on page 16.



- Seasons Greetings -



Wishing you all the many blessings of a joyous Christmas. May you enjoy a wonderful day with family and friends.

Have a Happy New Year, and we hope to meet many of you throughout 2011.



Colleen O'Leary
Editor.

Website www.bwm.org.au

BOER WAR MEMORIALS



We are going to list on our web site the Boer War Memorials and their locations in Queensland. I already have most of them with details and photos. However, if you have a BWM in your town, I may not know of it, and would appreciate any further information. I can be contacted at:

Feature Article

THE BATTLE OF ONVERWACHT KNOWN BY THE BRITISH AS “BANKKOP”

*Based on material from:
Mr Albert Swaters, History Master
Ermelo School, South Africa*

General Background

When the Battle of Onverwacht took place, the war was already two years and a few months old. Less than five months later it would end with the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging on the 31 May 1902.

On 25 October 1900 Britain formally annexed the Z. A. R. (Transvaal Republic). Thus 14 months before this Battle, even before this date the Boer forces that did not surrender, the Bitter-enders, waged guerrilla warfare. A small force of guerrillas waging a war of fighting and fleeing is in a position to fight indefinitely and even win against an overwhelming army of occupation. In the twentieth century most guerrilla forces won their wars. Even the mighty U.S.A. was brought to its knees by the Viet Cong in Vietnam.

The Bitter-enders, who were actually good guerrilla fighters, lost the battle chiefly for the following reasons:

- the concentration camps that removed their support bases
- the death-toll of women and children in the camps
- the scorched earth policy
- the superior numbers of the British forces
- the blockhouse lines and driving hunts
- the shortage of weapons, ammunition and food supplies for the Bitter-enders

The Battle of Onverwacht was the last great clash of the war between the Boer and British forces on the Eastern Transvaal Highveld. Blockhouse lines stretched in the north from Barberton to Wonderfontein, in the west from Wonderfontein through Ermelo to Standerton and in the south from Standerton through Volksrust to Piet Retief. General Bruce Hamilton with a force of 15,000 was busy pinning down the remaining Boer Commandos in the area against the Swaziland border.

General Louis Botha with a force of 750 guerrillas tried to prevent this. For General Louis Botha this was a last desperate attempt to continue the armed resistance. Increasingly the Bitter-enders questioned the sense of continuing with the war which obviously could not be won.

Course of the Battle of Onverwacht 4th January 1902

On 1 January 1902 General Bruce Hamilton moved out of Ermelo in a north-easterly direction to corner General Louis Botha's Commando. His force consisted of three columns.

Major J M Vallentin of the Somerset Light Infantry was the Commander of one of the three corps. Major Vallentin is regarded as a capable and brave commander. His corps consisted of companies of the Buffs Mounted Infantry, Hampshire Mounted Infantry, a company of Yeomen and 110 privates of the 5th Queensland Imperial Bushmen under command of Major Frederick W Toll. Major Vallentin's columns served as an advanced patrol for the columns of General Plumer. Major Vallentin also had a Pom-Pom cannon at his disposal. The last-mentioned can be regarded as a light cannon that could fire 60 shots per minute. As such it was a weapon feared by the Boers.

A strong west wind was blowing when Major Vallentin's corps reached the hilly terrain of Onverwacht's ridges. Major Vallentin set the Buffs Mounted Infantry the task of occupying the heights at Bankkop in expectation of the arrival of General Plumer's main force.

Meanwhile Major Vallentin and his corps advanced another mile (1.6 km). There he decided to remain and place his force in a half-circle of 3 miles (4.8 km) long. The Yeomen were placed in the middle, supported by 25 men of the Hampshire Mounted Infantry slightly behind the Yeomen. The 5th Queensland Imperial Bushmen were placed on the flanks.

Shortly after they had come to a halt, they noticed about 50 Boers on the right flank of a small ravine. Without waiting to familiarize himself with the unknown terrain, Major Vallentin decided to chase the 50 Boers. They had hardly advanced half a mile (800 metres) when they were surprised by 300 Boers under the command of General Koos Opperman.



General Opperman

The Boers had thus ambushed the British. With great determination the Boers attacked Vallentin's forces. A Boer eyewitness, C O Stolp, said "It was a fierce battle and one I shall never forget as to see 500 armed Boer riders recklessly attacking the enemy. It is a sight to make your hair rise and send a chill down your spine."

The superior power of the Boers forced Vallentin's forces back. The Boers could then concentrate on trying to seize the Pom-Pom cannon. The lightning-fast action of the Hampshires and the 5th Queensland Imperial Bushmen prevented this. Upon orders of Major Vallentin the Pom-Pom cannon fell back and resumed firing.

The Boers then surrounded the flank of the British forces and succeeded in placing the draft-horses of the Pom-Pom cannon out of action. The Pom-Pom cannon landed in a gully. The Boers could not succeed in capturing it. In the meantime Major Vallentin spurred the rest of his force on to make a last attempt to prevent a defeat. Major Toll of the 5th Queensland Imperial Bushmen had to retreat on foot with his soldiers and together with Major Vallentin and the remaining Hampshires they made a last desperate attempt on a bare ridge. But the superior force was too big - approximately 500 Boers at the time.



Major Vallentin

Major Vallentin was killed in action. Just such a telling loss to the Boers was the death of General Koos Opperman. General Koos Opperman is regarded as one of the bravest and best commanders of General Louis Botha's army. The battle was won by the Boers.

Seventy-nine British soldiers were taken prisoner. The Boer forces did not have much time to celebrate their victory.

There was just enough time to seize horses, weapons, ammunition, clothes and footwear before they had to make themselves scarce. General Plumer arrived on the battlefield with reinforcements and the Boers had to sound the retreat. General Plumer had the Boer forces followed but stopped after a while.

General Louis Botha tried to operate on the Eastern Transvaal Highveld between the blockhouse lines for about another month. After the Battle of Onverwacht it became more and more senseless.

In February 1902 General Louis Botha and his forces broke through the southern blockhouse lines to the north of the present-day Natal (around Vryheid) and stayed there until the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging on 31 May 1902.

Interesting Facts about the Battle

- The Battle of Onverwacht lasted approximately twenty minutes
- Killed in Action:

5 Boer Soldiers:

- General J D Opperman
- AS Buhrman
- W P Erasmus
- H F Moolman
- M van Buren

British forces:

- 13 members of the 5th QIB
- 1 member of the Somersetshire Light Infantry
- 7 members of the Hampshire Mounted Infantry
- 3 members; one each of the Yeomanry, Hampshire Mounted Infantry
- 5th QIB, died after the battle as a result of their injuries

- Boer and British forces came quite close to each other during the battle. Some of the Boers died as close as ten yards from the enemy. General Koos Opperman was possibly shot and killed at a distance of 20 yards.
- A tape recording tells how Gideon Erasmus stood behind a hill holding his father, Willem Petrus Erasmus' horse, listening to the sounds of the battle. His father also died during this battle, and his hat, with a bullet hole in the front, was later given to Gideon.
- In 1962 all the graves were dug up and the British soldiers were reburied in the Ermelo cemetery. These graves are indicated by a beautiful monument. General Koos Opperman was reburied in Vryheid.
- On Saturday 5 May 1962 a memorial service was held for the 140 Boer and British soldiers who had died. All the veterans of the Anglo Boer war in the area attended the service and the unveiling of the statue.
- General Louis Botha's ten year old son, who used to go on commando with him, was protected by the orderly Mosie van Buren. Van Buren was also killed. His grave is still on the farm.

Captain Wynyard Joss, who went to South Africa in command of the Cycle Corps attached to the 5th QIB was, at the time of the Onverwacht battle, an inmate of Charlestown Hospital. From accounts conveyed to him about the action, he wrote on 9 January 1902:

"This has been the biggest setback we have had, and it was long promised us, as the Boers have not forgiven the Bushmen for the shaking up they got in the Pongola Bosch, and said they would get square with us, and, by heaven, they have. Our corps commander, Major Vallentin, who succeeded Colonel Jervis, was killed, being shot through the brain early in the fight.

As the Boers numbered fully 700, some say at least 800, and we numbered all told about 200, you can see the odds that had to be contended against. Sergeant Berry and Private Chardon, of the Cycle Corps, were both killed. Poor lads, both good fighters. There were, also, I think, three of the old Cycle Corps wounded...

Major Toll is dreadfully cut up about the matter although not an atom of blame can be attached to him or his men, he was fighting right up to the last in the thickest of the fire, only desisting when it would have been madness to resist any longer, the Boers having galloped right amongst the 5th QIB.



Major Toll

The Major's command has been very popular, and he is well liked by all, and this last business is keenly felt by him. By all accounts our lads fought well, and had they had the support of the big guns, a different ending would have resulted.

To give the Boers their just due, they also fought well, and are as daring and as reckless in a charge as a mob of Soudan fanatics..."

[Source: "Letters of the Veldt" by Len Harvey]



Army Cyclist with Plumers Column 1902

Finally

To conclude, the following are words said by W E Gladstone, 20 years before the Anglo Boer War.

"Look back over the pages of history; consider the feelings with which we now regard wars that our forefathers in their time supported . . . see how powerful and deadly are the fascinations of passion and of pride."

It is therefore extremely important that we commemorate such events as the Battle of Onverwacht, in the first place because we have to learn the lessons of the past. In the second place, we must never allow the sacrifices made by our ancestors 100 years ago on this battlefield to sink into oblivion.



ONVERWACHT—THE BATTLE An Unexpected Event Yesterday & Today 100 Years on

By Lt Col M W Farmer OAM

“Onverwacht” is from the old high Dutch meaning “unexpected”, which it was for the 5th Queensland Imperial Bushmen [5QIB] on the 4th January 1902.

The author tells how it was something of “serendipity” which led him from the memorial erected in the Anglican Cemetery, Sherwood, Brisbane, commemorating Sgt Robert Berry, and Cpl John MacFarlane, who were killed in the battle, to the hills at Onverwacht, East of Ermelo in the Eastern Transvaal, where an imposing memorial was dedicated 100 years after the battle.

In January 2000, Japie and Gretchen Celliers, who farmed the land on which the battle had been fought, showed a party of Queenslanders the various features and the site where the men killed in the battle had been first buried. In the 1960s the bodies were re-interred elsewhere. Japie’s grandfather and great-uncle had been in the Commandos that had ambushed the British Force. The author, accompanied by Captain Lancelot Lawlor, both members of the earlier party, visited the Celliers and the site again in August 2000.



General Area of the Onverwacht Battle

The interest, thus created on both sides of the Indian Ocean, led to a very symbolic memorial being constructed on the site of the battle. This was the initiative of Mrs Gretchen Celliers, with support from the local farmers, and the students of the Ermelo High School. It was dedicated on 4 February 2002.

Later the author was introduced by e-mail to Mr Robin Smith, an historian in South Africa, who was studying the battle. A copy of Private David Priest’s sketch map, which had been sent to David’s parents shortly after the battle, was supplied to Robin. This proved to be a key to his understanding of the battle, when visiting the site.



Onverwacht Battle Ground

The Boer Commandos had certainly outsmarted our side in this battle, and it is well worth reading Robin Smith’s article which was published in “Spur Magazine”.

Lord Kitchener was determined to bring the war to an end and cause the Boer Forces to surrender. The scorched earth policy, restriction of movement by the blockhouse lines, and the raids at dawn, would have brought lesser opponents to their knees. The commandos were down but not out, and the “bitter-enders” continued to cause him trouble. It was not until 31st May 1902 that the Boers capitulated and the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging was signed in Melrose House, Pretoria.

Commemoration

Commemorating the Fallen is the reason why many study military history. It enables the deeds of our forefathers to be explained to the younger generation. The words of Max Chamberlain and Albert Swater say it so well. Max is the well know Australian expert on the Anglo Boer War, and Albert was the History Teacher at the Ermelo High School, and was the Master of Ceremonies at the Dedication on 4 February 2002.

"I write in the hope that the names on the memorials may mean something to young Australians, so that they may respect these brave men as do we who remember them."

[Max Chamberlain, Melbourne, 1999]

"It is therefore extremely important that we commemorate such events as the battle of Onverwacht, in the first place because we have to learn the lessons of the past. In the second place we must never allow the sacrifices made by ancestors 100 years ago on this battlefield to sink into oblivion."

[Albert Swater, Onverwacht, 2002]

The first commemoration began when the original British graves were identified with metal grave markers bearing the words "For King and Empire."

The family of Major Vallentin erected a memorial over his grave a few years after the battle. Then in 1962, when the bodies were re-interred in the War Graves section of the Ermelo Cemetery his memorial was placed there. A single memorial carries the names of all the soldiers buried in that place. The names of the Queenslanders killed at Onverwacht appear on this memorial. The bodies of the Boers were re-interred at this time, but with the exception of General Opperman the locations are not known. He lies at Vryheid.

There is a handsome memorial commemorating all the Boer forces in a beautiful garden setting in Ermelo.



Memorial Gardens, Ermelo

In Sherwood, Queensland, friends of Sergeant Robert Berry, and Corporal John MacFarlane, who had been killed in the battle, erected a handsome memorial in the Anglican Cemetery. It was dedicated on 21 June 1902, just six months after the battle. The two men had gone to the war as members of the Cycle Company attached to 5QIB, and they were subsequently mounted on horses from 4th QIB.



Memorial at Sherwood Cemetery, Qld



Relatives of Sgt Robert Berry

Community interest in this particular memorial was awakened in June 2001, when a very large Centenary of Federation Service was held in the Cemetery. The story of Onverwacht was told at this service.

Across the Indian Ocean in South Africa erection of a memorial on the site of the battle of Onverwacht was proceeding. The five stone columns representing the five graves had been posts used in fencing of kraals and barns in the area. The pentagonal base, lined by local stones, is representative of the Castle of Good hope in Cape Town. This is also symbolic of the badge of the former South African Defence Force, and also the South African WWI Memorial at Delville Wood in France.



Monument at Onverwacht Hill

A bronze plaque, carrying the names of the thirteen men of 5th QIB who were killed in the battle, or died of their wounds, was dedicated at a service at the Sherwood Memorial on 4 January 2002, the centenary of the battle.

The plaque was taken to South Africa and placed on the memorial at Onverwacht at its dedication on 4 February 2002, during a memorable ceremony.

The Sherwood Indooroopilly RSL Sub Branch, on 4 February each year, hosts a service, which attracts the relatives of many Boer War Veterans. Cadets from the local Air Training Corps provide flag orderlies, and mount a catafalque guard.

Students from the local Corinda State High School take part, and generally exchange messages with students of the Ermelo High School, with whom they have a linkage.

To foster this linkage and encourage commemoration of the battle, the RSL Sub Branch introduced an Essay Competition two years ago. The winner in each school receives a medallion, and a cash prize. The medallion bears the image of General Opperman on one side and that of Major Toll on the other. Unfortunately the Ermelo High School faces many difficulties in the new South Africa, and their response is not always as hoped for.

Commemoration of the Fallen remains a commitment to many people in Australia, and South Africa.

Australian soldiers killed at Onverwacht



Sgt R Berry



Cpl J Mc Farlane



Pte A Eagleton



Pte C Chardon



Pte E Salt



Pte F Goodall



Pte R Kelly



Pte W Clarke



Pte W Lilley



Pte W McCarthy

Sgt J Power – photo not available

Sgt J P Shannon – photo not available

Pte A G Belin – photo not available



War Grave Section of Ermelo Cemetery –
Australian and British Soldiers killed at
Onverwacht



LEST WE FORGET

THE VICTORIA LEAGUE FOR COMMONWEALTH FRIENDSHIP



“Where it all began....”

Since the inception of the Victoria League at the beginning of the last Century, its history has been one of constant adaption to changing conditions and has come a long way since Mrs Mary Davis, travelling on a train between Hilton and Pietermaritzburg in South Africa during the Boer War in 1901, said to her companion “I am so weary of the bitterness of this war. Why can’t we have a Society of Friendship?”

An Executive Committee was appointed and the name “The Victoria League” chosen in memory of the late Queen who had died on 22nd January 1901. The first President of The League was Margaret, Countess of Jersey. She was re-elected for a consecutive 26 years. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is World Patron.

During World War I, The Victoria League turned its attention to the plight of the armed forces, focusing on hospitality for Commonwealth servicemen.

The Victoria League has been involved with student hospitality and welfare since 1927. The present Student House in Bayswater, London, was opened by Her Royal Highness Princess Alice, the League’s President at the time, on 22nd October 1953. Student House, where the Headquarters of the Victoria League is also located, has become the focal point of the League’s charitable activities.

The Victoria League in Queensland

The Victoria League in Queensland was formed in 1927 to promote friendship between the people of the Commonwealth of Nations. The objectives of The Victoria League are:

1. Welcome and befriend visitors and migrants
2. Encourage the study of matters relating to the Commonwealth
3. Promote and foster understanding between the peoples within the Commonwealth
4. Provide Victoria League contacts to members travelling interstate and overseas
5. Promote any practical work for the good of the Commonwealth as a whole and co-operate with any organisation that has similar objectives

The Victoria League in Queensland is a good friend of the National Boer War Memorial Association Qld Committee, and takes a keen interest in our project.



**Mrs Ellen Morton, Qld Chairperson,
Victoria League, in ANZAC Square,
Brisbane – 31st May 2010**

[The Annual Review 2010—Victoria League Student House, is acknowledged for this article]



2nd/14th LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT [QMI]

We, the Queensland National Boer War Memorial Association Committee, would like to pay tribute to the men and women of the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment [QMI]. In 2010 they have celebrated their 150th year. Of particular note was their welcome home parade through Brisbane, after serving in operational theatres overseas, as well as their Regimental Ball.

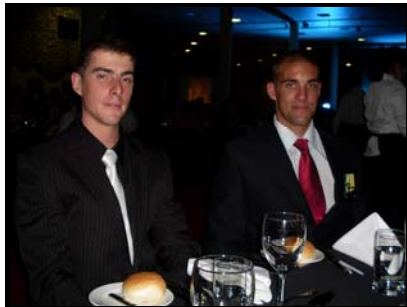
We are grateful for the assistance they have given us during 2010, and would like in particular to thank their CO Lt Colonel Chris Mills and RSM W01 Phil Thompson [bottom right photo]. These two gentlemen have since been posted out of the Regiment, and we wish them all the very best in their new postings.



QLD COMMITTEE IN 2010



2nd/14th Regimental Ball



Tpr W McGovern & Tpr D Perry



Memorial Service, ANZAC Square



Samford Museum Display, ANZAC Day



**Lord Mayor and Ron McElwaine,
Sherwood Cemetery Service**



**Queensland Committee "on the march",
Welcome Home Parade, 20th November**



BOER WAR MEMORIAL SUPPORTERS, QLD

Many readers have expressed an interest in being more connected with and supporting the campaign to have a National Boer War Memorial [NBWM] erected on Anzac Parade, Canberra.

To this end, the NBWM Qld Committee [Qld Cttee] has decided to form the ***Boer War Memorial Supporters, Qld***. This is an informal group managed by the Qld Cttee, and it could form the basis of a formal incorporated association in Queensland when the National Boer War Memorial Association has completed its task and is dissolved. This would be after the Memorial has been erected. Membership is open to all descendants of Boer War veterans, and to those of you who have a keen interest in our project.

As a member you will receive a quarterly copy of the "Monumentally Speaking" newsletter via e mail or post mail, a lapel badge, car sticker and a membership certificate, notices, invitations to ceremonies and other activities. Being a member would also enable you to assist us in other ways e.g. Public relations, selling raffle tickets, assistance at functions etc.