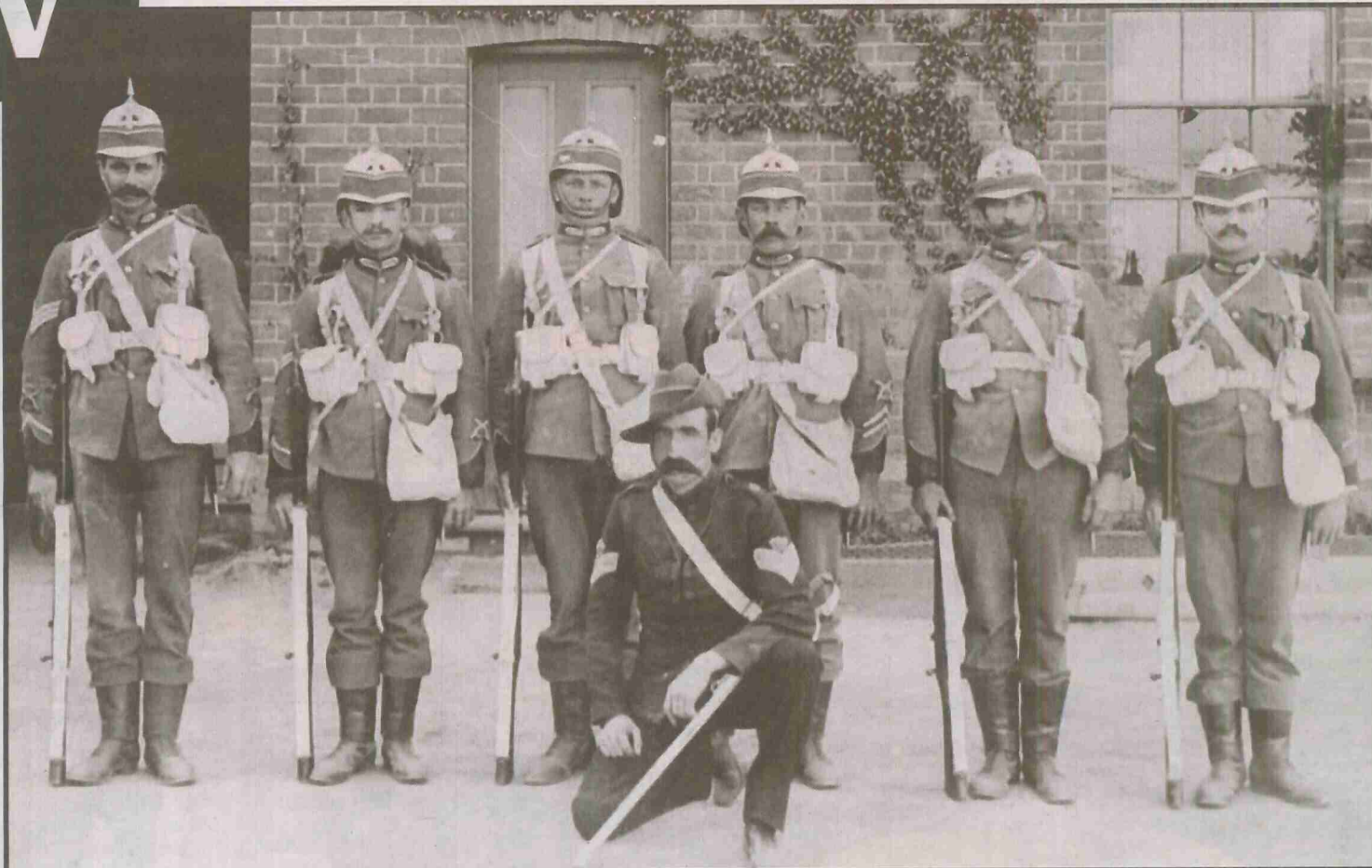


**Compiled by Leonie Moore**  
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 Craig Wilcox, *The Boer War: Australians and the War in South Africa, 1899 - 1902*, National Archives Research Guide Number 9, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 2000.  
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 Ladysmith Centenary Committee, *Ladysmith Centenary History Book*, 1981.



The first draft from Wagga to join the first contingent for the war in South Africa, October 24, 1899.  
 From left: JR Edney, JF Palazzi (killed in action - Palmietfontein, July 19, 1900), WT Annon, AJ Twyford, E Sawtell, SA Palazzi, Front: J Nicholson (From the *Back to Wagga* souvenir booklet, 1927).

## The facts

The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email [archive@csu.edu.au](mailto:archive@csu.edu.au), or visit our website at [www.csu.edu.au/research/archives](http://www.csu.edu.au/research/archives) for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.

The CSU Regional Archives is extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of every month. On these days, the archives will be open from 10am to 3pm. The next Saturday opening is on June 2.

# The war that Boer our defence beginnings

## at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



As we look towards the centenary of the Landing at Gallipoli, May 31, 2012, will mark the anniversary of 110 years since the end of the Boer War.

This war saw the enlistment of 10,000 Australian volunteers (of whom 6500 enlisted twice) with approximately 500 deaths, half of which were caused by disease.

The southern tip of Africa was originally colonised by Dutch (Boer) farmers. However, the British also established colonies along vital trade routes, assuming control of Cape Town in 1806.

The Boers, disgruntled at British rule and its abolition of slavery, moved north in the 1830s, establishing the republics of Orange Free State and Transvaal, and successfully repelled attempts by Britain to assume control of these areas in 1881.

However, the discovery of gold in Transvaal in 1886 brought an influx of miners to the area (including many Australians), who began to resent the Boer rule, which demanded taxes but denied voting rights and public office. The Boers, meanwhile, were suspicious of these foreigners who might attempt to establish British rule.

### Patriotism and adventure

IN 1895, an attempt was made to spark an uprising to provoke British defence (and rule), assisted by a contingent of Australian settlers forming an unofficial "Australian Corps".

A potential war was brewing, and prior to any official declaration, the New South Wales Lancers departed in March 1899, for six months training in Britain.

Other units formed in the other Australian states, and the first ships departed in October/November, collecting troops from each colony as they sailed to South Africa, arriving a few weeks later to join with the British forces under their command.

Men enlisted for many reasons. In an era prior to Federation and following the diamond jubilee of the reign of Queen Victoria, most Australian residents identified with being British, and there was concern that a British defeat would encourage France, Russia,

THE end of the Boer War and its history of volunteer service will be commemorated in Wagga on June 24 as part of Reserve Forces Day, with a parade starting at 10.30am on the corner of Forsythe and

Baylis streets, followed by a service and presentations at the National Servicemen's Memorial in the Victory Memorial Gardens at 11am. To commemorate 110 years since the end of the Boer War,

commemorative medallions are available for purchase. The medallions cost \$37.50 and can be ordered via the Reserve Forces Day website [www.rfd.org.au/site/Commemorative\\_Medallions.asp](http://www.rfd.org.au/site/Commemorative_Medallions.asp).

Japan (and later - Germany) to take up arms against the Empire and her isolated colonies.

The 1890s had been an extended period of drought across Australia, and the war offered adventure and one year of regular work - the pay of five shillings per day topped up by the colonial governments, far above the one shilling rate paid to the British regulars.

Despite most costs being met by the British, fundraising campaigns commenced to meet the costs of transport for men and horses, and relief for the families left behind.

### The war and Kitchener

INITIALLY, the Boers were victorious during "Black Week" in December 1899, sweeping into British Natal and besieging the towns of Ladysmith (after which the village near Wagga was named) and Mafeking, making the name of (British) Colonel Robert Baden Powell (who later went on to establish the Boy Scout movement and is honoured with a street name in Wagga) known throughout Australia.

Further contingents arrived during the year and were immediately put into service. Ladysmith was relieved in February, and Mafeking on May 19, the news prompting impromptu and rapturous celebration across Australia.

The next few months then began a chase to capture the commander of the Boer forces and the president of Orange Free State.

At the end of November 1900, Kitchener became the Commander in Chief, and implemented harsher methods to break down the Boer resistance.

Women, children and prisoners were rounded up into concentration camps, Boer property destroyed, and prisoners were executed for using hollow bullets and impersonating British soldiers by wearing captured British khaki uniforms and reportedly shooting from under the sanctity of the white flag.

### The "Australian Commonwealth Horse"

KITCHENER increasingly petitioned Australia for more troops, particularly at the end of 1900 when the contracts of the initial contingents expired. Many men re-enlisted, or enlisted with irregular British

units which offered more pay and adventure, and seemingly less discipline and interference from the British army hierarchy.

Australia was in the process of federation. However, with no formal federal government until elections in March 1901, the request again went to the states. It was not until January 1902 that Australian Prime Minister Edmund Barton proposed the formation of a unified Australian contingent. Commanded by Colonel Edward Hutton, the Australian Commonwealth Horse was raised, with a new Australian uniform denoted by a brass AC on the shoulder strap and the recognisable badge of the rising sun. The first contingent sailed in February 1902, closely followed by two more in April and May, bringing the total numbers to 3400 men. However, the men were disappointed in action, as the truce was signed on May 31, 1902.

### Peace and after-effects

AUSTRALIA was not involved in the peace negotiations of the Boer War. However, discussion was held as to the future of the defence of the Empire in a meeting of the British and colonial prime ministers in July.

In the absence of a navy of her own, Australia did agree to increase funding contributions towards the British navy; however, a united British Empire force was not agreed to.

Instead, Australian developed her own defence force, providing for compulsory military service, but ruling that overseas service was not required for Australian conscripts.

The Boer War shares many similarities to World War I, using trench warfare and demonstrating the need to develop good hygiene and medical facilities and more mobile tactics.

Many of the men who fought in the Boer War also went on to fight and command Australian troops in WWI, further demonstrating their commitment to Australia and the Empire.

Anzac Day is often described as Australia's "baptism of fire"; however, it was the Boer War in which the creation of an Australian Defence Force with its strong history of volunteer service was born.