THE BOER WAR:
ARMY, NATION AND EMPIRE

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INTRODUCTION
Lieutenant-General Frank Hickling
Chief of Army

Given that 1999 marks the centenary of the beginning of the conflict, the Boer War was an obvious topic for this year’s conference. But there are a number of other reasons for holding a conference on that war in this year: The war coincided with the move to federation in the Australian colonies. It saw the first use of Commonwealth troops in military operations. In the wider context of Empire, the war had an impact on the way Britain and the dominions interacted. The Empire’s foreign and domestic policies, especially Imperial defence policy, reflected the consequences of the South African experience throughout the critical years that preceded the First World War. All of these weighty political issues would be appropriate conference topics in their own right.

But there is another reason to revisit a war that occurred 100 years ago. I mentioned that the Boer War was the first conflict involving the newly formed Australian Army. It was during the course of the war that the Army was formed; and we now celebrate the Army’s birthday on March 1st each year, beginning in 1901.

Who could have imagined that the first operations of this new army would so closely resemble the operations being conducted by it as it nears its centenary? The patrols mounted through largely depopulated areas of the South African veldt, with only brief or fleeting encounters with an armed and dangerous enemy to heighten the tension, bear some similarities to the patrols being conducted right now along the East Timor border. Perhaps we will discover some useful insights for our forces with INTERFET as we re-examine the operations of our troops in their first war.

The war that broke out in South Africa 100 years ago between the British Empire and the Boer Republics was to have ramifications far beyond the expectations of those who precipitated it. There is no deep insight in this observation as it is true for all wars. War is, after all, the final resort of a failure in the political process. Regrettably, when a military solution is tried, the situation has usually deteriorated to the point where both sides have lost control. Without control, a favourable outcome cannot be guaranteed. So it was for both protagonists in this conflict.

Yet the Boer War seems to have escaped the detailed academic analysis that usually followed other wars this century; and therefore we have not had a chance to study the full consequences of resorting to a military solution. It is true that the events in Europe 14 years later overshadowed or obscured the political and military significance of this, the largest of Britain’s colonial wars. But to understand much that happened in Europe in the lead up to 1914, especially in Britain and in the British Army, it is necessary to look back to the South African campaign. Obviously, the war had serious and unpleasant consequences for the Boer Republics as well, but the detail of its impact on both sides has not been fully established and is not well understood.

The British Empire did not emerge from the war unchanged. The ineptitude and incompetence that characterised the conduct of the war, especially the early phases, undermined public confidence in the Army and the Government. The shortcomings of an army designed for one specific purpose, policing an Empire, were painfully exposed by the unexpected intensity of modern conflict. Perhaps there is a lesson here for governments and strategists today.
The British Government was forced to adopt radical measures to overcome its military shortcomings in prosecuting the war. Such measures were not without cost, however, and the dilemma for the British was that as the new strategy began to succeed militarily, the damage to Britain's international standing increased considerably. The dilemma was how to conduct successful military operations against an enemy engaged in unconventional warfare without breaching the rules of war. It could be argued that this has been the dilemma that many armies have had to face this century; as we are witnessing in Chechnya today. This is not a trend that is likely to disappear with the new millennium.

The Boer War changed the relationship between the various elements making up the Empire. The Colonial Office had less relevance to colonial and Dominion governments whose citizens had participated in the war under their own identities. The conduct and outcome of the war affected the very perception of Empire, and of the role of the British Government in the Imperial system. The British proposal for a system of Imperial defence experienced a very lukewarm reception in Dominion Houses of Parliament. Agitation for more Dominion control over defence assets grew: the ongoing argument over the control of the ships of the Australia station is but one example.

In some ways, the impact of the Boer War on inter-empire relationships was a harbinger of the dramatic impact of the First World War, and it signalled the end, in Britain's former colonies, of blind faith in the efficacy of the whole concept of Imperial defence.

For Australians, the Boer War appears to have been, at least initially, something of a distraction from a number of domestic political and economic issues. The significance of the Boer War in Australian history is probably enhanced by its coincidence with the moves to federation. Although defence issues were raised in the federation debate, they received only relatively minor coverage. The war itself does not appear to have featured in the arguments—although I recognise that Craig Wilcox's research may disprove this assertion.

However, it is the way both the population and the colonial authorities responded to the outbreak of the war and to the British request for assistance that, to me, provides a link with the federation issue. In many ways, the response to the war was as complex and diverse as the range of reactions to the federation idea.

During this conference, you will hear details of the wide range of domestic responses to the outbreak of the war. There was not the outpouring of Imperial patriotism that seemed to characterise the reaction to the outbreak of the First World War. Even the colonial governments were cautious in their initial responses. Many other citizens, especially those with deeply held suspicions of the British Empire, were opposed to participating in a war against other colonists.

These negative responses were balanced by a rising popular sentiment that would not tolerate any perceived affront to the Empire or its status as the pre-eminent political structure in the world. It may have been this domestic support for the Empire that prompted the colonial military authorities to offer troops for service in the war even before its formal outbreak.

The offer was for a combined contingent of 2000, comprising men from all the colonies to be sent as a single force. This proposal was a major departure from previous colonial offerings, in that it represented a national contingent that was intended to retain its national identity; an issue that continued to bedevil relations between British and Australian commanders for another half century.

The Imperial authorities rejected this offer as they wished to use colonial forces to reinforce British units. There was an impasse until the pressures of the campaign, especially early British setbacks, prompted the colonial political authorities to make individual offers of support. The concept of a national force would have to await the advent of federation but this attempt to raise and dispatch a national force two years before federation, is still a significant event; and it is one that presaged Australia's approach to providing forces for both World Wars.
If that first faltering example of independent Australian action is insufficient evidence to prove the importance of the war in Australia's political and military history, the formation and dispatch of the Australian Commonwealth Horse in the last year of the war is irrefutable justification. The military record of this first Commonwealth unit was unspectacular; but its real significance was less its achievement than the political milestone its creation and use represented. The new nation had formed its first national institution and used it to achieve a national objective. Our representation and leadership of INTERFET in East Timor is but the latest example of the use of the Australian Defence Force in the pursuit of national political objectives.

This linkage between the new Commonwealth Government and the newly formed Australian Army is a theme that Army intends to reinforce as the centenary approaches. The popular image of the Army is of an organisation that appears when the world goes to war and disappears when peace is restored. That myth is not only fanciful but far too often in the past has led to the deployment of poorly trained forces. We have paid for that folly in blood!

An army is only as good as its training, its equipment and its leadership. The early results of the British Army in the Boer War illustrate that truism perfectly; and, by contrast, the work of our people in East Timor illuminates the obverse of that coin. We must lay to rest forever the notion that some magic solution, or 'silver bullet', exists that will somehow obviate the need for the hard, costly work of equipping, training and leading troops in war.

In contemporary military circles, it is common to encounter the belief that the revolution in military affairs is a late twentieth century phenomenon. However, even a cursory examination of most periods of military history would reveal changes that were radical departures from the usual conduct of warfare in that time. This, to me, suggests that military affairs are in a state of constant revolution.

The case can surely be made that in the Second Boer War the British Army was forced to change many of its cherished practices and procedures in order to secure the defeat of a militarily insignificant enemy. New tactics and the use of new technologies had a direct impact on the course of the war and clearly warned those in the military profession that things had changed. Whether any army, including the British, learned from this experience is a question I hope will be answered in part by the papers at this conference.
When Australians look back on the South African War we peer across a century of total war and of political and social transformation; over the barriers of dead heaped up by the world wars and backward through the evolution of our country and of ourselves from a frontier society of British colonists to a nation of citizens whose ethnic origins are legion and which is debating the severance of its last, symbolic ties with Britain. A minor war fought in a distant land to bring two republics under British rule stirs few of us today, unless we had ancestors who fought in it or unless we want to understand the full Australian experience of war. Still, the war lives on in the periphery of the collective Australian memory as an early tableau in the dramas of our military achievement and national growth, as a sort of prequel to Gallipoli. What interests most of us about the war are the ways in which it advanced or retarded or qualified our evolution toward nationhood. Did the imperial government in London nudge Australian governments into committing troops to South Africa? Did a distinctive Australian fighting man reveal himself during the war? Were Breaker Morant and his comrades Australian scapegoats of a hypocritical British Empire? The common answers to these questions are yes, yes and yes.

Australians have reinvented the South African War and indigenised it—not that we are alone in this. Indeed I borrow the words 'reinvention' and 'indigenisation' from Bill Nasson and another historian, Iain Smith, who have used them to comment on the same process at work in South Africa. This process has happened there twice. From the 1920s to the 1960s Afrikaner writers and governments portrayed the war as one phase in the heroic struggle by the legitimate rulers of the region, the Afrikaners of course, to vanquish British domination, ignoring the involvement of black peoples in the war and discrediting white South Africans who fought for the British Empire. Today the government of a more inclusive South Africa proclaims that the war was a shared struggle by both black and white against British imperialism. No doubt that is a step forward, but it still ignores the fact that more South Africans, both black and white, fought for the British empire than against it.

If these South African reworkings of history seem too urgent, too transparent, for me to cast them as kin to how Australians might have constructed their part in the war, then let us look across the Tasman at our closest cousins. In October 1999 soldiers from the New Zealand Army marched through Wellington to mark the departure of New Zealand's first contingent to the war, symbolically affirming a unity, or at least a continuity, between the contingent and an army which did not exist until 40 years after the war. The governor-general praised the contingent for being the first batch of a quarter of a million New Zealanders who went to fight for their country overseas. The prime minister, even more ebulliently, congratulated them for starting New Zealand on its path to nationhood. As in Australia, as in South Africa, in New Zealand the war has become a curtain raiser to a present-day drama, part of the world we know and understand and approve of, fought by people just like us. If, as in the Australian and New Zealand cases, the immediate cause they fought for, the expansion of the British empire, now seems a dubious one, this is no matter. The greater cause is taken to be national integrity, one we would also fight for. Here, perhaps, is the real meaning of the process of the reinvention and indigenisation of the South African War, indeed of all wars. In a world of change a people talk among themselves, defining what they are like partly from what they are said to have done under fire, thereby reinforcing the duty of going to war, and finding a basis for passing on to the next generation certain values that remain non-negotiable amid the flood of social change.
Despite this process of reinvention and indigenisation we still rely more on assumptions than on scholarship for understanding how much, and in what ways, the South African War actually helped shape Australian politics and society a century ago. With the papers of Peter Burness, John Hirst and Luke Trainor we are well placed to move beyond those assumptions. But I want to strike out into different territory, reacting against the process of reinvention and indigenisation and inspired by the papers from scholars from Britain, New Zealand and South Africa, by the perspectives heard at other conferences in other countries marking the centenary of the start of the war, and by preliminary research which Cameron Simpson and I are doing toward a new history of Australians and the war. I want to interpret Australia’s part in the war in a post-nationalist way, in a way that refuses to make instant sense to our narratives of war and national identity, and restores the Australian experience as a part of the experience of all English-speaking societies in the wars they fought a century ago. I will argue two main points; that Australians were more partners in the imperial cause than victims of it, and that Australians who fought in the war are better understood as imperial volunteers than as Australian soldiers.

Partners in Empire

There are two bases to the popular characterisation of Australians in the South African War as victims. The first base rests on the view that Australians went to war indifferently, even reluctantly, in October 1899. It was a commonplace in labour and radical circles by 1902 that Australians, like other white citizens of the British Empire, had been nudged, even manipulated, into sending their men to fight in South Africa. That view, and its catchphrase of ‘manufactured spontaneity’, became academic orthodoxy in Australia during the 1970s after historians Chris Connolly and Laurie Field traced how London urged the sometimes reluctant Australian colonial governments into recruiting and despatching the initial contingents, and after Connolly went on to assess Australian opinion on the war as having been largely apathetic.²

New scholarship is beginning to undermine this view. Carman Miller concludes it was ‘the strident demands of ... pro-war advocates, not the clandestine machinations of a handful of imperial conspirators’, which prompted Canada's first commitment in 1899.³ Stephen Clarke suggests that something like the same local pressure was at work here in Australia. That pressure was part of a great social movement. For a few brief years, at the close of the last century and the start of this one, many English-speaking people went into partnership with the aggressively imperial firms which temporarily enjoyed a controlling interest in Washington and London. Among the consequences of this partnership were the South African War and the Spanish-American War, two similar conflicts in which wealthy, democratic empires assaulted provincial oligarchies, leading to annexations of new colonies in which white-skinned English speakers were a small minority. In both wars victory was arguably beyond the reach of the relatively small regular armies controlled by Washington and London. In any case, many military thinkers and community leaders believed it was time that ordinary citizens broke free from the militia and volunteer military traditions that confined their men to part-time drill and home service, and fall in behind their regulars as some kind of auxiliary force that would approximate the reserve divisions of Europe’s conscript armies. This was the broad context—and not British scheming to lay hands on colonial troops, as some historians have argued—for the despatch to South Africa and Cuba of contingents of citizen volunteers to fight beside the British and United States Armies.

I do not want to suggest that all Australians entered into this partnership, or that every Australian was bursting to fight in South Africa. For most of the war not even a majority of Australians were so inclined. But the minority who were inclined were no less significant than in any other English-speaking society, and for a minor war, in an age when communities were more important than governments in creating and sustaining defence initiatives, that minority proved sufficient to propel, perhaps to compel, Australian participation in October 1899 and for the rest of the war, and to bring Australians into the same martial orbit as their English-speaking cousins. To expect colonial governments to have done much apart from react to such pressure is to misunderstand their importance a century ago. Their role was to channel pro-war activity, to regulate it and to assert jurisdiction over its most obvious product, those
Australians who put on uniform and sailed away to fight. And many Australians saw no reason to heed this assertion, such was the looseness of Australian, as opposed to imperial, loyalty. Five of the twenty thousand Australians who fought in the war did so in non-Australian contingents; and Melanie Oppenheimer might be able to tell us whether the proportion of donations to imperial as opposed to local patriotic funds was similar.

For most of the war a coalition of loyalists and opportunists conducted Australia's war effort in South Africa. Loyalists, concentrated in middle class communities, watched the war loom, deprecated insults to the British flag, and began enlisting and contributing to patriotic funds even before the fighting began. Not all Australian loyalists were confined to watching the war from afar. A thousand or more Australian men were working in South Africa before the war, mostly in mines on the Rand. Some of these had formed a so-called Australian Corps to support the Jameson raiders at the close of 1895. Many, perhaps most, helped form and join volunteer units raised as war began, and a mining engineer and timber merchant from Western Australia, Walter Karri Davies, helped raise and lead the most politically and militarily significant of them, the Imperial Light Horse. While loyalists led the Australian war effort early in the war, opportunists were equally prominent later on. Australia suffered its worst drought on record during the war, and was pulling itself out of the financial depression of the early 1890s. Enlistment offered steady pay to rural men unable to find regular work and the army offered lucrative contracts to manufacturers, insurance companies, horse breeders and farmers. Australian horse breeders sold over 21,000 horses to the army by mid 1902, and during 1901 one in every ten pounds earned from exports was earned from sales to South Africa. Opportunism largely explains the flood of recruits for Australian contingents raised in 1901 and 1902, a time when the outcome of the war was never in doubt and revelations of farm burning and concentration camps were fuelling anti-war activity. Australian governments tried to regulate opportunistic enlistment; they promoted opportunistic war business without hesitation. Edmund Barton's government assiduously puffed Australian firms to the War Office and Army headquarters in South Africa, and in January 1902 the governor-general warned London that his ministers believed that farmers and manufacturers had 'not received adequate consideration in connection with [war] contracts'.

The conduct of the war passed briefly out of the hands of the coalition of loyalists and opportunists during the six months from Black Week in December 1899 to Mafeking Night in May 1900. During Black Week the British Army lost the battles of Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso, raising the prospect of an eclipse of British power in southern Africa or even of some rival great power, Germany perhaps, entering the war on the Boer side. Overnight the war seemed to change its character and importance. Looked at from Manchester, Montreal or Moreton Bay, Black Week seemed to promise disaster unless the empire's white citizens rallied. A crisis seemed at hand, one that London had had no hand in manufacturing.

Most Australians, like most of their cousins elsewhere in the empire, suddenly joined the loyalist camp and fell in behind the war effort. They included former opponents of the war such as Andrew Dawson, Labor Party leader in Queensland and founder of the Charters Towers Republican Association. Now came genuine spontaneity and popular commitment, as governments and private citizens raised further contingents for the war, far outnumbering those raised in October 1899. Home-bound militias, volunteer forces and rifle clubs expanded in anticipation of sudden attack. Donations to patriotic funds rocketed upward. Remaining critics of the war were shouted down, sometimes intimidated, burnt in effigy or even beaten. War news was eagerly imbibed, and the string of imperial victories from February to June 1900 that promised release from danger were frantically celebrated. This popular martial mood did not survive long after the most frantic of those celebrations which followed news of the relief of Mafekiking. The relief, along with the occupation of Pretoria two weeks later, seemed to signal the end of any crisis, and the war effort gradually reverted to the hands of the old coalition of loyalists and opportunists. Still, when seeking to understand how Australians went to war in 1899 it is a mistake to assume that popular indifference extended throughout the war, or to assume that when it did prevail it was telling. From Black Week to Mafeking Night most Australians were swept up into an imperial partnership, and for the rest of the war enough Australians entered into the partnership to conduct an energetic war effort. The only victims in this willing process were the businesses which lost out on the bonanza of war contracts.
The second basis for characterising Australians as victims in the war is the limited control which their governments and military leaders exercised over the course and conduct of the fighting and over the treatment of their own soldiers. Here the nationalist view is on firmer ground, though the lack of control was not absolute and, compared with black Africans who aided the imperial cause, Australian soldiers were firmly in the camp of privilege.

Australians exercised a small degree of influence over the course of the war and over its denouement, though more often invisibly with other imperial subjects rather than visibly as Australians. The Australians on the Rand who helped agitate against Boer rule before the war and who formed volunteer units during the Jameson raid and as war loomed helped bring about the conflict, antagonising the Transvaal government and providing Milner, Chamberlain and other empire-builders with supposed victims of Boer oppression whose cause should be championed. After the war thousands of Australians settled in South Africa, participating in an imperial scheme to Anglicise the conquered republics and secure them for the empire forever.

By 1904 Tasmanian sheep were grazing at a stud farm at Colesberg where Tasmanian men had died fighting four years earlier, a former trooper of the Australian Horse was farming a property called Monaro, east of Bloemfontein, and more than 5000 Australians were working on the Rand, a mass influx that prompted Donald Denoon to wonder whether they injected the aspirations of Australian labour into white South African society. Australian governments made a small contribution to the question of what peace terms should be offered the Boers. London did not formally consult Australia, but in mid-1900 Australian premiers cabled their support for the decision to annex the conquered republics, and as the war was ending Milner was told that the Australian Government would be satisfied only with unconditional surrender by Boers remaining in the field.

Australian governments had even less direct control over their men in uniform than they had over the course of the war, but it would be wrong to see Australian soldiers as victims inconsequence of this. As volunteers they enjoyed higher pay than British Army soldiers and partial freedom from military discipline. And as colonial volunteers, they benefited from a metropolitan anxiety not to offend provincial sensibilities unnecessarily. Then there was the protection that came from being part of a great imperial enterprise. Kitchener and Brodrick might have had Morant and Handcock shot for murdering prisoners, but Milner and Roberts saved another Australian, Charles Cox, from the same fate after he had had a black servant shot for no good reason, prompting local protest and a murder trial. George Witton, Breaker Morant's youngest accomplice, and three young Victorians who talked mutiny against their British commander after the ambush at Wilmansrust might have been sent to English military gaols for offences that might not seem to warrant such grim punishment, but the Wilmansrust mutineers were promptly released once the Army legal department reviewed their case, while 100 or more injured or sick Australian soldiers were sent to English hospitals for treatment, some to be subsidised there by private charity. Australians might not have held any high commands in the army during the war, but Australians generally commanded Australian units, Tom Price and Harry Vials, two competent Australian colonels, briefly led mixed forces of Australian and British troops, and several Australians held senior administrative posts in Cape Town. If we count Henry Pilkington as an Australian—he was a British Army officer who had been posted to Australia as secretary to a governor before commanding Western Australia's second contingent—then an Australian held the senior post of commander of the paramilitary South African Constabulary in the Orange Free State.

If there was any division in the Army between oppressors and victims, it was the division between white soldiers and black labourers and farmers—a division which, of course, placed Australians firmly in the former camp. The Army depended on thousands of non-whites to drive its wagons, help find its fodder and food and sometimes to do its scouting. Bill Nasson has written that white soldiers new to South Africa rapidly absorbed the local settlers' view that all manual work should be left to blacks. Australians certainly did, despite coming from a society that prided itself on performing its own labour. Some Australians also absorbed local views on how these labourers should be treated—or perhaps they imported folk wisdom from the Australian bush. Native villages were seen as stores of food and fodder to be plundered. 'If you have had nothing to eat since last night, and see no prospect of anything to-night', one Australian explained, 'you ride up to your kraal ... draw your carbine from its bucket, insert a cartridge in the breech, and rest it across your legs. The movement is not lost on the head of
the household. The supremacy which Australians and other white soldiers enjoyed over black Africans was generally exercised more benevolently than brutally. Still, supremacy it was, and a vivid indicator of the real status of Australians a century ago as partners in the British Empire, albeit junior ones. When Rudyard Kipling portrayed Australian soldiers in a short story written in 1900 he did so through the eyes of an Indian servant, whose exclusion from the world of the white man enabled him to recognise them for what they were—in his memorable words, 'a new brand of Sahib'.

Imperial Volunteers

Just as Australians a century ago were more partners in empire than victims of it, their men in uniform were more imperial volunteers than Australian soldiers.

It is not easy to argue this in the face of a century of effort to construct the character of the Australian soldier. We like to see Australians in South Africa as the first men to exhibit this character, said to comprise initiative, individuality, mateship and courage according to one commentator. We have eyewitness descriptions of Australian distinctiveness not only from Australians but from British observers like Kipling, who described Australian soldiers as 'Dark, tall men, most excellent horsemen, hot and angry, waging war as war, and drinking tea as a sandhill drinks water'. Then there is the praise from British generals, who routinely described Australians or all colonial troops as natural scouts, natural horsemen, natural soldiers.

Certainly a distinctive outlook was found among many men of the Australian contingents, and certainly their scouting and riding abilities sometimes shone brightly. But Australians were not always distinctive and superior, and Australia's open spaces and democratic ethos were unlikely to have been the main influences on them when they were. After all, Australian soldiers were more likely to have lived in cities and towns than in the bush, and highly likely to have been born and raised in Britain or to have grown up in a household under adults who had been. The difference between Tommy Cornstalk and Tommy Atkins was less geographic than institutional—the difference between the citizen soldier and the professional.

We have Ian Beckett as our guide here. His 1991 book The Amateur Military Tradition sketched the history of a British military institution, citizen soldiering, which predated the British Army by several centuries and endured alongside it, characterised by community patronage, individual initiative and self-discipline. Citizen soldiering transplanted successfully to Britain's settler colonies, taking firm root in new lands where significant regular forces had no permanent existence, it formed the basis of Australian military efforts until 1945. During the second half of the nineteenth century a mass community concern for defence in all English-speaking countries brought hundreds of thousands of men into volunteer forces, voluntary militias and rifle clubs, by then the main expressions of citizen soldiering and more libertarian than their predecessors. Some volunteers formed mounted rifle units, claiming that civilians, especially fanners and frontiersmen, were the ideal raw material for this new kind of cavalry that rode horses for mobility rather than the charge. It was this volunteer strand of citizen soldiering which formed the institutional base by which the English-speaking people went into partnership with the imperial firms at the close of the nineteenth century, and the contingents sent to South Africa or raised there were almost all volunteer units in organisation and culture.

They made up two-fifths of the half-million strong imperial army during the war. A little over half the volunteers came from Britain, a little over a quarter came from southern Africa, and a little over a fifth came from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There were militiamen from England and medical staff from New South Wales, City Imperial Volunteers and Cape Town Highlanders, infantry from Quebec and cyclists from Queensland, and above all mounted riflemen. Reflecting tactical need and volunteer fashion, most volunteers were this new breed of horse soldier, and their bewildering variety of names—horsemen and light horsemen, guides and scouts, dragoons and carabiniers—disguises their similar duties and, perhaps, their importance; together they made up around half the army's mounted troops. Mounted riflemen from the colonies were said to bring unique frontier qualities into play; Erskine Childers, a former City Imperial Volunteer, thought they 'seemed by intuition to grasp
the possibilities of a union of the rifle with the horse'. But were these qualities, this intuition, of British origin? 'The mounted rifleman', Henry Havelock wrote a generation before in 1867, was 'the union and full development of the two strongest tastes, most deeply rooted and most ardently cherished, that every Briton has had from his boyhood ... love of the horse' and 'love of the gun'.

After the war Erskine Childers hailed the 'great throng' of volunteers as 'an army in itself'. Not only numbers but shared institutions and expectations gave that great throng its identity, marking it out from the regular soldiers of the British Army they fought beside. Most were taller, fitter, better educated than Tommy. Perhaps they shared a mental superiority too. 'We had two great advantages', judged Sidney Peel, an imperial yeoman from Britain, 'the men as a whole were of fine physique, and they were enthusiastic, and keenly eager to learn'. Volunteers interrupted their civilian lives to enlist, for a limited period and for higher pay than the regulars, because the imperial cause seemed just or even vital to them, or because a short term of military service seemed opportune or profitable or exciting. Individual initiative, folk wisdom and local knowledge were esteemed among volunteers, necessarily so when formal training was rudimentary at best. And all volunteers, not just the colonials among them, had civilian ideas of discipline.

One soldier from New South Wales justified a protest against an officer by saying, 'We Australians have more military privileges than ordinary soldiers have'. This was to nationalise an institutional distinction. All volunteers in South Africa asserted traditional citizen soldier rights against military discipline and authority. Sidney Peel recorded how his unit would not tolerate what he described as attempts 'to turn us into regular troops'—attempts which were resisted by evasion and humour, occasionally by disobedience. 'We wore them down eventually', Peel smiled. Volunteers regularly protested about the quality of remounts, inconsistent pay levels, lack of overcoats and blankets, lack of recognition for deeds of bravery, attempts to prolong their enlistment—even attempts to keep them at the front for their agreed term of enlistment.

If colonial nationalism prompted some Australians to want their soldiers in South Africa formed into Australian regiments and brigades, the volunteer tradition combined with the bush legend and intercolonial rivalry to prompt others to oppose such combinations. They saw their soldiers as bands of independent scouts who should act as the eyes and ears of the regulars, not try to imitate them. One patron of a New South Wales bushmen contingent complained when his unit was brigaded with other Australians that 'we understood that we were [raising] five hundred scouts, not five hundred fighting men who were to fight in a bunch. These men were to be the advance post of an army, on account of their bush knowledge; they were to be drafted off in twenties or fifties to the different [line] regiments'.

Late in the war Edmund Barton wanted the Australian Commonwealth Horse—the last batch of Australian contingents for the war, and whose battalions effectively comprised Australia's first expeditionary force—to go to South Africa in separate squadrons as glamorous scouts. Perhaps it was London or London's military man in Australia, Edward Hutton, that dissuaded him. At any rate, it was generally British Army officers who consolidated Australian units once they arrived in South Africa.

Seeing Australian soldiers as volunteers encourages us to move beyond our usual focus on British praise for Australian skill as scouts and horsemen and to examine their performance more critically, in the context of the performance of volunteers generally in the war. Australian feats like the dogged pursuit of De Wet in February 1901 and the defence of Elands River Post in August 1900 were remarkable, but no more remarkable, or ultimately war-winning, than the pursuit of Viljeon by the Scottish Horse and other units under Benson during July 1901, or the defence of Wepener in April 1900 by 2000 Cape volunteers. The best scouts in the country were more often South African than Australian. Nor did Australians prove the natural soldiers that many said they were. Like the bulk of volunteers, they arrived at the front with little training and under loose discipline, ignorant of the terrain and its resources, riding unsteady or unfamiliar horses. This was no recipe for success. They hailed themselves as demon riders, but when a British mounted infantryman fell in with 50 Queenslanders he was surprised to observe that only one could ride well. The result of lack of training and riding ability was often an early gift to the Boers of rifles and horses. Many volunteer units
underwent ambushes in their first months in action, the Australians no less often than others. The two most spectacular episodes occurred at Lindley in May 1900, involving 500 Irish yeomanry, and at Wilmansrust in June 1901, involving 350 Victorian Mounted Riflemen. Experience and the removal of the worst officers, not reliance on natural ability, improved volunteer performance, and after a year in the field, judged one general, volunteer mounted rifle units held more than twice their original value. But at that point, as enlistments expired, they were lost to the army.

Given the weaknesses of the volunteers and the dearth of food and fodder in South Africa, we might ask whether the volunteers' presence was redundant, even harmful, to the imperial cause. To pile up volunteers was not necessarily to help the British Army to win the war; as London pointed out to Lord Roberts, 'every additional unit not only robs this country, but increases your difficulties in the matter of transport and supplies.' Stephen Badsey has noted that Douglas Haig thought most volunteers should go home. The British cavalry was capable of fighting as mounted riflemen, and maintaining dozens of barely trained auxiliary mounted units in the field in a barren country, Haig felt, simply strained resources so greatly that the army was bogged down and victory delayed. Australians and other volunteer mounted riflemen were meant to give wings to the British Army in South Africa. If Haig was right, they merely gave it an anchor.

**Bushveldt Carbineers’ Episode Reconsidered**

If Australians were more partners in empire than victims of it, more imperial volunteers than Australian soldiers, how then should we interpret the crimes, trial and execution of Breaker Morant and his accomplices—the one incident from the war which every Australian remembers, and in a way which allows us to share honours with the Boers both as superior soldiers to the plodding British and as victims of their dubious empire? Let me conclude with a post-nationalist interpretation of the incident, partly derived from a 1987 book about Morant edited by a South African historian, Arthur Davey, of which few Australians seem aware.

Morant himself perfectly represents the pre-national character of most Australians of his day. He lived half his life in England, half in Australia, and his last thoughts were of his fiancee in Devon. He never thought to claim immunity from prosecution as an Australian. He turned to the old and passionate rhetoric of Irish opposition to the empire, not to the newer, shallower rhetoric of the Sydney Bulletin, when he felt betrayed by the cause he had fought for. He ended one of his last letters only semi-humorously with the epitaph, ‘God Save Oireland’.

Morant's unit, the Bushveldt Carbineers, was one of dozens of so-called irregular units brought into being for six or twelve months in South Africa during the war which had an institutional character as a volunteer unit but no national character at all. Raised by local loyalists in the northern Transvaal to patrol the newly conquered district, the Carbineers were recruited from former members of disbanded volunteer units, often from Australia, who had not yet had their fill of war and were attracted by the high pay being offered—opportunism as a motive loomed larger for these men than loyalism. Some may have hoped to settle in the district after they had pacified it, which is to say after they had cleared opponents of British rule from their farms. The Bushveldt Carbineers were a cross between a mobile arm of the British army garrison and prototype Black and Tans, relying on local intelligence and local loyalists to find and arrest armed Boers, if necessary defeat them in battle, and with luck inherit their property.

Patrolling beyond the eye of professional officers, at the mercy of conflicting intelligence, local feuds and anyone who could speak Afrikaans and the local black languages, the Carbineers had no professional training and no culture of military discipline to fall back on when the job proved harder than expected. Terror was the handiest weapon of last resort, one that mounted auxiliaries with European armies had long deployed and that white frontiersmen from the Australian bush, the Canadian prairies and the South Africa veld had some experience with. It was not surprising that one detachment of Bushveldt Carbineers stationed at Fort Edward began to play the auxiliary's ancient role of licensed murderer, the modern equivalents of the Hungarian hussars with the bag of human heads dangling from their saddles.
If the British Army's right to try Morant and other Bushveldt Carbineers officers from Fort Edward offends us, it ought to be because the accused were civilian volunteers rather than Australians. Australians, indeed, were prominent among their accusers, indicating the army's truly imperial composition. Key evidence was gathered by Frederick de Bertodano, a British militia officer attached to Army headquarters who had been born, raised and educated in Australia. A Carbineer private from Western Australia, RM Cochrane, led 15 of his comrades, mostly Australians, to testify against Morant and the others. Far from holding any reservations about imperial jurisdiction over Australian soldiers, Cochrane and the others demanded justice be done on the grounds that 'We cannot return home with the stigma of these crimes [committed by our officers] attached to our names.'

Kitchener, alarmed by the violence being shown by several volunteer units on the fringes of the war, was eager to punish some as a warning to others. Backed by the Secretary for War in London, he refused to reprieve Morant and Handcock from their death sentence. There was no singling out of Australians in this; George Witton's death sentence was commuted to a prison sentence, while the South African intelligence officer involved in the murders, Alfred Taylor, would certainly have been shot if white witnesses had come forward to corroborate what black witnesses had said and if there had been no doubts about the court's jurisdiction over a semi-military official.

Probably the common reaction in Australia to the news of the punishments meted out to Morant, Handcock and Witton was embarrassment, if not shame, that men from their country had murdered prisoners, though the gaoling of Witton, who had only followed orders, created unease. But to ask about an Australian reaction alone is to ignore the imperial reaction to what was an imperial event. Across the white empire men and women discussed the case, generally agreeing that Morant and Handcock had got what they deserved and that Witton ought to be released. Committees to petition on Witton's behalf were formed in South Africa as well as Australia, and it was not an Australian but a wealthy Cape politician, James Logan, who travelled to London and secured Witton's release.

Although we should not exaggerate its importance at the time, the voice of nascent Australian nationalism was heard responding to the Bushveldt Carbineers' episode. Australians had been praised for using brute force in South Africa when the situation demanded it, by no less an authority than Kipling. Now they were to be punished for it. 'Any feeling I have in the matter', one Australian wrote, 'is in favour of the executed officers'. Why weren't British officers who had shot prisoners not also tried? he asked. 'A self evident answer', he concluded,

may be found in the supposition that the other officers implicated possessed wealth, rank and political influence enough to shield themselves from ... punishment ... the Australian officers sprung by merit from the ranks were ... poor and without official backing and were therefore chosen on that very account as scape-goats to carry by the ending of their lives the misdeeds of a collection of British officers ... all the feelings I may entertain as to the injustice of the execution will not restore the poor fellows into life again. Though their sad and undeserved fate will ever awaken feelings of regret.

Thus did one Australian decide why Morant and Handcock had been killed for displaying the very lack of scruples which had prompted Kipling to high praise. He was not alone in his thinking. Some Australians were already turning their backs on their new status as junior partners in empire, and were on the way to seeing themselves as innocent victims of a hypocritical British Empire.


5. Hopetoun to Chamberlain, 4 January 1902, CO 418/18 f 14, PRO.


11. Kipling; 'A Sahib's War, 87.


13. LS Amery (ed), *The Times History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902*, vol VI (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1909), 279. These figures are not precise as they count enlistments, not bodies.


27. Makins to Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 28 June 1902, CO 418/25 ff 734-35, PRO.
Almost a century ago, Rudyard Kipling, that most ironic bard of the British Empire, despaired of the Boer War as a bad business, plainly and bleakly, ‘No End of a Lesson’. Britain had prevailed in its imperialist war to crush the white colonial nationalism of independent Boer republican communities, but it had been a costly job. London's colonial war effort was characterised by humiliating military reverses, an increasing financial burden, and a rising moral fuss within domestic Liberal and other anti-war opinion over the rigour of its internment policy and other anti-guerrilla tactics which inflicted great suffering upon Boer civilians, especially women and children. The Transvaal and Orange Free State Boer Republics, products of nineteenth century migrant settler state-formation in Southern Africa, lost a bitter struggle to maintain their separatist independence from the influence and authority of the Crown. For their radical anti-British-imperialist leadership, the war was a disaster, for it broke what one scholar has nicely termed the Irish or ‘Sinn Fein variety of Afrikaner nationalism’, as the die-hards or bittereinders could not long sustain a will or the means for a fight to the end. The war also signified more than nationalist defeat. Horrendously high mortality rates in British concentration camps, and the loss of perhaps as much as 20 percent of the tiny Boer republican populations, meant that it represented a form of historical trauma for Afrikaner society, the depth of which imperial and other English-speaking historians have perhaps rarely fully recognised.

Ideologically, the war left an immediate fissure within early-twentieth century Afrikaner society, divisions which began to bite very soon after the signing of the 1902 Treaty of Vereeniging, and which were more or less bound to result from the kind of Boer-republican ‘people's war’ which had been fought. At one ascendant pole, there was an accommodationist, pragmatic Afrikaner war veteran leadership, now reconciled to getting into bed with imperialism, and appreciative of the gains to be made in moving on from the bitter legacy of war to forge an inclusive Afrikaner-English-white political nation. At another, there were either bittereinders who had jabbed at acceptance of a negotiated peace, or a sulky clump of those who had gone down to defeat, but had in a sense surrendered conditionally, bristling for any fighting opportunity to restore a shattered republican vision by other means. From the start, this resitive and militant Afrikaner nationalist constituency defined itself in relation to harrowing memories of the notorious camps and scorched earth of 'The English War', flexing a combative identity against the imagined ethnic and cultural blood sacrifice of the conflict. 'By creating thousands of martyrs for the cause of the volk' and by in one way or another touching every Afrikaner community and family in the country, war and its memory became a prime and most exact register of 'Afrikaner-ness' in the twentieth century.

In social reach and human cost, the South African War was the biggest and most modern of the numerous pre-colonial and colonial wars which raged across the Southern African subcontinent. It is the war which today still counts in national memory, however narrow the historical context of that construction; other war memories slumber on through the transmission of nineteenth-century African oral tradition, in popular rural mythologies about Shaka and the Zulu kingdom, and in the odd dreams of regaining some tribal pastoral lost in nineteenth century settler frontier or land wars. There can be no question that these fleeting oral tracings of war valour or war suffering have left little imprint upon the historical consciousness of a modern white-rulled South Africa. British regiments have long had their Zululand monuments; only at the end of the 1990s is a memorial to Zulu warriors to be inscribed on the landscape of official cultural representations of warfare.

In any wide view, political memory of the South African War counts with fairly good reason. Generating a wealth of literature, this early twentieth century colonial war's literary epitaph remains unrivalled locally, this cultural deposit perhaps making it the modest South African equivalent of an American Civil War, a British Great War or even a Spanish Civil War. In part,
that reflects the obvious contrast between the short and easy war that was imagined, and the lengthy and arduous war which was actually fought. It is, even more, an illustration of the degree to which, especially after 1902, the meaning of the war continued to be fought over between new Afrikaner colonial nationalists and unreconciled Afrikaner republicans. For the ruling elite of the new 1910 Union of South Africa, Anglo-Afrikaner reconciliation specifically required a moderation of bitter war memories; in benign nation-building rhetoric, the war became a tragedy or a regrettable imperial entanglement in that it had ruptured a natural Boer-British European settler unity. For the cosmology of disinheritied and dissident republicans, on the other hand, the war was a grudge to be nursed in concentrated form. Not only had Britain trampled a republican 'nation' underfoot; ex-Boer generals like Louis Botha and Jan Smuts had become London’s secondary demons, their silky collusion with imperialism nothing other than a stab in the back.3 And so, as in post-1939 Spain, a war of arms was now to continue as a memorialising war of words for those to whom the Anglo-Boer War became a massive building block of a patented 'Afrikaner' history, a contagious ‘myth of national origin’.4

That inflated war of words was certainly of considerable rhetorical importance to the balance of white political forces even into the early post-Second World War era, when the survival of cultivated memories of British concentration camp ‘genocide’ and cruel conquest through war remained indissolubly connected with the rise and eventual ascendancy after 1948 of a republican nationalist Afrikanerd. As the emotive expression of a subordinate yet pugnacious national combination of classes, tilting at the political and economic citadels of South Africa’s languid English establishment, Afrikaner war commemoration provided a moral legacy of heroic manly struggle and female fortitude and sacrifice. That reflection began in the 1900s, through pilgrimages to grave sites, the disinterring and ritual reburial of the remains of fallen combatants, the later creation of war memorials, such as the 1913 Vrouemonument or Women's Monument in Bloemfontein, a male-inspired shrine to female martyrdom, or the 1938 Cottesloe Boer Veterans' Monument in Johannesburg. Other components included the issuing of commemorative veterans' medals, regular wreathlaying ceremonies at camp sites, and more resurrectionary modes of expression, such as mounted parades by veterans under arms. However varied the form of this commemoration, it usually involved an inevitable transition from private or community bereavement to political symbolism through deft Afrikaner nationalist appropriation.

The demand of the political moment was explicit allegory. For the bittereinder Boer general Christiaan Beyers, therefore, the meaning of the Women’s Monument lay in its utility as a condensed repository of ‘memories’ which could fertilise the future, preparing the soil for the rebirth of a free nation.5 In similar vein, the annual attendance of coterie of commando veterans or oudstryders and camp survivors provided a means of bringing home to an Afrikaner public the enduring feature of a national history: survivors and veterans bobbing along as symbols of an eternal Afrikanerd, fleshy representatives of a gritty Afrikaner struggle for survival.6

It is against this background that myths and patriotic messages expressed the message that the fatal clash between Briton and Boer was not to become just another miserable vestige of the brutalities inflicted by imperial conquest. As prominent nationalistic war poets like Jan Celliers, Eugene Marais and 'Totius' asserted after 1902, cathartic memories of the blood sacrifice of volkshelde or armed ‘people’s heroes’ could kindle consciousness of a unified national identity and help to renew crucial dignity and purpose. It is perhaps not stretching things too much to see the war enshrined as the Verdun of Afrikaner society, or even as its 1905 mutiny against despotism. In this, Afrikaner nationalist writers and historians beavered away as hard as anyone to keep the war a live and burning issue within the vital social networks of religion, politics, family, and friendship.

In the first instance, in the immediate postwar years it was obviously necessary to construct a view of the republican struggle which countered the fairly ludicrous and often offensive portrayal of Boer society peddled by numerous imperialist writers. In the most vulgar of these depictions, the ‘Boer’ was a degraded rural layabout, an untidy pre-modern with no legitimate place in capitalist modernity, and a warring primitive who displayed cowardly or shifty fighting
qualities in pursuing a criminal war against civilising progress. These stereotypes became refashioned or inverted in comic form by nationalist children's literature in the 1920s and 1930s: the Boer commando, depicted as a bearded toad which had hopped on to General Buller's mess table, would be transformed into handsome and dashing Albert Viljoen, a princely lion-heart who had easily outwitted plodding, slum-born British Tommies. But there was always more to such decorative representations than mere counter-history, or the swopping of mythologies. For influential popular historians such as Gustav Preller, a prominent former war correspondent on the Boer side, accounts of republican doings all served an overriding purpose—to awaken 'the' Afrikaner to the Truth of Their War of Freedom and Their National Mission.

As Albert Grundlingh has emphasised, the impulse was to make a 'war of freedom' inheritance the powerful core of an immanent Afrikaner 'nationalist spirit', with a stream of robust popular histories reminding readers of the Christian Boer crusade 'against the mighty British Empire, and the suffering of women and children'. Memory of war had:

had to serve as a constant reminder of the Afrikaners' bitter fight for freedom. Although they had lost ... they were exhorted not to sacrifice a common identity as Afrikaners ... History had to be used in such a way that it enhanced patriotism and national consciousness ... Contemporary Afrikaners had to complete the historic mission of the Boer die-hards—they had to continue the fight for Afrikaner independence in the present.⁷

This meant placing the war in the long term perspective of Boer-Afrikaner history in general, and of a national martial spirit in particular, filled with images of an old frontier Boer republican manhood.

In practice, the devastating impact of the war upon the fabric of Boer society in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal did not make it easy going for a bookish, middle class Afrikaner nationalist intelligentsia; it took time to stitch together a meaningful sense of war and a renewable ethnic nationhood. But, once the cultural assertion of a standard Afrikaans language became buttressed by official recognition from the 1920s, magic could be worked with war writings. Much of this patriotic alchemy was pursued in popular magazines like Die Brandwag (The Sentinel) and Die Huisgenoot (The Home Companion). By soliciting rural homes for personal male and female war testimony for regular feature publication, they plumbed a rich seam of earthy folk memory of hardship, privation, and brave sacrifice. Homespun, uplifting periodical stories of conduct under conquest circulated through reading circles, public readings and magazine clubs into the 1930s and beyond. Coursing through tiny rural settlements and scattered farms, the influence of this literary pipeline looks to have been quite considerable, not least through its wide appeal to republican patriots, particularly rural women who had been a fierce repository of wartime resistance in defence of homesteads, as well as to commando veterans and their families. Die Huisgenoot and other magazine correspondence columns filled up with appreciative murmurs from middle-aged readers of personal wartime histories, some urging everyone who had something to say to give a day to the commemorative cause, in which their most raw and 'visionary' 1899-1902 experiences could be documented on paper.⁸ In this genre, the war largely ceased to be a disputed and increasingly divisive national struggle against imperial domination; instead, it became resurrected in print as the unity of the pastoral Boer nation at war, a tribal defence of hearth and home by a small and virtuous Protestant people.

While relatively few Afrikaans books on the war appeared between the 1900s and the end of the 1920s, the ensuing two decades witnessed a surge of popular works, ranging from tendentious histories such as Sara Raal, Met die Boere in die Veld (With the Boers in the Field), to animated historical fiction like 'Mikro', Die Ruiter in die Nag (The Rider in the Night).⁹ Populist writings of this kind helped to lubricate a progressively consolidated collective mentality and public memory by creating an exalted sense of an essentialist national character: hardened, tough, valiant, and wily in adversity. And, while harping on war memories of bitterness, anguish and redemptive Christian fortitude, it was equally essential to commemorate superhuman republican bravado, exemplified by the gritty epic of bittereinder
One such instinct was embodied in mythical representations of the Boer warrior as volksheld or national hero, imagery borne in a direct and undiluted way by the presence of rustic oudstrryders or veterans. Biographies, poems, novels, essays, and popular magazines of the 1930s, such as Huisgenoot, turned generals like Christiaan de Wet and Koos de la Rey into household names. Here were idealised warriors who defined the the special quality of heroic Boer masculinity; this lay not in marching to order and in blind self-sacrifice (as with the British enemy), but in swift improvisation, unorthodoxy, and in mastery of the tactical retreat when the odds against one became too overwhelming. Thanks to such God-given instincts, the superior Boer warrior always knew what to do to live on in order to fight another day. Rousing literature from both non-combatants and veterans reinforced an attitude that 'true' generals, the icons of guerrilla warfare, had never been defeated militarily by British arms. Britain had prevailed solely through superior numbers and resources, and by the barbarism of a levelling war of attrition. For General Jan Kemp, all that tempered the awfulness of defeat in 1902 was that genuinely partisan and therefore 'true' republican warriors had not failed. Through veteran generals; they could continue to speak for national identity, forming a mystical, almost omnipotent brotherhood of the living and the dead.

For nationalist writers in Die Huisgenoot in the 1920s and 1930s, the 'fidelity' of heroic military leadership had only been deepened by the 'treachery' of backsliding Boer soldiers who had limply surrendered, or turned traitor by joining enemy forces. In the face of 'unmanly' cowardice and a breaking of ranks, the tenacity with which bittereinders stuck to the battle for independence provided a calming solidity for life after war. As warriors, the toughest generals had come back undiminished, still sustaining the honest identity of men 'of the soil', and with the unquestioning conviction of saints.

A striking feature of this manifestation of martial masculinity was its egalitarianism, refracted through a richly-layered celebration of a democratic fighting republicanism. Huisgenoot, Volksblad (People's Paper) and other widely-circulating organs of nationalist propaganda turned all Boer soldiers who had died in combat or held out as die-hards, into disciplined, gilded national heroes, placing generals and men on something like an equal footing. Highly emotive examples of valour and sacrifice were easy to come by, as the last months of the war had seen remaining Boer belligerents slowly bleeding to death. By the 1920s, there was an almost insatiable intensity to catalogue everyone who had done their bit as part of a loyal soldiering community; very young boys, the aged, and men who were amputees or otherwise disabled, became a fetish, as writers scrambled to construct various warrior lineage biographies for those who represented the touching extremities of service in defence of freedom. A minor cult of the less than able-bodied provided a moral aura to eclipse almost anything.

As in post-1939 Francoist Civil War historiography, the overlap between popular and more scholarly representations of past war which turned history into nationalist propaganda was very marked. Through the 1940s and, for a time even beyond, much academic writing presented the war above all as a militant and emotive moral covenant of Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation. Such classic studies of the later 1940s as JH Breytenbach, Die Betekenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (The Meaning of the Second War of Freedom), demonstrated a war made up of godless and mendacious British and upright guardians of a freeborn Boer people, men of the elect who listened to the Prophets, and women who would continue to carry the seed of a republican freedom whose time would surely come again.

Integral to the professional promotion of an Afrikaner volksgeskiedenis (people's history), this gloss on the war became its historical truth, part of an 'objective-scientific' truthfulness about the Boer past furnished by leading nationalist historians. The psychology of 'scientific' history in the inter-war decades stressed the 'truth' of a Calvinist-ordained, ethnic political
unity as one of the eternal verities of an Afrikaner 'being', registered as a mystical 'people's union' or volkseensheid. The volk was two things. One was an organic body, unified by a common historical culture and a racialised social metaphysics in which individuals could have no existence outside of nationhood. Another was its core historical identity, defined by a perpetual struggle against predatory foes, bent on ungodly business. As more than one historian has pointed out, the ideologies of an Afrikaner nationalist intelligentsia in the 1930s were in various ways linked to those of contemporaneous mobilising German nationalists.\textsuperscript{17}

The Afrikaner story became one of seamless ethnic suffering; in the nineteenth century, migrant Boer voortrekkers had been bloodied by black African savages, while in the early twentieth century, the 'Boer' had been done in at the hands of the British. The 1920s, 1930s and 1940s provided a most fruitful environment for a dusting of war memories to be added to other staple ingredients of nationalist feeling. In 1938, the massive centenary celebration of the Great Trek and the Boer-Zulu Battle of Blood River provided a focus for South African War commemorative bonding; not surprisingly, new 1899-1902 monuments and memorials, along with wreath-laying ceremonies, formed a crucial part of 1938 'people's festivals' or volksfeeste, locating the armed struggle and military traditions minted at the end of the nineteenth century in the longer history of a shared nationalist past. Moreover, as the Second World War approached, radical nationalists discovered anew the fleeting late-1914 Afrikaner Rebellion, when several thousand Boer commandos had had enough of the sickly virus of Anglicisation, and had launched an armed insurrection against the state, its leaders declaring it an armed protest against the Union's collaboration with the British war effort.

Many prominent rebels had been 1902 bittereinders, with rebellion rhetoric drawing heavily on an inherited, dreamy language of republican 'restoration' and 'no surrender'. It spoke of a mystical nationalist past in terms which seemed to speak directly to a present new 'Boer' crisis; and, in due course, later 1930s nationalist discourse ran the upswings of 1899 and 1914 into an embalmed line of heroic volkshelde and selfless armed martyrdom.\textsuperscript{18} Like the war, the 'Rebellion' had illustrated a truth about Afrikaner national honour: it was preserved best in adversity. Inculcating and anchoring an irreproachable nationalist 'truth' in these years was the resonance of a Vryheidsoorlog (War of Freedom), a pervasive term first coined in the 1880s, after the Boers had defeated the British at the 1881 Battle of Majuba. Retrospectively, therefore, the 1880-81 Transvaal War became represented as the Eerste Vryheidsoorlog (First War of Freedom), an epic tribe of Israel struggle for justice and independence in the promised land. As a living parable, this imagery went on to season the second major conflict. The confection of a Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (Second War of Freedom) served to affirm the key place of this war in the long uphill slog of a republicanist Afrikaner nationalism. A commemorative grammar of war remembrance linked with Afrikaner survival through apartheid, to form a kind of coordinated moving front.

This was all, in a way, a doctrinal preface to Afrikaner nationalism's elevation to power through the National Party electoral victory of 1948. Its achievement of political control changed the picture: there was now a diminishing need to bolster bitter social memory of the 'English War'. Having lent a helping ideological hand, the war's commemorative boom underwent a gradual deflation through the course of the 1950s and 1960s; public memory grew more mellow, and the meanings of the war became less touchy an issue in national white politics. At the most general level, the earlier course of that public memory in the aftermath of Union had always been more about prickly cultural boundaries and partisan allegiances than about any common war heritage. After all, for English-speakers and Afrikaner advocates of post-1910 white reconciliation, possessing and rallying around an Anglo-Boer War memory was bound to prove tricky, for commemoration and reconciliation had become squarely opposed social processes. Any wider commemoration of the fallen could not avoiding raking up the more controversial questions of the war's sectional course and consequence. Accordingly, the civic worthies of 'English' cities like Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg maintained a mostly muted observance, although in the 1930s and 1940s it was not always possible to avoid becoming embroiled in bitter local quarrels with nationalist Afrikaner dignitaries and war veterans over the 'misuse' of commemorative processions and gatherings to express anti-English 'anger' and 'hatreds',\textsuperscript{19} or at the deriding of civic protocol by 14 excluding mayors from annual memorial invitations. As a pained correspondent to the
Natal Witness put it in 1939, the emphases in Afrikaner ceremonies were 'neurotic' and 'fixated', when the need was for life to go on, and for the war to be left behind, a 'sad happening' of 'our unlucky past'.

Why was there less of a fixation after the end of the 1940s? Apart from the National Party's political triumph, any answers to this question can probably be little more than conjectural. But a few reasonable suggestions can be made for why exaggerated nationalist reminders of the moral lessons and animosities of the war weakened appreciably in the immediate post-Second World War decades. In part, this was because many Afrikaners, including poorer whites, found themselves enjoying unprecedented prosperity under post-1948 National Party rule. Various Afrikaner interests were specifically secured by the apartheid state, through such measures as a political purge of English-speakers in the Union army and the police, the statutory elevation of Afrikaans, and the reinstatement to command of Nationalist military officers who had resigned on South Africa's 1939 declaration of war against Germany. In such satisfying circumstances, continuous brooding over the privations and losses of the 'English War' inevitably became a less important element of nationalist propaganda.

There were also other significant factors of decline. One, commencing in the early 1950s, was the increasing tendency of the new ruling nationalist elite to extend the frontiers of war commemoration. Both World Wars (previously remote from official republican Afrikaner culture) were now to be commemorated by Afrikaner nationalism; this essentially political dedication even saw the erection of a new monument on the Somme in 1952. More 'universal' than the South African War, these wars encoded a particular commemorative intention for prime ministers like DF Malan and JG Strydom: to affirm the national sacrifice and legitimate aspirations for freedom of a European South Africa, inscribed within the free and democratic order of what Malan called a 'timeless' tradition of just wars to preserve Western civilisation.

Another factor was the long-awaited satisfaction at the achievement of a national South African Republic and its withdrawal from the British Commonwealth at the beginning of the 1960s: at least in spirit, the old Boer Republics could waltz again. Another was the need to shuffle English South Africans into a more companionable and inclusive pan-white supremacist nationalism, in which emergent Afrikaner industrial and financial classes came to share interests with an established English elite. This duly produced a thaw in war sentiment by the 1960s, with a decreasing tendency for staunch Afrikaners to crudely associate English-speakers with the old brutishness of imperial conquest. Whereas in the earlier 1900s the anti-British case embodied by urban 'Boer' war monuments had caused acrimony and division between Afrikaans and English whites in cities like Johannesburg, by the mid-1960s some larger annual remembrance services had become communal, jointly organised and attended by armed services representatives and members of both English and Afrikaner cultural bodies and war veterans' associations. Still, some residual Afrikaner war sentiment had a knack of breaking through with disconcerting force over monument observance of colonial English fallen, with English newspapers like Johannesburg's The Star and the Natal Witness rounding on the Afrikaner press for disagreeable diatribes against any honouring of the old enemy. What they had in mind were individuals like JF du Toit, chairman in 1964 of an umbrella committee of Afrikaans cultural groupings, and not one for letting bygones be bygones. In August, he came out against the very idea of a combined, transcendent commemoration of the fallen, declaring that to 'commemorate men who died for a British imperialist interest' along with patriots 'who died in defence of the Boer republics' was akin to burying nineteenth-century Transvaal President Paul Kruger, and the capitalist imperialist, Cecil Rhodes, 'in one coffin'.

By the early 1970s, such minor key memory of the war as an ideological totem had largely migrated to more rural and conservative Afrikaans social constituencies, including a khaki-shirt, nationalist ultra-right which continued to maintain a communitarian, 'volk' ethos through pistol clubs and rifle associations, para-military youth camps and regular commando drill. The movement of opinion was gradual, almost imperceptible through the late-1960s, and took wing in response to crucial shifts within the body walls of a nationalist Afrikaner 'volk'. As Afrikaner capitalism became increasingly less statist and more driven by market economy
imperatives, so heavily indebted groupings (like smaller farmers in the Orange Free State and Transvaal) or statutorily-protected urban manual workers began to feel the pinch of a capitalist modernisation. Their interests no longer fully guaranteed by National Party political patronage and redistributive subsidies, more marginal, insecure, and conservative Afrikaans constituencies gravitated towards more extreme and purist Afrikaner political parties and populist movements. Mostly dormant through the fattening 1950s and 1960s, classic 'Boer' traditions of resistance and a warring identity were now reinvented and re-imagined, given a new lease of life by men and women who, by the late 1970s, had been elbowed out of the core modernising Afrikaner nationalist constituency.

In a host of small ways, a far-right populism began to course through the 1980s, bearing the old imprint of combative War of Freedom memories: shared by people in organised rural circles, by those attached to fundamentalist Protestant religious tributaries, by scattered clusters of rural army reservists attached to a 'Boer commando' identity, and by right-wing Conservative Party leadership, this was a hostile and isolationist message. Attempts to reform the apartheid economic and political system were a 'craven' capitulation to Anglicised and other enemies of the Afrikaner nation: had 'true' memories grown so short that Lord Kitchener had been forgotten? Had Afrikanerdom's national memory forgotten the scarring of the 'the Boer nation' by war, and its lesson of unstinting republican vigilance? Oppressive war had 'made' an Afrikaner people, and this was a defining legacy which could not be displaced. 

In this sense, the ground so well watered by the Afrikaner nationalist project in earlier decades continued to bear fruit as war memory continued to be invoked and manipulated. Indeed, even when well past its zenith as a generalised mobilising cult of commemoration, the embers of 1902 could be stoked by moments of crisis, most especially by the combustible terminal turn of apartheid by the 1990s. In a striking 1993 observation, the quixotic Afrikaner historian, Floors van Jaarsveld, concluded that 'Afrikanerdom has suffered two great defeats in its history: the first at the beginning of the twentieth century in the war with Britain, which inflicted a military defeat on it, and the second at the end of the twentieth century—a political defeat at the hands of Africa'. 

Renewed elements of a bittereinder resistance aesthetic took shape around this view, as British imperial domination became African domination, with African National Congress President Nelson Mandela its odious High Commissioner; for its ultra-right, Afrikanerdom once again faced the prospect of complete deracination in a unitary mongrel state. 'Again', intoned Ferdi Hartzenberg of the Conservative Party, 'dark days have come to our people'. In turn, to his right, there was a rekindled yearning for a Transvaal and Orange Free State Boerestaat or Volkstaat (People's State) to secure the endangered bloodlines of ethnic self-determination. In one memorable burst of unvarnished Anglophobia, Robert van Tonder of the Boerestaat Party called for authentic 'Boers' to consecrate a pure 'Boerestaat' as posthumous revenge upon Queen Victoria, who had seen to it that 'our Boer republics were crushed in 1902 and other "peoples" were forced to live with us in one state'. This had amounted to a 'declaration of civil war' but then, as now, 'civil war' could not defeat Afrikaners, as, 'after all, it was the Afrikaners who invented it'. In Van Tonder's historical universe, the South African War boiled down to an attempt to exterminate a fellow-people, a 'civil war' in which Afrikaners had survived the fire through their imagined creation of a guerrilla 'people's war'.

Equally noteworthy were the pricks felt during the first visit of the Windsors since the 1940s, the 1995 tour of Elizabeth II in the wake of South Africa's recent Commonwealth re-entry, and its transition to majority rule. Reviving old war words and images, an incensed Boerestaat Party formally declared the Queen unwelcome in an imagined 'Boerestaat of Transvaal and the Free State'. From a 'dynasty of conquerors', she was 'the great granddaughter of a cruel queen', whose invading armies had not only 'destroyed our Boers' freedom', but had also committed 'the infamous holocaust in which a sixth of our people were murdered in concentration camps'. Other Afrikaner responses were less apoplectic, if still chastening, even when from non-nationalist quarters. Thus, blustery ANC parliamentarian, Carl Niehaus, called upon the Queen to observe a more inclusive act of South African war remembrance by commemorating Boer dead. 'If she is going to lay wreaths at World War II and World War I graves here', he declared, 'she ought also to lay wreaths on the graves of the tens of thousands of women and children who died in the camps'.
Through the 1990s, a dissenting Boer War flank engaged on a number of fronts, not so much against the old enemy of rampant Englishness, but against a dawning age of racial equality and majority rule, and against now despised National Party leaders for yielding to a tide of racial and cultural cosmopolitanism. At one tragi-comic pole there was, for instance, the armed seizure of Pretoria's nineteenth century Schanskop Fort and military museum, a symbolic place in thrall to Boer commando heritage and its militarised republican reference. Under the *Vierkleur* or flag of the old Transvaal Republic, a militant knot of right-wingers protested against multiracial national political negotiations, their sole purpose seen as a selling off of the 'sacred' assets of Afrikaner sovereignty. After their arrest and conviction for illegal armed occupation, their khaki-clad leader, Willem Ratte, wrote furiously from gaol to contest his English press depiction as some right-wing anachronism. What outweighed this was a First Anglo-Boer War antecedent. In his torrential and powerful manifesto, Ratte insisted:

> Were the Boers of 1880 called right-wingers, for resisting the imperialist British occupation? Then, as now, you had an alien regime lording it in Pretoria over our people, whose gutless president had betrayed and handed over his sovereign state. Then, as now, the new (neo) colonialist administration pretended to be God's gift to the supposedly 'dirty and dumb Dutchmen', and tried its best to smear the pro-independence party as only a few backward 'Don Quixotes tilting at windmills'. Our struggle has nothing to do with right or left ... this being incidental, like religion in the Irish-British conflict, but everything to do with a nation having an inherent right to be free.\(^{32}\)

At another eccentric pole, an October 1992 Kruger Day commemoration saw a sliver of rough-hewn Englishness regain some lustre in right-wing nationalist Afrikaner life. In a cameo of bonding between Afrikaner and English ultra-right interests, indefatigable ex-Rhodeans and new English-speaking adherents of the Conservative Party lumbered into the Vaal River to retrieve rocks from a Boer concentration camp memorial, reputedly torn down in spite by departing British soldiers in 1903. Under the solemn gaze of a crowd of several thousand, the rock was piled up close to the official Paardekraal camp monument, thereby atoning symbolically for past desecration. Hailing it as 'the greatest conciliatory gesture by English-speaking countrymen since before the Boer Wars', Conservative Party leader Andries Treurnicht announced that 'the time has certainly come for all English-speaking patriots to let bygones be bygones, and to join hands with the Boer to resist the common enemy of black domination'.\(^{33}\) This, as it happens, was a droll gesture from someone who had spent a good chunk of his political career railing against the perniciousness of English influence in South African life.

In innumerable other ways, fragments of the old imperial connection entered the grain of radical nationalist war remembering in the later 1990s. In April 1998, for example, there was gleeful Afrikaner press appreciation of news from Ireland of opposition in Listowel to the raising of a plaque to commemorate Kitchener's birthplace, because of his ruthless prosecution of the closing stages of the war. One typical correspondent noted that it would be received with 'great satisfaction by Afrikaners in general, but particularly by descendants of the Boers who fought against Kitchener's barbarism'. Several others invoked the obvious analogy, declaring that Kitchener's concentration camp policy had been the genocidal work of a British 'Hitler' in South Africa; Paardeberg was an Auschwitz, a war crime never to be forgotten. JA Marais, 'son of a Boer father' exiled and imprisoned with other captured soldiers on St Helena island, and 'a mother who was interned in the Klerksdorp concentration camp', urged on the campaigning idea of a republican Irish-Afrikaner 'war crimes tribunal for Kitchener' in 1999, as the most meaningful 'commemoration of the outbreak of the Boer War'.\(^{34}\) It was all caught sublimely by a *Sunday Times* call for Britain's Prime Minister, Tony Blair, to apologise for his country's 'appalling concentration camp record', in the light of public contrition before the Irish for the potato famine, and Indians for the Amritsar massacre. In response, a correspondent cautioned readers against expecting much sentiment, for while there were 'many Irish and Indian voters in the UK', there 'is no Afrikaner vote'.\(^{35}\)
Such flickerings can probably be seen as being among the last thorny episodes of an antique Afrikaner past, dredging up for a self-conscious and ailing ‘Boer’ minority, the nostalgias, iconography and resentments of a world in steep decline. For isolationist politico-military bodies like the Wit Wolve or White Wolves, there was a knowing sense of things sliding away, as some displaced farmers and alienated blue-collar workers clung doggedly to a volkisch memory of the war. In a sulphurous style which was on the way to becoming almost formulaic, Afrikaner burger beweging (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) leader, Eugene Terreblanche, likened black political demands to those of the English Uitlanders (foreigners) who had been so unwelcome a blot upon Paul Kruger’s Transvaal Republic. Terreblanche growled that not to grant Afrikaner ‘freedom’ in an autonomous people’s state would be ‘to play with fire’, as British statesmen had discovered in the 1890s. Sceptics were referred to Thomas Pakenham’s major 1979 history, The Boer War. A redemptive English work of ‘truthful’ war scholarship which, in his view, gave the Boers their due and more, Terreblanche recommended it as being as admirable as Shakespeare, therefore ‘not part of any English conspiracy’.  

Within the AWB on the extreme white right, the coming of black majority rule represented ‘a second invasion’, requiring the invoking of a national Boer state defence. This produced overstatement: a heightening of the inclination to clip about under arms on horseback, in a steely display of the Boer commando tradition of bearded masculinity, and a gingering up of the key tribal bonds of kinship and language. Because of the danger to ‘authentic’ Afrikaners from untrustworthy news editors, slippery National Party politicians and meddling American imperialists (Washington having now replaced London), the call was for a ‘return’ of ‘the generals’, for nationalist Afrikaners had historically always looked to their toughest and sharpest military men, the de la Reys and de Wets, for salvation. Something of that vindicated old martial spirit was now again urgently required.  

Just how much things turned on emotive memory of the ashes of 1899-1902 could be glimpsed in puffy Conservative Party talk of an imminent Derde Vryheidsoorlog (Third War of Freedom), the cocky use by the AWB and Boerestaat Party of the old Transvaal republican flag and its admonitory anthem, Ken u die Volk (Do You know the People), in swiping gunshots at the British Embassy in Pretoria in 1990, and in a bomb attack on Melrose House, where Boer leadership had signed its surrender in May 1902. Back where it all started, radical ideologues of national purity demanded the reclamation and renewal of the old Boer Republics. This was not something to be created, for historically they had already been in full, legitimate existence, based on a Boer occupation which had ‘enjoyed internationally recognized independence until 1902’.  

In a further poignant echo from the early 1900s, there was denunciation of reformist National Party leadership as verraiers (traitors) to the cause of Afrikanerdom for having submitted to the ANC. Fringe politicians to their right went for the government as ‘a lot of traitors’, guilty of appalling ‘treachery’ and ‘acts of treason against its own people’. The base appeal of the notion of ‘national treachery’ was to a form of atavism, a bitter replay of the closing moments of the Anglo-Boer War which had produced a full-blown split between Boer hensoppers (‘hands-ups’), opting for peace rather than going on to the wire) and bittereinders, some of them stiff-necked women, who wanted to hold out against imposed peace terms. In other words, here again were some leading Boer ‘generals’ turning traitor through premature capitulation or spineless surrender. The chief modern incarnation of this yellow behaviour was, of course, President FW de Klerk, who in 1997 tellingly let slip in London that he had bowed to the inevitable necessity to ‘surrender the right to national sovereignty’. In terms of the conventional nationalist content and discourse of Afrikaner history, the very term ‘surrender’ has long been peculiarly pregnant in partisan meaning; through his treacherous submission, de Klerk had in effect become guilty of complicity in the monstrous crime of war against the freedom of his own nation. Equally, this seizure of the didactic precedent of 1899-1902 war memory may well be seen as perhaps the final historical moment when the fires of traditionalist nationalist bitterness and self-righteousness could still be fanned by the historical stimulus of the moral relevance of the South African War.
The essential way in which the South African War has been remembered is sectional—Afrikaner nationalist, political, and polarising; and, over the course of the present century, that war commemoration as political vision has passed through a number of phases, variously inflected by changing material and psychological contexts. This present consideration of war remembrance arises in an increasingly contradictory climate of commemoration. On the one hand, the dawning 1999 centenary of the war provides for an obvious surge of war remembrance and deliberation over its meaning. On the other, the centenary coincides with the obvious displacement of Afrikaner nationalist power—by a post-apartheid political order. At the time of writing, it is perhaps never more obvious that shifting historical contexts affect rooted ways in which war is popularly remembered and commemorated. As external repositories of public memory, war memorials and monuments now face a future in which they are divested of symbolic ‘Boer’ ‘party’ and ‘political’ power accrued in the nationalist apartheid era; they may, as some scholars have recently argued, be transmuting into open ‘texts’, mnemonic reminders of how a particular South African community (no longer special, nor privileged) viewed the place of a defining war in its history.42

Nor is this the only issue worth consideration. In a changing society directed by the liberation aristocracy of a black African nationalism, busily creating its own national mythologies of martyrs and liberators, what will happen to national memory of a historical Anglo-Boer War, in a context in which the position of the country’s black majority has long been to dissociate itself from a perceived ‘white man’s war’? One possibility is that the war may inevitably come to be remembered as an increasingly remote episode from a vanished European imperial age. As the Johannesburg Sunday Independent put it on the centenary of the 1895 Jameson Raid on the Transvaal, that madcap moment of imperial buccaneering which Winston Churchill considered to be the real start of the Anglo-Boer War: ‘with this tumultuous century drawing to a close, hindsight puts the do-or-die battle between Afrikaners and English-speakers into its proper, smaller context. White men were never going to win indefinite control of this African continent’.43

In some ways, there can be little doubt that perpetuation of the war in the public spaces of historical memory will wane, a revivalist centenary notwithstanding. It is even conceivable that with the disappearance of a distinctively constituted Afrikaner ‘political nation’, the war may come to have little meaning at all as core national political heritage. Even the key arenas of war are already not what they were, unlike say, the Somme or Flanders. The Orange Free State, seminal to freehold Boer republican identity since the mid-nineteenth century, has had to fall in with African nationalist times, losing its revered Dutch ‘Orange’ stamp in 1994 to become the Free State, and shedding Afrikaans in favour of English as its sole official language three years later. Its fighting sister Transvaal has also been administratively dismembered, retitled and demarcated as new territorial entities with chunky non-colonial names like Gauteng and Mpumalanga. Sanitised of their Boer republican identity, on a simple map reading the old warring territories have become the provinces from nowhere a century later.

At the same time, other impulses seek not so much to deflate war remembrance as to recompose it, through detaching its Boer commando and concentration camp past from conservative nationalist Afrikaner history and imbuing it with new national patriotic meanings. In this, the purpose of crafting a new vision of the war is to structure consensus. Accordingly, an ANC judge of the South African Constitutional Court has reclaimed idealism and the universal story of human freedom as the shared meaning of the South African War. Sliding together the language of the present with that of the past, Judge Albie Sachs asserted his personal ‘pride in the heroic struggle of the Boer fighters in the history of the world and in our history’. Any history of a liberal human rights culture had to ‘take into account the fate of the women and children in the concentration camps. So much of Afrikaans history is part of the struggle for freedom. Vryheid (Freedom) has real resonance and meaning’.44 Assimilation of the war to a more inclusive new South Africanism is a model illustration of how a present political agenda seeks instinctively to re-invent or re-imagine the past, so that the Anglo-Boer struggle is to be remembered through a new lens of understanding as one of a series of South African Wars, in which ‘virtually all ethnic groups’ played a shared role, thereby forging ‘the common historic destiny of all South Africans’.45
Yet, outside of elite cultural and academic missionary circles, the South African Anglo-Boer conflict remains what it has always been, a segmentary war, and one not felt to be a shared legacy, let alone a shared tragedy. In any final analysis, it is hard to see how it could ever be otherwise in a colonial country of such limited commonalities. The South African War is not, and has never been, an American Civil War, a 'never-to-be-forgotten moment' in 'the collective consciousness that makes Americans American'. It produced no Stephen Crane to mythologise a tragic war as a national rite of passage to 'manhood' for both the Blue and the Gray. Instead, it produced an ideological memory as far removed from a single encompassing statehood as could be imagined. In our own time, it is this cultural heritage, sentimentalised or institutionalised, which is now fast trickling away. In the longer run to come, the war may continue its present shift away from a white nationalist-inscribed nationalist commemoration of a sense of 'Afrikaner' self, to more anodyne remembrance as historical heritage, or as a site of pilgrimage for British and Commonwealth regiments to honour the sacrifice of their fallen. At the same time, the official, state-sponsored commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the war points to a new avenue of South African nationalist affirmation. The post-1994 ANC Government has, bizarrely, 'licensed' the war, declaring that it be termed the Anglo-Boer South African War, so as to reflect greater involvement by both white and black. War commemoration, in the words of the deputy Minister of Arts and Culture, Ms Bridgitte Mabandla, is to represent an 'exercise in nation-building through inclusivity, promoting reconciliation, presenting a balanced picture of the war, and raising heritage awareness'. More particularly, in another vintage round of nationalist re-ordering of history, the core focus of the centenary is to be black suffering and sacrifice during the war years: Africans are to join Afrikaners as the carriers of victimhood. While the war has not been seen as a 'white man's war' for some years now, it may now become a 'black man's war'. All this is a fairly long way from the struggle of Afrikaner generals to resolve the fate of a white nation, but it would be another inventive turn in the cultural negotiation of South African War commemoration.
Endnotes

7. Albert Grundlingh, 'War, Wordsmiths and the "Volk": Afrikaans Historical Writing on the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 and the War in Afrikaner Historical Consciousness, 1902-1990', in E Lehmman and E Reckwitz (eds), Mfecane to Boer War (Essen: Renz Verlag, 1992), 52.
27. Beeld, 18 January 1993; Aida Parker Newsletter 163 (1993): 2. A far right, Transvaal-based opinion newsheet of the 1980s and early 1990s, rumoured to have been established with conservative US foundation funds.
34. Rapport, 12 April 1998; Sunday Times (Johannesburg), 5 and 19 April 1998.
41. Patriot, 7 June 1901.
44. Cited in Grundlingh, 'War, Wordsmiths', 54.
45. Cape Argus, 1 October 1996.
47. Cape Argus, 11 October 1999.
It appears to have been Robert Louis Stevenson who coined the phrase that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive. One is reminded constantly of this when surveying British expectations of the prospects of war. 'The finest army that has ever left these shores.' 'The Army was never in better condition either as regards the zeal and skill of its officers from the highest to the lowest, the training and discipline of the men, or the organisation of all the branches of the service.' 'In every respect, ... incomparably the best trained, best organised and best equipped British Army that ever went forth to war.' The first and last of these three quotations may sound familiar. Only one—the third—was arguably true, this being Sir James Edmonds' conclusion with regard to the British Expeditionary Force in 1914. The first was the initial verdict of *The Times* on the expeditionary force being sent to the Crimea in 1854. The second, of more immediate relevance to our concern, was the judgement of the military commentator, Henry Spenser Wilkinson, at the beginning of the South African War.

Within a few short weeks, of course, events in South Africa suggested that Spenser Wilkinson had been all too optimistic although, in part, it had been his intention from the start to contrast the apparent efficiency of the army with what he perceived to be the inadequacy of the higher organisation of defence. By the end of the war, the generally accepted conclusion with regard to the British Army's performance accorded with that of Leo Amery. His massive and influential *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, published between 1900 and 1909, famously proclaimed that, while the army was a success judged as 'an institution or society', as 'a fighting machine it was largely a sham'. Similarly, to Amery, the home army was 'nothing more or less than a gigantic Dotheboys Hall', the allusion being to Wackford Squeers' notorious academy in Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Though Amery claimed that he wished to produce a 'really accurate and impartial work', *The Times* history was always intended to be 'essentially propagandistic' in the belief not only that 'unflinching frankness of criticism was needed in the public interest', but also that 'the story of the war could be made the best instrument for preaching Army Reform'. It was Amery, of course, who orchestrated the press campaign to remove Sir Redvers Buller from the Aldershot command in October 1901. Moreover, Field Marshal Lord Roberts and his circle cooperated closely with Amery and, as Major-General Geoffry Barton revealed before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, the normal rules with regard to communication with the press were suspended in the case of *The Times* history.4

Many contemporaries recognised the flawed nature of Amery's creation. Sir George White, for example, complained that it ascribed 'successes to accidents or to glaring failures on the part of the enemy rather than to allow any credit to those senior officers to whom blame is meted out with no grudging hand when opportunity offers'. Similarly, an anonymous reviewer in the *American Historical Review* wrote in 1907 of the inability of the author of *The Times* volumes to 'resist scourging his victims with whips steeped in acid brine'. With some irritation, Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice also pointed out in the second volume of the War Office's official history, published in the same year, that it was too easy to forget that the British Army had initially been numerically inferior to a well armed and organised enemy and to 'throw the whole blame on our "ignorant generals" and our "stupid soldiers"'. As Howard Bailes has written, however, the more measured and colourless tone of the official history, published between 1906 and 1910, 'barely modified the influence exerted by the lively and readable volumes of Amery's *History*'. Indeed, Amery's conclusions continued to shape the received version of the war for almost 70 years, authors of the popular accounts that appeared when interest in the war revived in the 1950s and 1960s appearing oblivious to his motives.
Thus, from an assumption of unmitigated military failure, and of obvious lessons deriving from the South African experience, the impact of the war upon the British Army has been largely seen as administering, to quote Kipling, 'no end of a lesson', ushering in a period of substantial and much needed reform. Clearly, there were major changes, not least in higher military organisation. In many ways, however, the impact of the war was not as great as sometimes supposed since the apparent lessons of war were far from unambiguous. But, then, they seldom are.

I

The war clearly had significance in that it was the first occasion on which the British Army was faced, as Maurice put it, 'as no European army has yet done, with the new conditions of war'. As will be seen, this is not entirely true, but the South African experience was on a new scale. As Maurice further commented, the effectiveness of the weapons available to both sides in South Africa was 'about in the same proportion to those which thirty years earlier the contest between France and Germany had been fought out then stood to the Brown Bess of Waterloo'.

The results were early apparent, as Major-General Neville Lyttelton noted. Commanding the 4th (Light) Brigade at Colenso, Lyttelton was startled by the contrast with his experience of commanding a British brigade at Omdurman a year previously: 'In the first 50,000 fanatics streamed across the open regardless of cover to certain death, while at Colenso I never saw a Boer all day till the battle was over, and it was our men who were the victims'. Indeed, compared to the 25 British fatalities at Omdurman, in which only four had been killed in the main action and the remaining 21 during the charge of the 21st Lancers, 171 men were killed or died of wounds at Colenso. At Modder River, Lord Methuen suffered 102 killed or died of wounds, while Spion Kop was to cost 383 British lives, and Paardeburg, 348. As Thomas Pakenham has noted, the army had lost over 100 men killed in a single action only twice since 1857. Both circumstances had been atypical, namely Isandlwana and Maiwand. Small wonder in 1899 that, to quote Colonel FN Maude, the country 'did not know that bloodshed was a usual consequence of the armed collision of combatants. Hence, the outbreak of hysteria with which they received the news of our casualties'.

Apart from the effects of firepower, South Africa was also noted for the use of railways, the telegraph, steam tractors, armoured trains, aerial reconnaissance by balloon, electric illumination, blockhouses, wire entanglements, entrenchment and so on. Most of these had already featured in other conflicts during the late nineteenth century such as the American Civil War, the German Wars of Unification and the Russo-Turkish War. Nonetheless, the war was undeniably 'modern' and JFC Fuller was somewhat more accurate in his later characterisation of the conflict as one of the 'roots of Armageddon' rather than in his earlier judgement that it was the 'last of the gentleman's wars'.

How far the war was, or was not, a 'total' conflict is a rather larger question, with which this paper is not directly concerned, but the scale of the war clearly dwarfed earlier colonial conflicts in which Britain had been involved. Some 30,000 men had been despatched to the Crimea in 1854, and the next largest military effort was the deployment of a 16,000 strong field force in Egypt in 1882. By comparison, Britain sent 112,000 regulars to South Africa between October 1899 and January 1900 and, by the end of the war, had deployed over 448,000 men from Britain and the empire and also employed perhaps 120,000 blacks and coloureds in auxiliary roles. Instead of a three or four month campaign costing perhaps no more than £10 million and minimum casualties, the war lasted 32 months and cost £230 million and almost 22,000 British and imperial dead.

Yet, the South African War was also clearly a transitional conflict on the cusp between the traditional and the modern although, so for that matter, was the First World War. Alongside the controversies over alleged Boer use of dum-dum bullets and abuse of white flags, which led British soldiers to dehumanise their opponents and made the adoption of 'methods of barbarism' easier, there were aspects of Boer society with which those same British soldiers could readily identify. There were instances of chivalrous conduct among enemies, such as
the obvious mutual regard between Methuen and 'Koos' de la Rey, evident both when Methuen spared de la Rey's property, and when Methuen was later captured by de la Rey. Some soldiers were uneasy with the methods being used during the guerrilla phase of the conflict and the soldiers were instrumental in forcing through a more magnanimous peace than the politicians would have imposed.

In military terms, there was still a reliance upon horses and mules for transport since there were only 5024 miles of railway line in southern Africa and much of it single track. Similarly, while the army had embraced X-rays, its handling of the outbreak of bubonic plague in Cape Town in 1901 demonstrated its unwillingness to adopt what has been characterised as the 'talisman of modernity' in medical terms, namely inoculation and bacteriology. It is, of course, a significant defence of the conditions in the concentration camps to acknowledge that the army was no better at preserving the lives of its own men than Boer civilians from disease.9

Notwithstanding the paradoxes, many contemporary commentators were convinced that the lessons of the war were obvious. In offering his collected articles from the Morning Post to the public in March 1900 under the title of Lessons of the War, for example, Spenser Wilkinson made the confident assertion that the war's lessons were already far from obscure for 'those whose occupations have led them to indulge in any close study of war'. By contrast, St John Brodrick, who became Secretary of State for War in October 1900, scaled down the scope of the official history begun by Colonel GFR Henderson and then taken on by Maurice after Henderson's death. Ostensibly, Brodrick claimed that 'though a great war for us, it is hardly a Franco-Prussian War in its lessons—especially after the first twelve months'.

It is apparent that financial restrictions were the real cause of Brodrick's stance, but, in fact, many other commentators believed the South African War so abnormal as to render its lessons, in the words of Major-General Robert Baden-Powell's brother, Major BFS Baden-Powell, 'hardly worth study'. Baden-Powell shared his brother's views. Henderson, who otherwise saw further evidence in South Africa of the appearance of what he characterised as the 'second tactical revolution' brought about by smokeless powder, magazine rifles and quick firing artillery, similarly believed the conditions on the veldt 'peculiar'.

Appearing before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, Major-General JP Brabazon also declared that, 'It was a most extraordinary war, fought under absolutely different conditions (it was my sixth campaign) from those of any other war I had ever seen'. The value of Brabazon's observation, however, was perhaps offset by his advocacy of shock tactics by cavalry armed with tomahawks. As Lord Esher remarked, 'He drew graphic pictures of a cavalry charge under these conditions, so paralysing to the imagination of the Commissioners that they wholly failed to extricate the General or themselves from the discussion of this engrossing subject'. Even some external observers were struck by the unique conditions, the American naval theorist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, declaring the war an anomaly in his account of it published in July 1900, although Jean de Bloch did believe the war essentially modern.10

To some extent, these peculiarities derived from the climate and terrain. As Maude pointed out, it was almost as far from Cape Town to Pretoria as from Vienna to St Petersburg. Similarly, it was as far from the Cape to Durban as from London to Prague. Only Natal had a climate resembling any part of Europe. The area around Mafeking was, for all intents and purposes, semi-desert, while temperatures on the high veldt, between 5000 and 7000 feet above sea level, were subject to the most extreme variations. Summer months between October and March were sometimes wet, resulting in good pasture for transport animals, but flooded and impassable rivers. The dry winter months of April to September would guarantee hard tracks, but shortage of water and non-existent pasture. In any case, European-bred horses disliked the 'thin, reedy, bitter grass'. An additional factor was that deadly horse sickness was a feature of lower altitudes, and of the wet months. These aspects had particular implications for any lessons regarding the use of mounted troops. Of particular significance with regard to the assessment of firepower, whether rifles or artillery, was the atmospheric clarity of the veldt, and the lack of either large scale topographical features or natural obstacles. This enhanced the effectiveness of fire at long-range, with unaimed fire to the maximum range of magazine rifles quite capable of killing distant opponents.11
If many of these conditions were unlikely to be produced in Europe, then there was also the nature of the Boers themselves. In the first edition of his celebrated *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, published in 1896, Colonel Charles Callwell had already placed the Boers in a category of their own, separate from all other colonial opponents faced by the British. The third edition published in 1906 and embracing the lessons of the second Anglo-Boer conflict, did not alter this assessment. Indeed, Callwell remarked of the methods eventually evolved to defeat the Boers that ‘it would rarely happen that such heroic remedies would be necessary in operations against the class of enemy ordinarily met with in small wars’.

Nonetheless, in passing, it should be emphasised that, while common to some of those already used by the Spanish on Cuba between 1896 and 1898 and the United States in the Philippines between 1898 and 1902, the highly successful pacification methods evolved in South Africa, including the use of wire, blockhouses, mobile columns, and reconcentration, were to inform British counter-insurgency practice throughout the twentieth century. In any case, leading British military theorists like Henderson and Maurice were too pragmatic to assume that any conflict did more than add to the accumulation of practical experience. Moreover, those lessons from South Africa deemed to be applicable to a modern European war were soon to be contradicted in many cases by those of the Russo-Japanese War.12

II

Turning first to infantry tactics. Fuller's claim that British generals displayed a 'Brown Bess' or 'Peninsular' mentality of 'shoulder to shoulder formations, of volleys in rigid lines and of wall-like bayonet assaults' is quite ludicrous. Admittedly, peacetime training in the 1890s showed that some battalions still clung to the close formations long officially abandoned, and Fitzroy Hart's brigade was committed in close order at Colenso (15 December 1899). Part of Thomas Pakenham's attempt to rehabilitate Buller's reputation, however, was to argue that, after the reverses at Colenso, Spion Kop (24 January 1900) and Vaal Krantz (5 February 1900), the final advance of the Natal Field Force to relieve Ladysmith saw troops move in short rushes, using available cover and with the support of creeping barrages, so that it was Buller who first evolved ‘the tactics of truly modern war’.

In fact, as Edward Spiers, Tim Moreman and, most recently, Stephen Miller, have all pointed out, those used to recent Indian warfare had already become painfully aware of the potentially destructive effects of modern breechloaders during the great rising on the North-West Frontier in 1897. Thus, Hamilton deployed successfully in extended order at Elandslaagte (21 October 1899) and Methuen also deployed successfully in extended order at Belmont (23 November 1899) though, unfortunately, his troops were caught while deploying at Magersfontein (11 December 1899).

Moreover, Howard Bailes has argued that the whole thrust of British tactical thought and training through the 1890s was towards more flexibility. Thus, the 'Notes for Guidance in South African Warfare', issued by Roberts on 26 January 1900, and emphasising the need to avoid frontal attacks and to use extended order, were no more than a 'textbook summary of the advanced tactical ideas of the previous three decades'. Bailes also argued that the failures in the early part of the war were not a consequence of British tactical doctrine, but a 'failure to act in accordance with it', although he acknowledged that the war occurred at a moment when the practical application of new tactical ideas was at an early stage.13

The principal infantry lessons of the war, therefore, certainly appeared to be that firepower was the most decisive factor in warfare, and that manoeuvre was required to avoid its destructive effect, although the success of manoeuvre was also taken to rely upon the offensive power of modern weapons. Henderson, indeed, in stressing the importance of envelopment, argued that 'it is not always realised that anything which gives new strengths to the defence at the same time adds something to the advantage of the army which attacks'. If the war suggested the significance of infantry firepower, however, through the perceived reluctance on occasions of officers and men to face fire, there was also a new emphasis upon morale and the offensive spirit. Soldiers such as Maurice, indeed, were in the forefront of the
growing concern with the apparent deterioration of the imperial race as suggested by the physical deficiencies of many wartime recruits. The Royal Commission on Physical Training in Scotland and the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1903 were but two manifestations of the trend towards eugenics.

This particular emphasis was reinforced by the Russo-Japanese War, although its lessons were equally ambiguous. To quote Major-General EA Altham, the experience in Manchuria 'has wiped out the mistaken inference from South African experience that bayonet fighting belongs to the past'. Similar conclusions were reached by Major-General Lancelot Kiggell, Douglas Haig's successor as Director of Staff Duties at the War Office in 1909, who also believed that Manchuria had proven erroneous the assumptions about firepower derived from South Africa.

A greater emphasis was given to musketry training as a result of the South African War, although financial considerations led to the scaling back of the new practice ammunition allowance of 1902-3 in 1907, and also to the compromise adoption of the Short Lee-Enfield in 1905. However, the significance accorded firepower and the methodical caution in attack apparent in the new manuals, *Combined Training* in 1902 and *Infantry Training* in 1905, was reversed in *Field Service Regulations* in 1909, which downgraded firepower and subordinated the defensive to the moral effect of the vigorous offensive.\(^{14}\)

The lessons of the war with regard to cavalry were even less clear cut. It is usually assumed that traditional cavalry, 'wedded to shock tactics', proved unsuccessful and that mounted infantry was the key to the future of the mounted arm. As is well known, Roberts and his supporters, such as Amery and Erskine Childers, the author of the fifth volume of *The Times History*, dealing with the guerrilla phase of the war, and subsequently the author of *War and the Arme Blanche* in 1910, were highly critical of the cavalry's record in South Africa. Childers, indeed, famously questioned the utility 'if any, of the *arme blanche*, in the conflicts of the future'. The new manual, *Cavalry Training*, in 1904 thus emphasised the importance of the rifle and of dismounted action rather than of the sword and of mounted action.

As Stephen Badsey and the Marquess of Anglesey have demonstrated, the limitations of the cavalry in South Africa owed most to the woeful neglect of the 'horsemastership' essential in the particular climatic conditions of the veldt. Thus, the perceived failure of the cavalry at Poplar Grove (6 March 1900) was due to the poor condition of the horses. Moreover, actual doctrine as suggested by the 1896 Cavalry Drill Book endorsed the combination of mounted and dismounted action, though without devoting much space to the latter. Indeed, British cavalry traditionalists such as Sir John French and Haig were able to argue that the principles of offensive mounted action remained unchanged as a result of the war.

Traditional cavalry action had worked well at Elandslaagte. Similarly, French demonstrated what Stephen Badsey has described as 'the immense tactical flexibility of his reformed cavalry' at Klip Drift (15 February 1900) and the combination of mounted and dismounted action proved successful at both Zand River (10 May 1900) and Diamond Hill (11 June 1900). Subsequently, there were many examples of cavalry charging successfully during the guerrilla phase of the conflict, albeit with rifles rather than swords. As Badsey has emphasised, Childers fully recognised this and, while believing the sword unnecessary, was not actually an opponent of the cavalry charge per se.

Consequently, Haig, as successively Director of Military Training and Director of Staff Duties between 1906 and 1909, and French, as Inspector-General of the Forces from 1907 to 1911, reversed the emphasis upon mounted infantry. Haig's *Cavalry Studies*, published in 1907 in collaboration with Lonsdale Hale, and French's preface to the translation of Bernhardi's *Cavalry in Peace and War* in 1910, both upheld traditional principles of offensive action. The balance, however, shifted back, towards mounted infantry in the 1912 edition of *Cavalry Training*. In fact, Badsey has argued that the cavalry was trained adequately for both mounted and dismounted action by 1914, although the combination of tactical roles ascribed the cavalry was overly ambitious, and one the more traditionally minded officers found difficult to grasp.\(^{15}\)
As Edward Spiers has remarked, the cavalry versus mounted infantry debate ‘merely confirmed that the war had not produced many self-evident lessons’ since, for example, Ian Hamilton's view of Zand River was very different from that of French. Unlike the infantry debate, Manchurian experience was of little further guidance since cavalry played virtually no part in the Russo-Japanese War. The latter conflict, however, was of more significance for artillery lessons, which were obscured in the case of South Africa by the war being primarily used to justify the rearmament and reorganisation of the Royal Artillery without any regard to the actual experience.

British soldiers entered the war already believing in the need for European-style quick-firing guns. Consequently, the Director-General of the Ordnance, Sir Henry Brackenbury, persuaded the government to consider rearming the Royal Artillery in January 1900. An order was immediately placed for German Ehrhardt guns and agreement reached on a three year programme of rearmament in January 1901. It should be emphasised, however, that the Boers possessed no such quick firing guns and that the only ones actually deployed in South Africa were naval guns. These were too heavy for use in the field, and fired only an estimated two per cent of those shells discharged by the British during the war. The war was thus merely a means of justifying rearmament and, as Edward Spiers has again remarked, the only actual perceived lessons were refinements in armament characterised by ‘greater mobility for Horse Artillery, increased fire power for Field Artillery, and a longer range capability for both’.

These requirements were satisfied by the adoption of the 13-pounder for horse artillery, and the 18-pounder and 4.5" howitzer for field artillery. In fact, not all artillery officers shared these perceptions, and many erroneously thought that the new quick firers would make little difference to artillery tactics. Colonel Long, of course, utilised at Colenso tactics which had worked at Omdurman. Indeed, despite the poor results of those at Magersfontein and Colenso, largely as a consequence of a misplaced faith in the effectiveness of lyddite as a propellant, an emphasis was retained on the necessity for preliminary bombardment. Shrapnel, which had also proved largely ineffective, was retained precisely because lyddite had failed as a high explosive.

Even those who grasped the importance of indirect fire, and the need to accentuate the volume of fire as a necessary precondition to movement, were haunted to some extent by the accusation that, in ‘hiding behind hills’, they sought to avoid delivering close support to the infantry in the firing line. Subsequently, the experience of the Russo-Japanese War, and observation of French artillery tactics, demonstrated that simply rearming, without a due consideration of the tactical implications of doing so, had been somewhat premature.¹⁶

In many respects, the least ambiguous lessons of South Africa were those relating to the army’s support services. Most, with the noted exception of the Royal Army Medical Corps, had performed adequately. Indeed, despite much contemporary criticism, the Army Service Corps had done especially well when the disastrous meddling of Roberts and Kitchener in regimental transport is taken into account. All services, however, had been grossly understaffed and under-resourced. Consequently, the Royal Engineers and the RAMC were both expanded after the war, which had provided useful lessons in such areas as military railway management, military nursing, ambulance design, and hospital trains. Jay Stone has also pointed to a variety of smaller lessons taken on board with respect to equipment such as puttees, the lighter aluminium canteen, new water carts, looped cartridge belts and universal khaki service dress.¹⁷

The shortages of matériel, especially ammunition, in 1899 were also addressed following Brackenbury’s dire warning that Britain was ‘attempting to maintain the largest Empire the world has ever seen with armament and reserves that would be insufficient for a third class military power’. Indeed, by November 1899, there was only eight weeks’ supply of .303 ammunition left and the supply of shells had been exhausted even before that. British firms were capable of producing only 2.5 million rounds a week when the demand exceeded three million. An additional problem was that the stock of 66 million rounds of Mark IV expanding ammunition, approximating to two-fifths of the reserve in July 1899, fouled barrels and could
not be used. The programme finally agreed with the Treasury fell short of Brackenbury's requirements, but it was still the case that the Director of Army Contracts was purchasing in a month supplies which would have been regarded previously as sufficient for 20 years. In some cases, the arms manufacturing companies were still two years behind completion of orders by May 1901.

Unfortunately, however, since the war ended before an even greater economic mobilisation became necessary, the lessons were not absorbed. Thus, the Murray Committee concluded in 1907 in a spirit of continued economy that government ordnance factories should be cut back since the private sector could supply future wartime needs. Moreover, reserves of ammunition continued to be predicated on the South African War experience, the lesson drawn from the Russo-Japanese War being the need to ensure fire economy rather than increasing the ammunition available. In part, this reflected continued financial restraints in the face of which, to quote Keith Neilson, the ‘prudent response for the British Army was to introduce tactical reforms that did not require new technology’. Predictably, the same kind of shell shortages occurred in 1914-15. Yet, it still needs to be recognised that Britain was able to fight, and ultimately win, a war 6000 miles from the home base. By contrast, as Jay Stone has noted, the French had to rent shipping from Britain in order to invade Madagascar in 1895, the Germans were unable to contribute even a battalion to the international peacekeeping operation on Crete in 1897, and the United States experienced extreme logistic difficulties in invading Cuba, but 90 miles from the American coast, in 1898.18

The war's greatest and most important impact, however, was in what John Gooch has characterised as the 'managerial revolution', emanating from the official enquiries by royal commissions and parliamentary committees instituted as a result of the war. Two met while the war was still in progress, the Select Committee on War Office Organisation, chaired by Clinton Dawkins, reporting in May 1901, and that on the Education and Training of Officers of the Army, chaired by A Akers-Douglas, in 1902. Principally, however, organisational reform was driven by the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, chaired by Lord Elgin, which reported in July 1903; the War Office (Reconstitution) Committee, chaired by Lord Esher, which reported in January and March 1904; and the Royal Commission on the Militia and Volunteers, chaired by the Duke of Norfolk, which reported in May 1904.

Of course, a measure of greater higher defence organisation had been instituted before the war through the establishment of such bodies as the Colonial Defence Committee (1885), Joint Naval and Military Committee (1891) and Standing Defence Committee of the Cabinet (1895) although, like changes within the War Office in 1895, these had not been notably successful. Indeed, the Elgin Commission revealed the frequent confusion as to the respective functions of such bodies. It did, however, point to the success of mobilisation in 1899, an unprecedented event, which was itself the product of the Stanhope Memorandum of 1888. The Stanhope Memorandum, of course, has often been criticised, but it was a genuine response to the demands of the military for guidance as to the purposes for which the army existed and for which they were expected to plan, even if the mobilisation was not actually sufficient for the demands of modern war.

Elgin also pointed to the accuracy of the predictions of the small and poorly funded Intelligence Department within the War Office, a new post of Director General of Mobilisation and Military Intelligence having already been created in November 1901. Despite its attention to the decision-making process, however, the Elgin Commission made few positive recommendations and it was Esher who had dissented from the majority report, and whose own committee produced what Gooch has called 'the crowning achievements in the spasm of institutional reform' which followed the war.

The general outline of the reforms are familiar: abolition of the post of Commander-in-Chief; the creation of that of Chief of the General Staff and, in due course, the creation of a General Staff; an Army Council; a permanent secretariat for the Committee of Imperial Defence established by Balfour in December 1902; the reorganisation of the Staff College; and the greater professionalisation of officer education. Some of these, of course, were old ideas, the Hartington Commission having advocated the replacement of Commander-in-Chief with a...
Chief of Staff in 1890. There were also the successive attempts at organisational reform between 1901 and 1905 by St John Brodrick and HO Arnold-Forster as Secretaries of State for War. Brodrick and Arnold-Forster, however, did not succeed, and it was left to RB Haldane to effect wider reforms after 1906, which were guided more by financial considerations than either strategic calculations or lingering reflections on the military lessons of the South African War.19

Nonetheless, just as much as his two immediate predecessors, Haldane still needed to take into account the reorientation of British strategic interests, which were driven partly by the cost of the war. The process had begun in many respects with the abandonment of the traditional concern for the independence of the Ottoman Empire and the freedom of the Straits in 1896. It was accelerated, however, by the fears arising from British diplomatic isolation during the war. Concessions had to be made to the United States over the Venezuelan episode in 1901; there were the tentative negotiations with Germany in the same year; and the conclusion of the alliance with Japan in 1902. While the infant CID devoted over 50 of its 82 meetings between 1902 and 1905 to the defence of India, some soldiers were already turning their attention to strategic challenges from Europe.

The spectre of invasion had arisen once more during the war, at least in the public mind, and the army schemes advocated by Brodrick, Arnold-Forster and Haldane all addressed the effort required to meet British commitments at both home and abroad. As a whole, it is estimated that 14.2 per cent of the male population of the United Kingdom between the ages of 18 and 40 were in uniform at some stage between 1899 and 1902. By March 1900, however, only one regular infantry battalion remained in Britain, with the volunteer force the only additional defence against possible invasion. Hence, the concern to reform the auxiliary forces as well as the regular army, the process ultimately resulting in 1908 in Haldane’s abolition of the militia and the merger of volunteers and yeomanry in the Territorial Force.20

III

The South African War was, like the First World War, a transitional conflict and it caught the British Army at a moment when it, too, was in a state of transition. There is some debate as to the degree of real change within the army as a result of its experience. This mirrors in some respects the wider historical debate about continuities and discontinuities with respect to the effect of war upon social change. Tim Travers, for example, emphasises the persistence into the First World War of the amateurism, and of the personalised command structure apparent during the South African War. It might be added that the war had also seen soldiers seize effective control of policy in South Africa itself, in ways which would be repeated on a far greater scale during the First World War, the debt the government owed to Roberts and Kitchener in securing its political survival enabling them to dictate the peace settlement.21

In a sense, since the lessons were so ambiguous, what mattered most about the impact of the South African War upon the army was the general sense of the need for reform. The army was undoubtedly better for the experience and, in August 1914, the fact that the BEF was such a finely honed military instrument owed much to the South African War. Unfortunately, an assumed wastage rate of 40 per cent for the first six months of war, and between 65 and 75 per cent for 12 months, calculated as an average between those of the South African and Russo-Japanese Wars, tragically proved a considerable underestimate: the actual casualty rate was 63 per cent in the first three months. In other words, while some lessons had been absorbed, the South African experience had not fundamentally altered the limited way in which the British envisaged waging war in the future. A more profound lesson awaited them. As Cyril Falls later wrote of the BEF, ‘Armées d’élite would be invincible if wars were fought without casualties. Things being what they are, armées d’élite are unlikely to remain so for long’.22
Endnotes


5. Maurice and Grant, History of the War in South Africa, II: 204.


Although the war began disastrously for Britain, the Boers were administratively weak. Their commando system, ideally suited to an African enemy, was incapable of a major offensive against an enemy with the war potential of the British Empire. Unable to convert tactical success into strategic victory, the Boers could not resist the growing stream of men and equipment that Britain poured into the country. There were no great battles; the war was characterised by a series of ambuscades, skirmishes and sieges. The last set battle was fought on 8 September 1900 at Spitzkop. Having lost all hope of winning the war, the Boers harassed the British with guerrilla tactics; denying pitched battle and concentrating, whenever possible, against British weaknesses. Frustrated at there being no centre of gravity at which to strike, the British attempted to deny the commandos their source of physical and emotional succour: the farms were burned and the women and children of the two republics herded into concentration camps. In Lord Wolseley's words: 'Your first object should be the capture of whatever they prize most, and the destruction or deprivation of which will probably bring the war most rapidly to a conclusion.'

The Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) was one of the crucial events in South African history. It has been the subject of much research and reassessment, and the battle for the naming of the war reflects the tremendous impact it had on all the peoples of southern Africa. As General JC Smuts pointed out, it was in many respects a total war, amongst the first of the twentieth century mould, and for this reason its ramifications on South Africa's development were profound.

The war cost Britain 22,000 men and £223 million. The cost to the Afrikaner totalled 6000 men in addition to the camp deaths, and incalculable economic loss. Yet these statistics misrepresent the physical and psychological impact of the war. With a long history of foreign wars, it was easy for the British to 'forget' the pain of the Anglo-Boer War, soon dwarfed by the losses sustained in the First World War. British casualties of the Anglo-Boer War became more insignificant than the lesser numbers held in the collective Afrikaner mind.

Dis die blond,
dis die blou:
dis die veld,
dis die lug;
en 'n voël draai bowe in eensame vlug—
dis al.

Dis 'n balling gekom
oor die oseaan,
dis 'n graf in die gras,
dis 'n vallende traan—
dis al

With these simple, evocative stanzas war poet, Jan FE Cilliers (1865-1940) has vividly captured something of the loneliness, the gloom and devastation faced by the thousands of exiles returning after Vereeniging to burned farms, empty lives and the loss of missing family. Although Boer society had been engaged in numerous conflicts since the founding of a permanent European settlement at the Cape in 1652, not all perhaps classifiable as wars, none other has had the impact of the Second Anglo-Boer War. Prior to the outbreak of the war, few Boers shared General JH de la Rey's concerns regarding the nature and impact of a war with Britain. While most Boers looked forward to a second Majuba; the British predicted a swift and easy victory. The Boers were not the only foolish belligerents.
**British Over-confidence and Self-deception**

In October 1900, after a year of operations, Sir Alfred Milner expressed his disillusionment to the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain: 'I am fairly taken aback at the vitality and ubiquity of the enemy, the staleness and dissatisfaction of our men, and the aimlessness and inconsequence of our present operations'.

When the declaration of war came in October 1899, the War Office and people of Greater Britain—the world's strongest power—did not expect serious resistance from the two, tiny, agrarian South African and Orange Free State republics. Britain was overconfident and quite underestimated the (albeit limited) military potential of her opponents.

Yet, from Milner, this was a feigned surprise. He, their proconsul in southern Africa and the person ultimately responsible for their deception, had 'always regarded war with the Republics as a very formidable war indeed'. With the possible exception of Redvers Buller, who had seen action during the First Anglo-Boer War (1880-81), Milner, more than anyone else, 'believed in the Boer's capacity for war'. He knew the true size of the Boer arsenal and of what the Republican forces were capable. He, furthermore, not only had timely warning of ZAR (South African Republic) preparations but was also in possession of the Boer campaign plan and as early as June 1899. These were details, it would seem, he failed to pass on to the War Office.

As Thomas Pakenham has shown, Milner had been less than frank with his principals in London. The War Office in their *Military Notes on the Dutch Republics*, expected the Boers to limit themselves to a raiding strategy conducted by no more than two to three thousand men; and that after a serious defeat they would surrender. British soldiers 'asserted over and over again that the death of a few hundred of their comrades would be enough to scatter the commandoes (sic) to their farms'. The Intelligence Department correctly predicted the coalition of the two republics but underestimated the number of rifles by at least 10,000. Ardgath's *Military Notes* estimated that 26,500 ZAR burghers were liable to military service. However, as the War Office appreciated, these figures were untrustworthy and that any estimate 'should rather be too high than too low'. The inability of the ZAR Government to hold an accurate census worked against Britain's war preparations, and London remained unable to gauge figures of reasonable precision. The total number of burghers liable to service (ages 18 to 34) in the ZAR was eventually estimated at 14,391, those between the ages 34 to 50 at 7242, and those aged below 18 and above 50, at 4666.

This figure of 26,299 was too low. The armed forces of the two Boer republics including the approximate 2000 foreign volunteers, numbered as many as 66,667 (Table 1), although this was only approximately one-tenth of the size of the British Army. Thus at the outbreak of war the Boers outnumbered Britons in South Africa by at least 2 to 1. Had they maximised the benefit of their initial numbers, their knowledge of the country and superior mobility, they might very well have swept the British to the coast, occupied the harbours, contested the landing of reinforcements, and undermined the resolve of the British parliament. As we know, caution and ineptitude prevailed, and the moment was lost.
Table 1: The Republican Forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commandants</th>
<th>41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Cornets</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Field Cornets</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Troops:

- South African Republic (Transvaal) | 32,353 |
- Republic of Orange Free State | 22,314 |
- Agterryers ('After-riders' or servants) | +/- 10,000 |
- Foreign corps | +/- 2,000 |

Total | +/- 66,667 |

Milner had different figures and he failed to route cardinal intelligence gained by the British Agent in Pretoria, through to London. He was 'a middle-aged man in a hurry', and as such could not afford to be frank: he wanted to reshape the sub-continent and for this he needed a war. While Milner believed the power of the Boers could be broken, he believed that the war would be fierce yet short. As the man-on-the-spot, he had not underestimated the military power of the republics but, like most others, had 'overestimated the competence of the British Army'.

Moreover, as to the 'vitality and ubiquity of the enemy', the British should have been familiar with the Boer military system. The common pattern for colonial warfare—serious defeat followed by British adaptation to local circumstances—should have been unnecessary. The British had faced the Boers on a number of previous occasions: most notably at Boomplaats (1848) and in the various battles of the First Anglo-Boer War (1881). Furthermore, during the nineteenth century, many British regiments had fought against the Xhosa—in no less than seven of the nine Eastern Cape frontier wars—and so gained field experience in South Africa. Yet all the colony's soldier-settlers, 'many ... [of whom] had fought and hunted side by side with the Boers ... all asserted that the Boers could not shoot, and were wanting in every military quality except cunning and endurance'. This was probably based upon 'personal dislike and racial feeling'. Thus, although having ample opportunity to study the Boer military system, the British thought that the Boers of 1899 were not the same men as they had been in 1881. Majuba, no matter how humiliating, was a fluke and despite Butler's study of Colley actions in 1881, no 'lessons' were seemingly learned.

The British had nothing but contempt for the farmers against whom they fought. While the Boer republics lacked a military force in the conventional sense and their generals and commandants possessed a coherent grasp of neither strategy nor tactics; they did have modern rifles, and their men were hardy, expert marksmen, and admirable horsemen. Although the commandos at the best of times held to the loosest of discipline, they knew the veld and had the toughness born of struggling to farm a harsh and forbidding land. This lack of conventional military forces induced overconfidence in a well-disciplined and organised British Army, few of whose generals understood South African conditions. How could a country of backwoodsmen, whose entire population was no more than that of an average British town, stand against the British Empire?

Although the republics had not faced a European enemy since the Transvaal had inflicted their blow to British pride at Majuba, they had considerable experience in the so-called native wars. The Transvaal arsenal was stocked with 155mm Creusot and large numbers of rifles of the latest technology. The officers and men of the two republics, and principally their State Artillery, also had significant contact with European officers, particularly French and German artilleryists, instructors who may have shared the so-called 'lessons' of the Franco-Prussian War—of cover, and fire and movement—with the Boers.
The republics might also have done more to recruit foreign veterans with their valuable experience from European wars, and ensure the return of South Africans living abroad. Offers of military hardware and expertise, from hot-air balloonists, German, French, Austrian and Dutch officers, medical doctors and artillery officers, met with a less than warm reception.28 Some talent was recruited before the war, especially from Germany and Austria, to assist particularly with the republican artillery.29 Germans laid the foundations for the Transvaal state artillery and a Hollander established its Field Telegraph Section; while a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War, Major RFW Albrecht, founded its Orange Free State state artillery. Captain Adolf Zboril, an Austrian artillery officer, was second-in-command of the Transvaal artillery before the war, during which time, as the only officer with training in the Western way of war, he tried to improve its organisation and efficiency. This reorganisation gathered pace following the appointment of Adolf Schiel, a former Prussian hussar, as Zboril's lieutenant. Zboril could, however, not convince Joubert, the commandant general, 'of the importance of a modern and efficient artillery force—and despairingly, devoted more time to his remarkably beautiful wife than to the artillery'.30

Although some two thousand foreigners fought with their commandos, the two republics failed to exploit the knowledge and experience of foreign soldiers, many of who were trained and (as veterans of the Franco-Prussian War) experienced in the use of the latest military technology. Their ideas on the application of the new technology in the art of warfare, particularly the rifle but also artillery, fell on deaf ears. However, their impact was lessened by not only the inaction of the Boer governments but also xenophobia, and the hatred for Uitlanders brought suspicion and increasing Boer control.31 The development of doctrine and training may also have been compromised by rivalry between the Austrian Zboril and the Prussian Schiel.32

The British were nonetheless surprised by their strength in artillery. The British had not shared in the recent experience in European warfare, in which the rifle and the defensive had come to the fore, and few of her officers attempted to keep pace with developments where Britain was not involved.33 Boer tactics, more sophisticated than they had been in 1881, surprised the British and Lieutenant-Colonel ES May, professor of Military Art and History at the British Army Staff College, had reason to commence his Retrospect on the South African War (1901) thus:

There has probably never been a more striking example of a foe being underrated than has been given to the world of late in South Africa ... each and every one of [our] assertions has been shown to have been untrustworthy, and every cannon by which the potential strength of our opponents was gauged may be shown to have been misapplied.

The Country and its Military Geography

Yet, the qualitative and quantitative underestimation of the enemy was not Britain's only intelligence failure. She also erred in terms of the theatre. The war was fought in a theatre approximately thirteen times the size of England, encompassing the two Boer republics and the British colonies and territories of the Cape, Natal, Bechuanaland and British South Africa. The size of the operational theatre and the relatively small forces employed resulted in a war of mainly movement: something for which Britain was ill prepared. She could only surmount the difficulty in containing enveloped Boers by drastically increasing her troop strength and employing counter-guerrilla strategies.

While South Africa possessed numerous good anchorages and harbours, Saldanha Bay, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban—and all were situated within the Cape and Natal colonies—Britain encountered problems the moment her lines left the coast. From then on her operations were limited to the area traversed by railroad and, more so, by the lack of transport animals. Buller complained repeatedly that he found 'greater difficulties than [he] anticipated in obtaining Ox Transport in [the Cape] Colony'.34 South Africa possessed few navigable rivers and the only river of consequence, the Orange, flowed east-west. On the other hand, although the South African Republic had to import horses from the Orange Free State in 1899, the commandos enjoyed a supply of horses almost to the end of the war.35
Topography was certainly problematic. The general physical features of the theatre comprised:

- A coastal region, rising gradually to an upland country, narrow on the east and west coasts, with terraced country or a gradual slope running up to the escarpment at which the great plateau starts.
- An interior tableland (the veld or veldt) 3000 to 6000 feet above sea level, flat or undulating, and only broken here and there by solitary rounded hills (koppies). With an average altitude of 3000 feet, the veld sloped down gradually from east to west. All the major rivers thus flowed across the plateau to the Atlantic, where there were no ports of consequence for the British invading forces to utilise.
- An escarpment marked the transition, sometimes gradual, but generally abrupt, between the coastal region and the veld. The escarpment commences near the Tropic of Capricorn in the north-east and runs parallel to the coast. As it passes southward it gradually becomes more precipitous until it rises to a height of over 10,000 feet in Natal. From the south-west end of the Drakensberg the escarpment takes a westerly course and runs along ranges of mountains such as the Stormberg, the Sneeuberg, the Nieuveld, and the Kornsberg, where for a time it becomes merged in the parallel ranges north of Cape Town.

Climate was also difficult. On account of its height and remoteness from the sea, the veld was subject to marked variations between winter and summer. These extremes of heat and cold, and the general tendency for the temperature to become hotter in summer and cooler in winter as the British moved from the sea to the interior, is shown by the following (degrees in fahrenheit):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East Coast (Durban)</th>
<th>Veldt (Bloemfontein)</th>
<th>West Coast (Cape Town)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January (summer)</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July (winter)</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation in average temperature</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The timing of the ultimatum at the start of the South African summer was also crucial. Much of the coastal region, through which the British troops had perforce to move, burns up almost to a desert during the hotter months. The moment the British broke through the escarpment and moved beyond Ceres, they were exposed to severe heat, lack of water and little from which to live on the countryside, perhaps only some sheep, goats, and ostriches.

Farther inland, beyond the escarpment, the veld (and thus the Boer republics) received summer rains. Growth at the start of the war would therefore be luxuriant; with ample food and fodder, animal and water resources. In the winter the picture changed drastically with only coarse grasses surviving, mostly growing in tufts and showing the bare earth between. Despite a low GNP and the dependence upon outside supply for manufactured goods, the two republics seem to have had no problem regarding food. The State Secretary of the South African Republic, Francois Reitz, could say with some satisfaction in late August 1899, that food sufficient for six to eight months had also been laid up in storage and that there would be no shortage of meat or flour. He and other government counterparts, expected the war to be over by the end of summer.

The Boer strategists attempted to make the most of the geography. They realised that the British would rather roll up rail way line to Bloemfontein with holding actions elsewhere and so avoid having to move through Natal—particularly the northern apex of the colony. Through skilful distraction, they would divert British energy to the relief of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking; the imperial regiments into the semi-desert hinterland of the Cape and strike at the enemy’s logistic lines. A similar strategy had great effect in 1881. Few British commanders, excluding Buller and Butler (who, having written a biography of Colley, was acquainted with the dangers of pushing troops into the northern apex of colonial Natal), understood the realities of fighting in South Africa.
The guerrilla activities increased after the British had defeated the two republics with a persisting strategy. The commandos conducted raids against weak detachments of the occupying forces and at railroads and other logistic objectives. The Boers, almost invariably mounted, broke British railway lines more than 250 times in 12 months. During the early, persisting phase of the conflict, they captured and held for 27 days the waterworks of the city of Bloemfontein, forcing the British garrison to resort to unsanitary water resources. This contributed to the subsequent doubling of the typhoid mortality rate. Fevers and infections accounted for the majority of imperial and colonial casualties for much of the war. In April 1901, for example, the colonials in South Africa suffered 385 casualties, almost 52 per cent having contracted acute infection or fever. Only four patients were released from medical care during this period.37

Britain responded with attempts to impede the movement of the commandos. They built across the country vast networks of barbed-wire entanglements, guarded by blockhouses that could keep the wire lines under rifle fire. Eventually, the 9000 blockhouses and 8000 kilometres of barbed-wire lines, effectively inhibited the movement of the commandos and assisted the mobile columns in the capture of many burghers. In addition, the British used a logistic strategy. They burned farms and crops and drove off livestock. This denuding of the countryside had two aims: to supply their own forces, and deny such supply to the enemy.38 Friendly civilians, the so-called Hensoppers or ‘Joiners’ together with women and children were brought into concentration camps to protect them from the full effect of this extreme application of a logistic strategy. There they were provided with food and shelter. There they were exposed to incompetence, indifference and maladministration; and more than 43,000 died in the British camps. One must question whether the British drew any political advantage by ‘shielding [their] supporters from the effects of the programme of terror implicit in such a logistic strategy’ by concentrating them in these camps.39

The Nature of the Boer Forces: The Origin of the Commando System

The very nature of the Boer commandos facilitated their transition to a guerrilla force. The majority of Boers lived in the country, surviving in relative isolation with the constant threat of a possible attack by wild animal or African warriors. In a constant state of preparedness, they acquired essential survival skills at an early age. A hardy people, excellent marksmen, and knowing their own country intimately, they were a stubborn foe—even for a nation with the resources of Britain. They had a natural sense of minor tactics and, although nearly all were mounted, they fought on foot. Thus, although incapable of conducting major operations, the Boer made excellent raiders.40

Cas Bakkes commenced his impassioned statement on the commando system, which was published in 1979, with these emotional words:41

Die burger, geklee in sy werksdrag, met ryperd, saal, toom en soms ’n bykomende perd met ’n paar dae se mondprovisie, ’n geweer, koeëls en kruit of patrone, aangewese om sy eie verdeiging waar te neem, was die kern van die kommandostelsel, want (soos dit uit hulle nagelate dokumente blyk); ’Wij hebben geen staande Armee soldaten, maar ons arme boer is zelfs de zoldaat. Wij zijn van zelfs Beschermers van onze land en Bewaakers tegen alle invallen van vijanden. Van achter zijn wij neen in het midden, van over den eenmaal honderd duysen wilde barbaarae en moordenaars en roovers geplaats, en soo ons niet Godt voor dát behoeid, wie sal ons redden? Wij zijn omringd van duizende van barbaren, die ons alle in een dag, ja, om zoo te zeggen in een uur kunne verdelgen.’42

Yes, the commando system played a key role in the history of South Africa. The principle of compulsory service by all able-bodied males came into force soon after the establishment in 1652 of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) refreshment post at the southern tip of Africa. Since then, this principle and the system to which it gave rise—namely the commando—was a central feature in burgher society and one which the trekboers and later the voortrekkers took with them to the republics they carved out of the hinterland. The commando was both a military and an economic institution, and—together with religion—was a key determinant
holding together and ensuring the survival of the burgher communities scattered during the Great Trek. Although the average Boer was an excellent shot, horseman and fieldcraftsman, most historians have presented a somewhat romanticised view. For example, to date, due to the emphasis placed in past studies upon Afrikaner nation-building and hence a common history, the intricate web of social relations—crucial for an understanding of the commando system—has been neglected.

The commando developed as an institution of the frontier when the Company could no longer afford border defence. While a town-based Burgher Militia, modelled on the militia in the United Provinces and comprising cavalry and infantry companies, was instituted at the time of the first VOC-Khoikhoi War (1659), this proved inadequate in the hinterland. Although the militia served with merit against the British during the two invasions of the Cape in 1795 and 1806, active service against the Khoisan and later the Xhosa was quite a different thing. The Burgher Militia, like the company garrison in Cape Town—many of whom were raw recruits straight from Europe, were 'Western' soldiers. They were uniformed, trained and organised according to the western way of war. Familiar with musket and pike and deployment in line and column, they were quite unprepared for the surprise, manoeuvrability and flexibility inherent in Khoisan and Xhosa tactics, and the essentials of fieldcraft. Unfamiliar topography and poor intelligence compounded this, particularly at greater distances from the Castle.

While the company garrison and burgher militia were retained for use in the event of a sea-borne attack by a European enemy, a third institution—the commandos, a mounted peoples' militia—gradually developed on the frontiers. Service in the commandos, like the Burgher Militia, was compulsory. Law and custom obliged all free burghers between the ages of 16 and 60 to undergo military training and render service whenever so required. Progressively, the free burghers came to dominate the expeditions formerly comprised of company soldiers only. There were sound reasons for this increasing burgher participation. They were more familiar with the veldt and the local topography, the habits of the enemy and, through their servants, they could acquire not always accurate intelligence. For the VOC, a profit-based trading company, the use of burghers implied a financial saving. Furthermore, with further expansion into the hinterland, the Castle became more and more removed from the threatened borders of the colony. It took the garrison longer and longer to reach remote frontier areas, and, as a result, frontiersmen felt more and more vulnerable and unprotected. A lack of confidence on the part of the burghers, in the Company and the competence of its soldiers accompanied this. Hence, there was pressure from burghers to protect themselves.

Although the number of free burghers gradually exceeded the number of soldiers on expedition, the Company attempted to maintain a strong grip by issuing definite instructions to the commandos and appointing garrison officers to their command. However, the eventual elimination of the company's presence was not far off and the first Burgher commando—consisting entirely of volunteers—was raised on 3 August 1715. This reflected an important change in policy and, in effect, meant that the free burghers, no longer having to wait for government troops, could act immediately against alleged thievery. Secondly, the initiative and control was now left in the hands of those, on the spot, whose well being, was immediately threatened. Finally, the friction between the frontiersmen and the company soldiers; between the natural shot and master of bushcraft and the Western-trained soldier (often mercenary) was done away with.

The combination of rifle and horse made the Boer commando almost invincible against African opponents armed largely with assegai and knobkierrie. As a general tactic, Boers rode to within range of African enemy, fired, reloaded and returned to within range and repeated this as necessary. Africans had little chance of coming sufficiently close to use their weapons. Moreover, most African formations were tightly bunched, so enabling maximum effect of concentrated fire. When they halted, the commandos always fortified in the form of laagers. Their tactics were to draw their enemy onto the laager and so derive maximum use of their firepower. Against the British, this did not work. They had to keep moving, denying pitched battle and operating against British weakness. Bombardment by British artillery—as General Piet Cronjé was to experience—made life in the laager none too comfortable.
This was all good and well as long as the commando system was not abused. However, from at least 1739, there are indications that the commandos were becoming increasingly violent and more proactive. The Company, in an attempt to stabilise the volatile situation on the frontiers, tried—mostly in vain—to exercise a measure of control through the selection and appointment of the burghers to lead the commandos, the issue of standing instructions, the supply of ammunition and the later despatch of company soldiers.

The **landdrost** (magistrate and district commissioner) personified the district's link with the central authority in Cape Town. He passed on the Castle's instructions to the commandant, who in turn passed these through to the **veldkornette** (field cornets), **wagmeesters** and so on to the burghers of the district. This 'interference' from far-off Cape Town was not welcomed on the frontier. The structure of this secluded, rustic (perhaps backwoods) society was typical of any open frontier. Very wealthy frontier farmers and particularly the Commando leaders (they were often one and the same) wielded authority based upon access to arms and ammunition and 'sustained through the distribution of spoils'. Controlling enormous acreage and commanding local respect, they were a law unto themselves. Large farms or small constellations of homesteads and smallholdings were almost 'states in miniature'—independent fiefs. The commando, as a band of armed retainers, had certain feudal features. The word of the local notable and not the wishes of distant Cape Town-based officials, was law. A number of these so-called 'frontier ruffians' refused to accept direction from Cape Town and a few even felt strong enough to come out in open revolt. The Prinsloos played a central role in the Graaff-Reinet rebellion of 1795 while FC Bezuidenhout—the 'hero' of the Slagter's Nek rebellion—'stood up to the impudent British who dared tell him how to treat his dependants'.

The system survived the British occupation and was taken to Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal, where it served as the defensive system for the Voortrekker communities. Religion and the commando—with its accompanying social structure—held these migrating communities together. Without exception, the Voortrekker leaders were all experienced commandants. These Trek leaders who 'emerged from the wealthiest of the migrants' set off with their clientage in tow, in search of new lands. The Great Trek was the largest expedition the commandos had to undertake, and soon a commandant in charge of all commandants was deemed necessary. This gave rise to the ranks of commandant general and chief commandant (**hoofkommandant**).

The relationships of power and property that had existed in the Cape Colony were thus reproduced in the newly established South African Republic and perhaps to a lesser extent in the Republic of the Orange Free State. The position of the field cornet—described by Trapido as 'the pivotal official of the burgher state'—remained essentially unchanged. Invariably he was elected from a family of local notables. He was the official with the most local authority. He was responsible to the Krygsraad (Military Council) and to the administrative and judicial authority of the **landdrost**. He was not only entrusted with the maintenance of combat-readyburghers in his ward and their mobilisation in case of emergency, but was also responsible for the registration of farms and administration of black people with his ward. Thus he was ideally placed for the accumulation of a large landed estate and acquisition of the necessary labour. Moreover, the office of field cornet was a useful escalator to higher office. According to Van Jaarsveld, a very high proportion of those who became members of the **Volksraad** began their careers as field cornets. Paul Kruger, Piet Joubert and Louis Botha were all land magnates who started their careers as field cornets and served some time as the commandant general.

The commandant general held a central and more than just a military position in Boer society. He fixed the prices of all commodities, acted as general broker in relation to the sale of ivory—the key means of exchange—and controlled the distribution of arms and ammunition, normally procured through Cape, Natal and Portuguese traders. Following the defeat of the British in 1881, the **Volksraad** of the now independent South African Republic decided that the term of office of the commandant general be ten years and that the incumbent sit on the Executive Council of the ZAR government. The commandant general, in effect, became a cabinet minister responsible for defence. At the same time, commandants were elected for a term of five years; and field cornets for three years. The ordinary burghers formed the
electorate. In 1894, possibly to limit the powers of the all powerful commandant general and the personal differences between Kruger and General Joubert, the latter's period of office was shortened to five years.  

The commando system and its officers—drawn from a class based upon the control of land, labour and trade—dominated the 'web of farmers, land speculators, merchants, and government officials, with the occasional lawyer, minister of religion, and journalist' that formed Transvaal society. The field cornets formed the pivot of this network, particularly after 1868 when they had become involved in tax assessment, collection and the liquidation of farming interests.

Most of those belonging to the bywoner class migrated to the South African Republic during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, at a time when farmland was no longer obtainable. They were men with movable property, who provided a share of their crops to the landowner and so added to his status. They also provided the rank-and-file for the commandos, inevitably commanded by the local landowner. Gradually, as land became commercially viable, the bywoner became an encumbrance. His status declined and his tenure became more precarious. The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) provided the opportunity for many landlords to refuse to resume patronage for those bywoners who had left the land to serve with the commandos.

If one accepts this, one must deduce that Christian principles and a strong sense of community can not have been that pervasive. According to Stan Trapido, 'the weakening of client-patron relationships and ... growing, but regionally uneven, impoverishment might have led to intra-Afrikaner class conflict'. Here much research needs to be done. We know that Afrikaner society was divided—both politically and economically—but we still need to ascertain how many landless bywoners became hensoppers (i.e. joined the British in the overthrow of a corrupt, land-based oligarchy) and how many served to the 'bitter end'(i.e. were Bittereinders). The bywoner had nothing to fight for. He was essentially landless and after the first months of the war, his movable property (mostly livestock) had been destroyed. The bywoners may have generally opted out.

**Military Capability of the Republics**

Although by 1899, the military system of the Boer republics had reached a peak in sophistication, the majority remained members of the commando system. While the officers of the two republics—even the generals—were elected they were in other respects no different from their British counterparts. At the outbreak of the war, the officers of the ZAR not only belonged, almost without exception, to the ruling oligarchy but many of the generals were related through ties of kinship and economic interests. Gustav Preller, for example, was the son of Commandant RCL Preller and Stephina, daughter of Commandant General Stephanus Schoeman. The incompetent General Hendrik Schoeman was his uncle. His wife, whom he married in 1898, was the daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel HPN Pretorius, commander of the Transvaal State Artillery, who (in turn) was a grandson of both Piet Retief and Piet Pretorius, brother of Commandant General AWJ Pretorius, and a cousin of President MW Pretorius. There was even a pre-war attempt by Kruger's government to establish a peerage for the Transvaal!

The election of officers, of course, did not always lead to creative strategy and tactics, or effective command. The very wealthy, or at best the popular, were not always military geniuses. Perhaps correctly, Pakenham has described the republican forces as a people's army—'commanded willy nilly'. Some of the best Boer generals, including De Wet, started the war as ordinary burghers. Boer veterans wore no medals, no uniforms. Their status was gauged by a white beard. Age often in combination with family credentials, bought respect and—as Botha and De Wet experienced—not young, innovative genius. According to Smuts, De Wet's 'active genius was thwarted at every stage by the stupidity of his superiors and the insubordination of his undisciplined men'.
However, the grip of the landed interest upon military command changed as the war progressed. The older guard, composed chiefly of Kruger's favourites, dishonoured themselves. General FA Grobler ('Groot Freek') was a staunch supporter of Kruger ... Many generals were appointed for no other reason—with dire results... General Erasmus 'should have been dismissed and punished ... for incapacity and disobedience'. Lukas Meyer was seized with paralysis and unable to operate offensively even under the most favourable of conditions. Jan Kock, exceeding his orders, led his commandos to a bloody defeat at Elandslaagte. Piet Cronjé's subordinates had to suffer his 'arrogant stupidity'. Hendrik Schoeman, perhaps the most pitiable of all the Krugerite generals, voluntarily surrendered, was arraigned for high treason and lynched by fellow burghers. Krause ascribed the heavy losses at Platrand:

to nothing else but want of discipline, and the ill-advised policy of the Kruger Government in interfering with the war operations, and appointing and keeping in command men like Schoeman, Erasmus etc, who are hardly fit to be employed even as common soldiers.

According to a contemporary observer, 'the conduct of these men was reported to the Government, time and time again ... But the President refused to believe anything against his favourites. He closed his eyes and stopped his ears and professed his belief in the help of God'.

Younger men, more deserving of the general's rank and 'in spite of gross prejudice and conservative stupidity', gradually replaced them. The four geniuses of the war, Botha, Smuts, de la Rey and de Wet all 'started and remained in a subordinate position until it was too late'. They could only push through to the front rank after the death of Joubert, the surrenders of Cronjé, Piet de Wet and Marthinus Prinsloo, the disgrace of Hendrik Schoeman, who 'represented in his person a whole vanished or vanishing order of things, both political and military', and, most importantly, the exile of Kruger. Nonetheless, by this time it was too late. Bloemfontein had fallen and the entire Boer campaign was being rolled back steadily. The nepotism of the Republican governments and the incompetence and arrogance of the military leadership, brought a situation that by late 1900 was past redemption.

Ineffective, even counterproductive, leadership was only part of the problem. Contemporary observers recognised that undisciplined troops severely affected operations. Discipline was generally bad. Officers who through the force of personality could not enforce their authority and attain respect experienced tremendous problems. In fact, most officers, particularly in the beginning, experienced problems in command and control. Even the charismatic Christiaan de Wet was no exception.

The State Artillery and ZARPs (South African Republic Police)—referred to as 'the disciplined force of Transvaal'—also experienced severe disciplinary problems. There are a legion of references to generals and commandants having to use force (de Wet had a whip) to keep the burghers at the front or enforce obedience. One must doubt de Kiewiet's description of the commando (although in a different era) as 'the sum of individual willingness' and Charles Townshend's belief that they were 'held together by voluntary co-operation'. Thus the weakest feature of the commandos was indiscipline: the burghers disliked being organised and their officers could never count on all the men on the muster roll being present to go into action.

However, to be fair, the burghers were untrained in matters military. Discipline and blind obedience to orders were foreign concepts. Townshend has stated that 'the Boer forces had always been at best (or worst) semi-regular armies ... loosely organized in "commandos" rather than conventional military structures'. Although this facilitated the transition to guerrilla warfare, following the defeat of the main Boer field armies; it certainly complicated the opening phases of the war. While one must agree with Preston et al that 'the Boers were hardy farmers who were excellent marksmen', one must question their too generous statement that the Boers 'were not hampered by traditional military concepts and methods'. Training in the art of war, and perhaps even the study of military history, might have produced quite different results. Not every Boer general was a de Wet, a Smuts or a de la Rey.
The British Army and the armed forces of both Boer republics went through an extensive rearmament programme during the last three decades of the century. The armies of both belligerent parties introduced breech-loading rifles that enhanced the rates of fire and allowed soldiers to fire from a prone position. Further sophistication—a bolt mechanism and magazine, smaller calibre ammunition, and smokeless propellants—enabled infantry to maintain rapid, aimed fire without powder obscuring the field of vision. The artillery of both armies also converted to breech-loading ordnance and adopted a smokeless propellant that had been available since the early 1890s.

Table 2: Rifles used by the Boers and British during the war, 1899-1902

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rifle</th>
<th>Calibre</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rifle</th>
<th>Calibre</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mauser</td>
<td>7 mm</td>
<td>49,810</td>
<td>Lee-Metford</td>
<td>7.69 mm (.303 inch)</td>
<td>Infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martini-Henri</td>
<td>11.4 mm</td>
<td>43,752</td>
<td>Lee-Enfield</td>
<td>7.69 mm (.303 inch)</td>
<td>Yeomanry (Reservists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guédes</td>
<td>8 mm</td>
<td>6150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee-Metford (.303 inch)</td>
<td>2730</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krag-Jorgensen</td>
<td>6.5 mm</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>102,542</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Total is for the two Boer republics at the start of the war. Rifles in private ownership not included.]

But how effective were these rifles? A comparison between the Mauser—chief weapon of the Boer commando—and the standard British Lee-Metford is revealing. Mauser rifles and cartridges were lighter. They could fire further and at a greater speed; and their magazines, accommodating five cartridges, were filled by means of a loading strip. The magazine of the Lee-Metford, on the other hand, could accommodate ten cartridges, but then these had to be loaded individually (Table 3). The deadly effect of the Mauser in the hands of the burghers eventually forced the British to alter their tactics.

Table 3: Comparison between the Mauser and Lee-Metford

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Mauser</th>
<th>Lee-Metford</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calibre</td>
<td>7 mm</td>
<td>7.69 mm (.303 inch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means of propulsion</td>
<td>smokeless cordite</td>
<td>smokeless cordite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight of bullet</td>
<td>24.8 g</td>
<td>31 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed (muzzle velocity)</td>
<td>728 metres per second</td>
<td>610 metres per second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum distance</td>
<td>4000 m</td>
<td>2560 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>4 kg</td>
<td>4.24 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>1.235 m</td>
<td>1.21 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loading method</td>
<td>magazine, 5 cartridges,</td>
<td>magazine, 10 cartridges,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>filled with loaded strip</td>
<td>filled individually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, not all burghers carried the Mauser. Many, and particularly Free Staters, still carried the cumbersome, and now out-dated, Martini-Henris. According to a veteran: 'Enkele dra nog Martini-Henri gewere en gaan gebuk onder die gewig van die swaar loodkoeëls, waarvan nie baie nodig is om 'n pond gewig op te maak nie'. The burghers expressed a strong preference for the Mauser and in Krugersdorp they refused to accept anything else. However, the older generals, familiar with the Martini-Henri, did not trust the newer technology. In 1896, the Commandant General, Piet Joubert, in a less than lucid moment, placed an order for antiquated, and by then already much-maligned, Martini-Henris.
Most burghers were excellent marksmen. Their ability to estimate distance ('goed om distansies te skat') resulted in deadly accurate fire. The British regiments, on the other hand, fired in volleys at the command of officers who also determined the distances, without actually aiming at a particular target. This was perhaps the reason why Boer veterans believed British fire at close quarters to be less accurate than at between 600 to 1000 yards. Although experiencing an initial difficulty in judging distance, the musketry of British troops improved after 1900. To say that all burghers were excellent marksmen is also an oversimplification. Although some (perhaps most) attended the annual wapenschauw (literally 'weapon show') no structured military training took place in either of the republics. Burghers living on farms and in rural areas grew up with a rifle in the hand and were masters at bushcraft. Those living in the towns, on the other hand, had no better acquaintance with either rifle or bush than the average British soldier did. This may perhaps explain the poor showing of the Johannesburg Commando under General JHM Kock at Elandslaagte on 21 October 1899. Urbanisation, the accumulation of wealth and a generally easier life certainly impacted negatively upon musketry and fieldcraft. The requisitions for supply submitted by the logistics commissioners on the front also present an interesting picture. Many commandos spent the first months of the war ordering extra bedding—pillows, mattresses and blankets—cutlery, and crockery. Ardagh's Military Notes were perhaps correct. The burgher of 1899 was possibly not as hardened, rough and ready as his counterpart in 1881.

Doctrinally, the British and republican armies were poorly prepared. The British soon found that 'technology and organisation were only adjuncts to, not substitutes for, inventive operational solutions', and that they could not always press what should have been their strong suit—technology. Their firepower, which normally gave them 'an important, but by no means decisive, advantage' in colonial warfare was somewhat counter-weighted by the artilleries of the two republics. European rivalries played a role in arming the Boers with modern weapons, comparable to those in the British arsenal. Of the two republics, the Transvaal, with approximately 450 well-trained artillerists in the State Artillery Corps, had the better artillery. Their guns were of heavier calibre than even those of the enemy, and comprised 12- and 15-pounders, Krupp guns, a few old Armstrongs, and the quick-firing Maxim-Nordenfeldts in addition to the heavy Creusots (Long Toms).

The British, however, had guns in greater numbers and the impact of these increased following the fall of Pretoria and the loss of the workshops there. The remoteness of some battlefields also made artillery a liability. The use of larger guns, such as the Creusot 75, could be maximised only if the battlefield was accessible and the enemy was willing to fight on the defensive. The Long Toms, which remained under-utilised, even wasted, had to be sacrificed early in the war in view of their bulkiness and relative immobility.

In the darker, earlier days of the war, Milner, in view of the 'colossal armaments of the SAR, could not but anticipate a terrible struggle ... ' A year later the situation had changed drastically. Unlike Britain, the Republics had a limited infrastructure and little logistic support to keep their weapons in service. For the first year, maintenance of guns and the manufacture of shells took place in Pretoria. By December 1899, the government stocks of rifles were diminishing and there was grave concern after Boer victories of that month that ammunition supplies would be exhausted. Thriftiness in battle was coupled with return of cartridges to Pretoria for reloading at the South African Explosives Factory. The NZASM (The Netherlands South African Railway Company) workshop repaired defective guns; while the engineering firm of Grunberg and Léon ensured a supply of gun ammunition: perhaps as much as 200 Krupp shells per day. Local manufacture and repair ended following the fall of Pretoria in June 1900.

The flow of consumables—spares, ammunition, fuel, clothing, and food—to the republican armies was difficult at the best of times. Much equipment and consumables could not be produced locally and had to be imported. Communication with the outside world, from whom the promise for support never came, was erratic and dependent upon the Portuguese at Lourenço Marques. These shortcomings seriously diminished Boer combat capability.
Britain thus had strategic reach. She could not only project manpower and firepower but also institute a naval blockade to halt the passage of arms and ammunition to the republics. Already in August 1899, consignments from the Creusot and Carlsruhe factories were stopped from leaving the docks at Lourenço Marques, following British pressure. War materials had to be sent under the guise of machinery. The republics, on the other hand, had no means to hamper British sea communications and the passage of materiel to South Africa.

Fighting over their own country they had no problem about supply. In terms of rations, the two republics did not seem to have a problem. The government of the ZAR was satisfied that food sufficient for six to eight months was laid up in storage and that there would be no shortage of meat or flour. After its many recent wars, the Transvaal logistic system was both in place and exercised. Yet despite this, the commandos experienced a shortage of food right from the start. Logistics broke down after the burghers had consumed their own supplies. The meat was of poor quality and in small quantity. The boere beskuit (rusks) were likewise inferior and in short supply. Faced with these conditions, alternative means had to be sought: goods were bought and looted at Belmont, where the burghers also did some ‘drinking at the Bar’.

The commissariat depots disappeared with the start of the guerrilla phase of the war.

**National Will**

As the clouds of war cast their long shadows over southern Africa, the Republics entered a defensive pact in 1897 and the younger burghers—bursting with patriotism—looked forward to a second Majuba. While cooler minds did not show the same enthusiasm, many—even in government circles—believed that the republics stood at the very least a reasonable chance of victory and that the war would last no more than six to eight months. A future combat general and later ‘joiner’, Piet de Wet, cautioned:

> Ons gaan nie net te doen hè met ’n klomp weerlose wesens nie, wat ons soos ’n klomp skape voor ons kan uitjaag nie, maar julle moet in gedagte hou dat die vyand net soos julle bekend is met korrel en visier, en glo aan dieselfde Voorsienigheid.

Although Calvinism was a common denominator, the Boers were not a united people with a common vision. Friction between the Transvaalers and Free Staters became more pronounced as the war progressed. Furthermore, as has already been noted, class differences existed in both republics. Traditional Afrikaans historians have emphasised the lack of social distinction within the republican military systems and founded their argument upon the practice of officer election and the accessibility of officers to the ordinary burghers. While the builders of the Afrikaner nationalism stressed this equality, other historians, chiefly neo-marxists, have questioned otherwise.

The ballot was not secret and bywoners (tenants) were pressed to elect their landlords or at least the foremost landlord of the district, to the position of field cornet. Yes, ordinary burghers had immediate and personal access to their officers. But the preponderance of evidence seems to suggest that this was the access bywoners would normally enjoy in presenting their personal problems or grievances to the landowners.

As with the squirearchy of rural England, Transvaal country society was inward looking. They married with other notable families and rapidly a network of familial, economic and political interests was formed. This was due to the small number of such notable families, bad roads, and marriages to secure inheritances. A class of quasi-feudal Afrikaner notables, with the assistance of their functionaries, came to acquire a monopoly over both the ownership of largely under-utilised land and government office. The British Agent, Conyngham Greene, described the position in 1899:

> The Kruger-Schutte-Kock-Wolmarans Gang ... was a mutual-benefit society, bound together by family and other ties of personal interest, whose aim it was to monopolize (sic) all the places of power, & plant their own relations in all the good positions.
The wealthy intervened in the interests of their children, relatives and associates. They appointed them to the relief committees to keep them out of the front lines. According to Ludwig Krause, Paul Kruger 'set the example of keeping his relations and children out of the fire as much as possible'. Or relatives were endowed with a military command. Kruger appointed Barend Vorster as Hoofd Commandant of Zoutpansberg, 'an office specially created by the President for a favourite' and over the head of the elected commandant. Furthermore, the notables also interfered in the judicial process. Kruger intervened to save a favourite. He had the sentence of cowardice and desertion against Field Cornet Jan du Preez reversed. 'That the poor private burger was punished, but that rich influential officers like Jan du Preez could do what they liked with impunity' obviously worked against high morale and esprit de corps.

According to Stan Trapido, a marxist historian, 'the weakening of client-patron relationships and ... growing, but regionally uneven, impoverishment might have led to intra-Afrikaner class conflict'. We know that Afrikaner society was divided—both politically and economically—but we still need to ascertain how many landless bywoners became hensoppers (ie joined the British in the overthrow of a corrupt, land-based oligarchy) and how many served to the 'bitter end' (ie were Bittereinders). The bywoner had nothing to fight for. As land became commercially viable before the war, the bywoner became an encumbrance. His status declined and his tenure became more precarious. The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) provided the opportunity for many landlords to refuse to resume patronage for those bywoners who had left the land to serve with the commandos. Having lost their movable property (mostly livestock) in the first months of the war, these landless bywoners may have tended to opt out of the war. Here much research needs to be done.

Relations between the Boers and the foreigners who—from as early as June 1899—volunteered to help oppose British aggrandisement were less than cordial. The rank and file had nothing but contempt for the foreigners, their education, manners and language. Boers saw them furthering their problems instead of lightening their burden. A clash between the educated, largely urban, middle class foreign volunteers and the 'rustic, patriarchal and conservative' Boers was to be expected. This was not a new thing. Kruger's erudite Dutch officials were ridiculed and criticised. Joubert also complained that he was continually harried by requests for accommodation, food, transport and arms. This is a little unfair, and archival evidence seems to point to the contrary.

The growing pace of surrenders and defections took its toll on morale. The unnecessary surrenders of Cronjé early in 1900 and that of Martinus Prinsloo in July of that year, broke not only the spirit of Joubert but also of the republican cause. 'What a shock it was to see him [General Joubert] only a few months later, grey-headed, with care-worn features and hollow cheeks. His heart was broken then, after Cronjé had blundered by allowing himself with close on 4,000 men to be captured, thereby breaking the spirit of nearly all and well nigh ruining our cause.' Both Smuts and De Wet realised that the republican forces had to be 'purged by these losses and defections' in order for the war to continue.

Furthermore, just as Boer national resolve seemed to be crumbling, that of the British Empire seemingly kicked in. The great hope of the republicans was a true people's war: a rising of the whole Afrikaner population including the Cape Dutch. This, their only realistic chance of success, might have swept the British out of southern Africa. Many of the most ambitious guerrilla operations were designed to inspire such a rising, but it never came. In its absence, the Boer commandos were effectively confined to defensive operations and, although the guerrilla war lasted nearly four times as long as the conventional phase, many (if not most) Boers recognised the futility of their struggle against an empire with her immeasurable war potential and her seemingly limitless military capacity. According to General Christiaan de Wet:

We knew, I need scarcely say, that humanity speaking ultimate victory for us was out of the question—that had been clear from the very beginning. For how could our diminutive army hope to stand against the overwhelming numbers at the enemy's command.
Endnotes

1. The term 'Boer' is used in its historical context. Gradually, after 1902 with the move from country to town and the solidifying of a common nationalism among South Africans of largely Dutch/German descent, 'Afrikaner' supplanted the term 'Boer' (meaning farmer).

2. These women and children included Boers and Blacks: indeed all those who rendered (or were suspected of rendering) assistance of any kind to the commandos in the field.

3 Quoted by Hew Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War (London: Routledge, 1993), 78.

4. The South African War, the Second War of Independence, the English War and the Boer War all insufficiently describe the complexities of the conflict. The Anglo-Boer War—perhaps too simplistically—is taken from the two main belligerents. This has several problems. Firstly, it excludes the 'other' parties (Cape Afrikaners, Australians, New Zealanders, Dutch, Belgians, Austrians, Russians, Germans, Frenchmen, Canadians, the Englishmen of Natal and the Cape, the so-called Uitlanders, and the thousands upon thousands of Black South Africans). Furthermore, it was not the second conflict between Boer and Briton. If one enumerates the events culminating at Slagtersnek and Bloomplaats, the war, which erupted in 1899, must number as the 4th Anglo-Boer War. The 'Three Years War' (De Wet's terminology) is too vague yet perhaps the best of a poor list. In South Africa, each of these terms carries a certain political baggage.


6. 'It's the tawny,
it's the blue:
it's the veldt,
it's the sky;
and a bird flies above in lonely flight—
that's all.'


12. Transvaal Archives Depot (hereinafter TAD): archives of the British Agent, Pretoria (hereinafter BA) 20, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 11 May 1899.

13. TAD: BA 21, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 28 June 1899.


15. TAD: A 12, Correspondence from High Commissioner, Chamberlain-Milner, 5 January 1899.

16. Ibid, 30 March 1899; and BA 20, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 6 May 1899.

17. TAD: BA 21, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 8 July 1899. The total white male population for both republics (?) was estimated at 66,498. This figure is ludicrous.

18. This comparative estimate includes the approximate 10,000 agterryers but excludes the substantial colonial forces on which Britain could call. The number of agterryers varies between seven and eleven thousand. See P Labuschagne, Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902: The Role and Contribution of Agterryers (Pretoria: Unisa, 1999), ix, 1; and Fransjoanh Pretorius, Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902 (Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg; Human & Rousseau, 1999), 294. 19. Pakenham, The Boer War, chapters 7 and 8; MJ Grobler, Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen: Generaal Prinsloo en die Bethlehem-Kommando (Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1937), 33-34; and numerous items in the Leyds Correspondente.


21. TAD: BA 21, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 8 July 1899, and Pakenham, The Boer War, 77, 96, 117.


24. Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War, 77-78.


27. Halifax (pop. 105,000), Southampton (pop 105,000), and South Shields (pop 101,000).
28. Many were prepared to travel out to South Africa at own cost. See Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 30 August 1899; Regeering Pretoria-Leyds, 31 August 1899; Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 22 September 1899, Regeering Pretoria-Leyds, 28 September 1899; Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 30 September 1899, and Regeering Pretoria-Leyds, 2 October 1899, in Leyds Correspondentie, 130, 173, 177, 180.

29. TAD: KG 1139, Briewen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps, Schiel-Commandant General, 15 September 1899.


31. TAB: archives of the Commandant General, ZAR (hereinafter KG) 1139, Briewen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps, Schiel-Commandant General, 20 September 1899.

32. Schmidl, 'Adolph Zboril'; 53-54; and M van Niekerk, 'Adolf Schiel en die Duitse Kommando' (Argiejaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis 1951/II).

33. Ian Hamilton. Majuba veteran and student of military history and strategy, was again an exception.

34. CAD: GH 39/12, Military Secretary, Letters Received, Miscellaneous, Buller-Milner, 12 November 1899.

35. TAD: KG 1139, Briewen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps. Lt Col Adolf Schiel-Staats Secretaris, Afdeling B, 25 September 1899 (f 54); and Schiel-Staatssecretaris, 1 October 1899 (f 168).


37. CAD: GH 40/8, Casualty Returns 1901.

38. Free State Archives Depot (hereinafter FAD): archives of the Military Governor (hereinafter MG) 24, Confidential Instruction, 7 December 1900: 'The Commander-in-Chief has noticed that, after the passage through a district of a column of troops, the food supplies therein do not appear to have sensibly diminished. The Commander-in-Chief knows how difficult it is to collect supplies over a scattered area, and at the same time defend a long column and complete a long march before nightfall, but he urges on officers commanding the columns that they should fully recognise the necessity of denuding the country of supplies and livestock, in order to secure the two-fold advantages of denying subsistence, and of being able to feed their own columns to the fullest extent from the country.'


41. C M Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstrook' in P G Nel (red.), Die Kultuurontplooiing van die Afrikaner (Pretoria en Kaapstad: HAUM, 1979), 294.

42. 'The burgher, clothed in everyday dress, with horse, saddle, bridle and sometimes another mount, with a few days of rations, a rifle, cartridges and powder or bullets, dependent upon his own defence, was the core of the commando system. As the documentary residue testifies:’ We have no standing army, but the poor farmer is himself the soldier. We are the protectors of our land and the guardians against all enemy invasions. We are in the middle of a hundred thousand wild barbarians and murderers and robbers, and were it not for God's protection, who would save us? We are surrounded by thousands of barbarians, who in one day, no, in one hour, could swamp us.”

43. Now the Kingdom of the Netherlands.


45. I D Bosman, Kommando-stelsel; HOIK tydperk, vol I (undated ms; Pretoria: Ms Documentation Centre, SANDF), 12-13.

46. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstrook', 296.

47. Cape Archives Depot: Council of Policy, C1457, 600-01.


49. For the example of the Battle of Vegkop (October 1836), see P Becker, Path of Blood: The Rise and Conquests of Mzilikazi, Founder of the Matabele Tribe of Southern Africa (London: Longman, 1962), 166.


52. Ibid.


54. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstrook', 301.
56. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur', 301 et seq.
59. Marks and Atmore (eds), *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa*, 33-34.
60. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur', 301 et seq.
63. Ibid, 361.
64. The old republican oligarchy showed a remarkable ability to survive both economically and politically. This can be clearly seen in the landed interests of men like Louis Botha and the composition of the first Union cabinet in 1910.
66. Military Archives Depot (hereinafter MAD); archives of the Adjutant General (hereinafter AG14), Box 25, file KA/Tvl, 'How Transvaal lost a peerage'. This was defeated in 1894, following a storm of protest from conservative elements and the satire of Eugene Marais.
70. J Taitz, K Gillings and A Davey (eds), *The War Memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, 1899-1900 (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1996), 6, 82. See also the case of Barend Vorster (ibid, 82-83).
72. Ibid, 54, 142.
73. Natrass and Spies (eds), *Jan Smuts*, 71.
76. Ibid, 7. Krause was a member of the Progressive Party—the parliamentary opposition to Kruger. He nevertheless presents a lucid, plausible picture. The facts speak for themselves.
77. Natrass and Spies (eds), *Jan Smuts*, 69, 82, and chapter 3: 'Reorganization' in general.
79. See de Wet, *Three Years War*: 'real discipline did not exist among the burghers' (15); 'they were quite unaccustomed to being under orders' (16); 'devoid of all military discipline' (64); and in conversation with General Piet Joubert' ... they don't know what discipline means' (63).
81. TAD: KG 1089, Staatsartillerie Strafboek. See for example the entry for FWG König, f 782.
84. Ibid, 159 (parentheses in original).
88. Ibid, chapter 3.
89. 'Some still carry Martini-Henri rifles and are bent double under the weight of the heavy lead rounds, few of which weigh a pound.' Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen*, 14.
90. '... wat is dan rede dat Commandt Genl geen Mauser s en patronen wil zenden burghers hier weigert nieuwe MH geweren te ontvangen ...' ('Why is it that the Commandant General will not provide Mausers and send rounds. The burghers here refuse to accept new Martini-Henris ...') TAD KG 457, Ammunisie nieuwe MH geweren te ontvangen ...
94. TAD: KG 1038 tot 1041, Skyfskietverslae, 1893-95.
95. TAD: archives of the Subkomitee van die Kommissariaat, Dundee' (hereinafter SCD) 1. Krijs Kommissariaat Dundee Order briefjes, 1899-1900: various folios: The approach of the German
Commando was quite different: requests for arms, ammunition, horses, and information on the disposition of the guns. See TAD KG 1139, Briwen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps, Schiel-Commandant General, 25 September 1899 (f 51); Schiel-Commandant General, 25 September 1899 (f 52); Schiel-Staats Secretaris, 25 September 1899, 25 September 1899 (f 54); Schiel Commandant General, 30 September 1899 (f 110); and Schiel-Staatssecretaris, 1 October 1899 (f 168).

96. Pakenham, The Boer War, 77.

97. D Porch, 'Imperial Wars: From the Seven Years War to the First World War', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern War, 84-85, 90.

98. Grobler, Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen, 30-31.


100. F Pretorius, Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902 (Cape Town, Pretoria, Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau; 1999), 84-85.

101. The Standard and Diggers’ News, 18 August 1899; TAD: BA 22, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Grene-Milner, 18 and 19 August 1899.


104. JA Mouton, Genl Piet Joubert in die Transvaalse Geskiedenis (Argiejaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis 1957 I), chapters 8, 9, 10 and 15; and Pretorius, Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, chap 1.


106. CAD: GH 26/398, Draft General and Confidential Despatches, Station Master, Belmont-Chief Train Manager, Cape Town, 16 October 1899.


108. Quoted by Grobler, Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen, 11. ['We are not simply going to have to deal with a bunch of defenceless beings, who we can chase before us like a flock of sheep but you must remember that the enemy just like our selves is acquainted with aim and viser, and believes in the same Provision ']


112. Preorrius, Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, 252-55: 'ranging from leave to horseshoes and lost horses'.

113. Personal communication: Rt Hon The Earl of Iddesleigh, 28 January 1983.

114. TAD: BA 20, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 10 March 1899, quoting Loveday, on the election of GD Wolmarans to the Executive Council, ZAR in succession to his elder brother, JMG Wolmarans.


116. Ibid, 82.

117. Ibid, 82-83.

118. Ibid, 100.


120. The old republican oligarchy showed a remarkable ability to survive both economically and politically. This can be clearly seen in the landed interests of men like Louis Botha and the composition of the first Union cabinet in 1910.

122. TAD: BA 21, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 7 June 1899.
124. See for example MCE van Schoor, ‘n Bittereinder aan die woord; Geskripte en toesprake van Mathinus Theunis Steyn (Bloemfontein: Oorlogsmuseum van die Boererepublieke, 1997), 21.
125. Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 247. A number of contemporary observers, however, have questioned the moral fibre of certain leaders, whose exploits were public knowledge. See for example Taitz et al (eds), *The War Memoirs of Ludwig Krause*, 6-7. An adequate case has already been made against the simple idea that Boer society was rustic, wholesome and corruption-free.
127. Schiel’s Germans enquired after arms, ammunition and horses. Compare, for example, the requisitions made by the Boer commandos: extra bedding, cutlery and crockery (TAD: SCD 1, Krijgs Commissariaat Dundee Order briefjes) with the requests made by the German Commando (TAD: KG 1139, Briewen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps) during the same period.
130. Townshend, ‘People’s War’, 159.
131. de Wet, *Three Years War*, 64.
By the very nature of its title, this contribution to understanding the Boer War and its place in history may be different from those that are concerned entirely with a narrative of the war itself. The term 'media war' was coined in the immediate aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, first appearing in print a year after, and at the end of the twentieth century it has become a commonplace expression. In Britain particularly, diplomatic and military historians have adopted the term 'media war' to a long-standing belief that mass news media coverage has been a missing or misunderstood element in the wider understanding of war. The concept has also provided a convenient vehicle for the continuing process of making whole what should never have been separated: by forging links between military history on the one side, and political, cultural and social history on the other.¹

The application of the concept of media war to the South African War of 1899-1902 presents the obvious historical problems inherent in applying the ideas of one society and historical period to another. It is an essential part of history that analysis should not be too prescriptive, and parallels not too readily drawn; if there is one rejoinder that characterises academic historical debate, it is the cliche that 'things were more complicated than that'. The current and well-established view of the British school of military history sees one of its principal roles as disabusing politicians, defence professionals and others who might seek to use history for support rather than for illumination, of cherished but flawed beliefs, rather than offering prescriptive lessons from the past. But such parallels and comparisons may still be of value, as much for the differences that they reveal as the similarities. There is also the long-standing tradition among historians of a search for origins, to investigate how far into the past any apparently new idea or phenomenon may be traced. There are a number of similarities both in communications and media technology, and in the nature of the wars of the period, between the 1890s and the 1990s, that makes such comparisons particularly fruitful. As it happens, the Boer War has also been largely neglected in histories of military-media relations and of propaganda; the few mentions that it has received being surprisingly inaccurate or superficial.²

The term 'media war' has also been increasingly used in the 1990s by defence professionals as synonymous with propaganda. There is indeed a degree of overlap, but in so far as propaganda is concerned with altering opinions and perceptions for the benefit of the propagator, it is capable of an extremely wide definition, to embrace almost any form of human activity. The most common and most fruitful form of military battlefield propaganda this century has been the humble leaflet distributed to enemy troops. This did not feature in any significant manner in the Boer War, except perhaps in the form of the safe-conduct pass.  

'Media war' describes something that is at once smaller and larger than propaganda. It is smaller because it is not so all-embracing, but concerned only with the mass communications media. But it is also larger, because it deals not just with the efforts of governments, armed forces or others to manipulate opinions, but with the entire breadth of involvement of the mass media in a war, from the front lines to the highest political levels, and to the broadest social impact on civil society, including the perception of the war held by later generations. Partly, 'media war' is concerned with institutions and technologies, in particular the reporters and their employers, and their relationship with both the armed forces and with wider society. Partly it is concerned with the abstract, and with the difficult concept of public opinion as related to war. Often what has been discovered by historians is that although contemporaries may have assumed a simple and direct relationship between media reporting of a war and public support for its conduct, the evidence is anything but straightforward. An important early case of this problem, although by no means the first in history, is the link between Lord Roberts' self-proclaimed victory over the Boers' in 1900 and the subsequent 'Khaki Election' in Britain.³
The age of the war reporter, and indeed of news reporting in the modern sense, came in the middle nineteenth century. It was the product of the double revolution in communications technology of the 1830s, the development of railways and steamships and of the electric telegraph, which between them allowed both physical travel and the transfer of information on scales, at speeds, and over distances that were unprecedented in human history. By 1899 the British Empire was linked together by a unique global network of underwater telegraph cables, the existence of which helped determine the nature of the Boer War. This was a considerable information advantage at a time when in the Transvaal (correctly: the South African Republic or ZAR) the existence of a telephone in a private house was a rarity worthy of comment.

The Boer War was for Britain an expeditionary war. Britain in 1899 had the ability, in the form of a commercial steamship fleet of unprecedented size, to project considerable military strength to any part of the globe within reach of a deep-water port, and to do so within a matter of months. During the course of the war, just over 1000 British merchant ships carried 386,081 troops with their equipment to South Africa (and in many cases back home again as well), as well as 352,864 horses and accompanying stores. But the Empire had also communications making it possible for the first time for events on a distant battlefield to be reported to the metropolis, by methods other than those under government and military control, with sufficient speed to have direct political consequences. The existence before 1899 of telephones, film and automobiles, and after that date of radio, television, computers and satellites, have all extended this double communications revolution, but not transcended it. The adoption of new media and communications technology in the twentieth century has been a complex interaction of social and political structures. Just as the first breech-loading rifles were built more than two centuries before their widespread military use, so the chemical telegraph printer or fax machine was first demonstrated and patented in 1847.

As it happened, the decade before the Boer War was accompanied both by very rapid developments in communications technology, and the emergence of a number of new forms of mass media. The invention of the functioning cine-camera is conventionally dated to 1896, and the Boer War was a technology; the newsreel was not yet an established feature of working class urban life in Europe, as it was to become over the next decade. There is not much evidence that genuine films of the war made much greater impact on public attitudes than some of the rather more famous fictional productions. Of greater importance in historical terms was the widespread use since the 1880s of lightweight still cameras, used by serving soldiers, civilians and conventional reporters as well as by the few photojournalists. In 1894 the new primed photographic or illustrated postcard was introduced, thanks to new printing techniques; and in 1897 George Eastman introduced the Pocket Kodak, which was widely used throughout the war. Some of the more dramatic images appeared in contemporary pictorial newspapers like the Graphic, including photographs of the dead at Spion Kop. Others, such as the touching photographic studies of wasted children taken in the Bloemfontein concentration camp, belong to the historical rather than the contemporary record of the war.

Despite these new media technologies, reporting and recording the Boer War remained dominated by the written word and the daily newspaper, both in southern Africa itself and around the world, supplemented by the vivid half-tone illustration. The developments of most importance before the war were the introduction 1896 by Alfred Harmsworth of the London Daily Mail as the first mass popular circulation newspaper, and the establishment in 1898 of the Imperial Penny Post which made it possible for letters to be sent virtually anywhere in the Empire. This, together with the telegraph, meant that the Boer War could be reported in a manner and on a scale not seen before in history.

As throughout the rest of the Empire, it was common practice in peacetime for the London newspapers to rely on reports and opinions supplied by the local press in southern Africa, rather than base their own independent reporters there. In turn, the Empire was effectively dependent on stories retransmitted from London for most of its news of the wider world. It was an important part of their development that for the Boer War, Australia, Canada and New Zealand sent not only troops to southern Africa but also their own reporters. The most famous
of these, of course, was Andrew Paterson of the Sydney Morning Herald, better known as the poet 'Banjo' Paterson, composer of 'Waltzing Matilda'. Reuters and other news agencies also used as stringers reporters and editors from a variety of newspapers in Cape Colony, Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Given the basic reluctance of late nineteenth century British governments to engage in expansionist wars, the use of the press and other methods by ambitious colonial figures to force war on Whitehall had been noted by contemporaries before 1899. Successful cases of this phenomenon included George Grey with the Waikato War in New Zealand in 1863, and Bartle Frere with the Zulu War in 1879. The arguments used by contemporary Radical critics of these wars were also virtually identical to the 'manufacturing consent' hypothesis associated in the late twentieth century with Professor Noam Chomsky. This ability of colonial authorities to dictate war-making policy to uncertain or indifferent governments in London, partly by deliberate manipulation of the press and public opinion, has been a neglected issue in Imperial history.8

Despite the determination of the British to learn from their experience, no major investigation of the role of the press in the war featured in the Elgin Commission Report, or in the War Office Official History of the War in South Africa, or even in LS Amery's The Times History of the War in South Africa. Partly this was because the investigators were themselves too close to the issue, taking the very close relationship between the London press, politics and perceived public opinion in war for granted. Most obviously this was true of Amery, who was chief war correspondent for The Times in South Africa 1899-1900. Partly it was because most statesmen and senior Army commanders alike saw their relations with the press as personal and slightly shameful, something best left to their staffs except on rare occasions, rather than as an integral part of their professional role. The only prominent exception to this was Lord Roberts, who was quite prepared to declare war reporters his comrades in public, as long as they did his bidding, but whose reputation suffered in consequence. In a tradition based on 'great men' and on 'drum and trumpet' military history, media relations was one more neglected field, together with logistics, officer-man relations and many others, which a later generation of historians has attempted to recover.9

In Britain, with the notable exception of the Manchester Guardian, the major newspapers both supported government policy in going to war, and its prosecution through to a conclusion. The industrialist George Cadbury, of the famous Quaker pacifist family, actually bought the Daily News in 1901 in the hope of providing a platform for anti-war views. But this support of newspapers for the war's prosecution was not the same as giving support to individual generals, or to all aspects of the war's conduct, and it was heavily predicated on the assumption of British victory.10

The established British war reporters (not all of who were British nationals, including as they did the American Julian Ralph for the Daily Mail) were known to transfer from one newspaper to another as better offers were made for their services, and any link between their writings and the political stance of their newspaper was by no means straightforward. John Black Atkins, reporting for the Manchester Guardian, was broadly supportive of the war effort, while Henry Nevinson of the jingoistic Daily Chronicle developed a reputation for being pro-Boer. But in addition largely to sharing the values of their society, these men saw their role as providing vivid and lengthy descriptions of battles, rather than engaging in criticisms of higher command or wider strategy. In contrast to most earlier colonial wars, the Boer War was also quite a dangerous experience for the professional war reporter. Of the better known British reporters, GW Steevens of the Daily Mail died of fever in Ladysmith, EF Knight of the Morning Post lost an arm to a Boer bullet, Aubron Herbert of The Times lost a leg, and Winston Churchill, also of the Morning Post, saw his younger brother Jack, serving with the South African Light Horse, wounded beside him.11

One notable feature of British political conduct in southern Africa from the Jameson Raid to the Vereeniging settlement was the degree of familiarity with the press shown by the new generation of Conservative Imperialists who were the war's most enthusiastic supporters. Whereas the older generation of politicians like Lord Salisbury accepted an interaction with the press as part of their duty, Sir Alfred Milner and his men were what a later generation would call 'media literate' to an unusual degree, and actively sought to involve the media in
their plans. Milner himself had worked earlier in his career on the *Pall Mall Gazette*, while among the bright young men of his famous 'Kindergarten' administering South Africa after the war were Geoffrey Robinson (who as Geoffrey Dawson would rise to be Editor of *The Times*) and John Buchan, who in addition to his novels held several senior positions in British propaganda during the First World War. Milner could also draw on the support in South Africa of such notable figures as Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle, who both contributed to *The Friend*, a British propaganda newspaper established by Lord Roberts in Bloemfontein after its capture in March 1900; and also on the support of ambitious Conservative Imperialist young men such as Amery and Churchill.12

Because no vital British interest was perceived to be at stake in the war, other than an increasing view after Black Week that British Imperial prestige depended upon victory, public opinion was perceived as being of critical importance to its conduct. Historians point to the reluctance of Lord Salisbury's government to engage in war against the Boer republics, on the very reasonable assumption that they were likely to fall quite peacefully under British control within a few decades, as indeed the Transvaal had briefly done between 1877 and 1880. There is no doubt that to oppose this position both Milner and Cecil Rhodes deliberately manipulated both the provincial press in southern Africa and as far as they could the London press, helping create a climate of public opinion for war. Rhodes in particular targeted the General Manager of Reuters in South Africa, MJM Bellasyse, whom he absurdly accused of being 'Pro-Boer', and who was replaced shortly after the war's outbreak by Howell A 'Taffy' Gwynne, a notably extreme Imperialist. Typical of the kind of newspaperman helping shape British public opinion were FW Moneypenny, a former assistant editor of *The Times* in London who edited the pro-Rhodes *Johannesburg Star*, and who rejoined *The Times* as a war correspondent in October 1899; together with Vere Stent of the anti-Boer *Transvaal Leader* and W H Mackay, editor of the anti-Boer *Pretoria Press*, who were both Reuters agents.13

These attempts at creating a climate of public opinion for war were aimed at Britain through the English-language press of southern Africa only. Apparently without exception, each side in the increasing conflict aimed its propaganda at its own supporters and treated the other side as a lost cause. Even after the outbreak of war there was no real attempt by the British to close down or regulate Afrikaans-language newspapers in Cape Colony and Natal, which continued to publish the most vehement anti-British sentiments, although newspapers in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal were closed down or taken over by Lord Roberts as his campaign progressed from town to town in 1900.14

On the other side, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State made little or no effort in creating a co-ordinated media strategy, either within southern Africa or within Europe, to go with their political and military strategy. To have done so would have required a degree of political sophistication, and knowledge of European politics, that was probably beyond its leaders at the time. It was also physically quite difficult to report the war from the Boer side, even before the fall of Pretoria. Through their settlement at Aden, the British controlled all telegraph lines out of southern Africa, including from Pretoria and Lorenço Marques, and only a handful of reporters accompanied the Boer commandos.15

Famously, since 1897 Dr Willem Leyds as the South African Republic's Ambassador-at-Large to Europe had from his headquarters in Brussels sought to influence others to support the Boer cause by encouraging anti-British propaganda as well as by diplomacy. In one assessment, Leyds 'was to cause almost as much embarrassment to Queen Victoria as Kruger himself'. The British attributed many of their difficulties in Europe to Leyds; and if the actual achievements of his policy of demonising the British was slight, with propaganda largely restricted in Germany and France to satirical magazines or specialist publications, the impact could be considerable if brief. A well-known cartoon showing Kitchener and Joseph Chamberlain as devils stoking a cauldron with dead children which appeared in the German satirical magazine *Ulk* in 1901 (and is reproduced by Thomas Pakenham in his popular history *The Boer War*) seems to have drawn as much criticism as praise. This was even more true of an otherwise innocent-looking drawing dedicated to Leyds, 'Hero Worship' by Thomas Heine, which appeared in the special German publication *Der Burenkrieg*. The caption of this drawing read: 'English princesses decorate the youngest soldier in the British Army for having already, at the age of thirteen years, raped eight Boer women'.16
Boer propaganda produced in Europe, and indeed their whole media stance, was otherwise characteristically ‘reflexive’ in nature. That is to say, although apparently aimed at others, its main function was to demonstrate to the Boers themselves the wickedness of their enemy and their own righteousness. This applied to Leyds’ speeches just as much to the articles on farm burning for European newspapers that Jan Smuts found time to write while on commando. This assumption of the self-evident justice of their cause and ability to fight for themselves by the Boer leaders also ran contrary to any attempts to generate outside support. ‘Thank you for coming’, President Paul Kruger told one group of foreign volunteers, ‘Don’t imagine that we have need of you. The Transvaal wants no foreign help but if you wish to fight for us you are welcome’. Other foreign volunteers also found the Boers on commando hostile and insular, and only in rare cases did they develop closer ties. Equally, the small number of American reporters who accompanied the commandos seem to have decided on a pro-Boer stance before entering the war zone, rather than being converted by their experiences.17

Even so, in an important sense the first political and propaganda battle of the war was won by the Boers even before their ultimatum of October 1899. British military doctrine of the time drew a very sharp distinction between the rules and methods of conduct of European warfare or Grande Guerre, and those of savage warfare or ‘small wars’ (not in the sense of being small in scale, but as a different type of war). In 1896 this doctrinal division was made absolute with the publication of the first edition of CE Callwell’s textbook of imperial soldiering, Small Wars. (This absolute distinction, which fell rather out of favour in the course of the century, has recently been revived through the introduction in 1994 by the United States of the doctrinal term ‘operations other than war’, adopted by a number of other countries.) The Boer success in 1899 was in proclaiming themselves to be the inhabitants of organised and developed states along European lines, and without much thought the British also accepted this position. In the famous phrase of the time, this was to be ‘a white man’s war’. From the British side the Boer War was initially reported as the American Civil War or the Franco-Prussian War had been, with an emphasis on setpiece battles, and on the capture of the enemy capital cities in the expectation that this meant the war’s end. This portrayal of the two republics as organised states to which individual Boer farmers and their families owed an abstract loyalty was very far from reality, as was shown when the fall of the capitals failed to produce the expected victory, and by the repeated breakdown of central authority over the commandos.18

The strategic situation faced by the two Boer republics in October 1899 also closely resembled that of the Southern Confederacy in early 1861. The surprise ultimatum had successfully pre-empted the main British deployment, and offered perhaps the only chance of an outright Boer military victory. As envisaged by Jan Smuts in particular, a three-pronged commando invasion of Cape Colony could have triggered an uprising from its Boer population and the capture of its deep-water ports while the bulk of the British expeditionary Army Corps under Sir Redvers Buller was still on the high seas. The Afrikaans language press contributed to the atmosphere of revolt against the British, but despite repeated commando invasions through to 1902 no such revolt ever materialised in Cape Colony. This once more suggests that a common Boer identity in terms of European patriotism was not a particularly significant factor in the war, and that the Boer propaganda and media strategy aimed at stimulating such an identity may have been misconceived.19

After the failure to win a quick success, the only realistic chance for the Boer republics was a political victory rather than a military one. Commandant-General Piet Joubert expected to fight his last war again. The experience of the First Boer War 1880-81 (or Transvaal War of Independence) was that the shock of one or more Boer victories on the scale of Majuba Hill would cause the Salisbury government to fall to public pressure, and a new Liberal government would negotiate peace. This opportunity came with the triple British defeat of ‘Black Week’ in December 1899. It is not simply historical revisionism to stress how militarily lacking in significance the three British defeats at Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso were. The total British dead for all three battles was under 400 soldiers, compared to nearly 1000 lost at Maiwand in 1878 and a similar number at Isandlwana in 1879. The underlying cause of all three defeats, understood at the time by experienced British officers, was the lack of an effective supply system and mounted scouting forces, the creation of both of which had
been pre-empted by the Boer ultimatum and sieges. This importance granted to these battles has also obscured for historians the British record against the Boers up to that point, which at four victories and two defeats does not support the conventional view of an army bulging with incompetence. British expeditionary strategy of the middle and late nineteenth century was based on strength in depth and the ability to recover from such defeats; it was the political decision to make peace after Majuba that had been the exceptional case.\(^{20}\)

The Boer victories of 'Black Week' derived their importance from their impact on politics and public opinion in London, rather than presenting the republics with any military advantage on which they might capitalise. Denys Reitz recorded the expectation in his own commando that 'peace would soon follow' as it had after Majuba. But at this low point for the British, there is nothing to indicate a prepared or sustained political offensive by the Boer Republics in order to secure a climate for peace in London, or intervention from outside. President Kruger's mission to the capitals of Europe after the fall of Pretoria was a case of political mis-timing.\(^{21}\)

An informal War Office enquiry a few months before the Boer War found that the vast majority of owners and editors of British newspapers were anxious to co-operate with the government in wartime, and favoured informal agreements on security issues. Lord Lansdowne's rejection of these offers in favour of attempts at formal military control of the press, which in 1899 were unsuccessful, was the first case of a wartime dynamic between military authorities and the media which has characterised all twentieth century wars. Another common theme which found its first expression in the Boer War was the military belief that recent changes to press behaviour, public sensibilities and media technology posed a new and dangerous threat to their ability to carry out military operations. The Adjutant General, Sir Evelyn Wood, wrote a few months before the war's outbreak:

> It is unnecessary to quote historical examples to prove the advantages derived in past wars by military commanders from a study of the newspapers of the enemy. The possibility of so reaping advantage has been greatly enhanced in modern times by the multiplication and acceleration of the means of communication and the feverish competition of modern journalism to obtain news which will interest the enormous reading public for which it caters.\(^{22}\)

The military controls which were prepared in peacetime for the British press between 1902 and 1914 were not the personal creation of Lord Kitchener, but a genuine attempt by the Army to address what it saw as a serious threat to its ability to wage war. (There is no doubt, however, that Kitchener was deeply hostile to the press after his experience with them in the Sudan in 1898.)

In the absence of any formal analysis or investigation, or anything resembling a Staff College doctrine on the press, the views of senior officers were most likely to have been shaped by personal experience earlier in their careers. A number of commanders and their staffs who served in the Boer War had such direct campaign experience. Lord Roberts, although he had not seen active service since 1880, had effectively invented the prevailing command style of unofficial rewards and restrictions towards the press in his campaign in Afghanistan of that year.

Since then, like his rival Lord Wolseley, he had maintained and developed his press contacts in Britain. Kitchener in the Sudan had established his own personal approach, based more on restriction and control rather than co-operation. Lord Methuen had served in 1897 as the unofficial press censor for a punitive expedition on the Afghan frontier, and showed a relaxed and supportive attitude towards the press in South Africa. Sir Redvers Buller, as Adjutant General in 1889, had introduced the first formal licences for war correspondents with the Army, although in his relations with the press, Buller remained friendly but formal, rather than proactive and manipulative like Roberts.\(^{23}\)
A number of significant middle-ranking officers also had experience from earlier wars, either of writing anonymous paid reports for newspapers, or of providing illustrations, or of acting as censors on the staff, including through association with Roberts. These included Colonel Robert Baden-Powell, Colonel Ian Hamilton, and Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson. Even Major Douglas Haig, who like Lord Kitchener had the lowest opinion possible of war reporters at this stage of his career, understood their value in providing support and publicity, and was by no means discourteous or un receptive to approaches from reporters.\(^{24}\)

From the point of view of Britain and the Empire, reporting from southern Africa itself in the course of the war followed four overlapping phases, closely matching the progress of the war itself. Its opening months from October 1899 onwards were marked by a British failure, as a War Office system of control based on previous practice in colonial war of a small number of accredited war reporters accompanying the Army broke down or was never properly implemented. Instead, the relatively sophisticated and well-developed infrastructure of southern Africa allowed and encouraged a much greater number of reporters, and this opening phase of the Boer War saw the first example in warfare of a ‘media circus’. The Reuters news agency employed about 100 reporters and stringers in the course of the war, and 21 of them saw enough action with the British to receive the campaign medal. The big London daily newspapers each maintained a staff of 20 or so in southern Africa, supporting four or five war reporters in the field, backed up by political correspondents based largely in Cape Town; while many of the minor British newspapers also sent at least one war reporter. The War Office’s failure to establish either effective pre-war regulations or agreements with the major newspapers meant that it was also possible for individuals to travel to South Africa as reporters who had quite separate motives. The most famous of these was the young Churchill, certainly in South Africa to report for the *Morning Post*, but also intent on establishing a reputation for himself in order to enter a career in politics, which he did on his return. According to British censors’ notes, an important motive for Lord de la Warr, who came out to South Africa for *The Globe* but soon resigned, was pursuit of another man’s wife. An exact total may never be known, but according to censors’ records there were at least 70 accredited reporters with the British in early 1900, and probably over 200 individuals involved in the news media process at the war’s height.\(^{25}\)

The second phase of the war, in terms of military relations with the mass media, was marked by a gradual establishment of mutually agreed rules and methods of conduct, beginning with the arrival of Colonel Edward, Lord Stanley, in South Africa as the Army’s chief censor. The presence of the politically sophisticated Lord Stanley was an indicator of how seriously the British government regarded the issue of press censorship. A former government Whip, he would become Earl of Derby and Minister for War in the First World War. Also, and not unusually for the twentieth century, the press themselves reacted to a coherent censorship policy with relief and enthusiasm at knowing the parameters within which they were to work. This phase of relative harmony between the press and the Army reached its peak under Roberts, although it was a harmony based on the understanding that Roberts and his staff occupied by far the dominant position.\(^{26}\)

The third phase came between July and December 1900, after the fall of Pretoria, when most reporters including virtually all the famous names associated with reporting the Boer War simply went home, sharing with Roberts the conviction that the war was successfully over. Lord Stanley also left South Africa with Roberts at the end of the year. The importance of the role of the press in this British self-deception should not be under-estimated, particularly in their praise of Roberts. For the final and guerrilla phase of the war, other than one or two war reporters such as Bennet Burleigh of the *Daily Telegraph* or the newcomer Edgar Wallace of the *Daily Mail*, British newspapers were dependent on Reuters and other news agencies or on stories from local newspapers, exactly as they had been before the war. By January 1901 the war had almost ceased to feature at all in the provincial press in Britain, while in the London press it was marked more by critical leader articles than by an increasingly few actual reports from the front.
Although Kitchener inherited from Roberts a compliant British and local press, his own attempts to exercise even greater control gradually brought about a deterioration in relations, and a polarisation of opinion between such figures as Gwynne on the one side, and Edgar Wallace on the other. The strategy established by Roberts and developed by Kitchener of farm burning and concentration camps, particularly at a time when the British Government had proclaimed that there was no war in South Africa, created a second major dynamic in military-media relations of the twentieth century. At a time when the term ‘concentration camp’ was still fresh in public sensibilities from Cuba in 1898, the military maladministration of the camps, together with such practices as an authorised food ration scale for the families of Boers who had not surrendered lower than for those who had provoked outrage in London when they were revealed by the press. The Liberal Leader of the Opposition, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in a speech to a Liberal Party dinner at the Holborn Restaurant on 14 June 1901, declared that:

A phrase often used is ‘war is war’. But when one comes to ask about it, one is told that no war is going on—that it is not war. When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa. 27

It has been a repeated characteristic of twentieth century governments and their armed forces to take the position that indeed ‘war is war’, and to seek to impose on the press in expeditionary wars the same obligations and restrictions as in wars of national survival. Equally, although the media have often accepted restrictions placed upon them in total war, political conflict has arisen over the extent to which the ‘war rules’ should apply in lesser conflicts. It is significant that the main criticisms of Kitchener’s conduct of the war did not come from reporters within South Africa itself, who saw their role as reporting with the mounted columns and blockhouse patrols, rather than criticising high policy. Rather, it came from editorials and accounts that appeared in newspapers from informal observers after they had left South Africa, most famously Emily Hobhouse over the concentration camps. A passage from a short story published after the war by Captain Ernest Swinton of the Royal Engineers (later famous in the First World War for contributing to the invention of the tank) catches the prevailing attitude to such writings among junior officers nicely:

He thought of what would happen if they got too close to the enemy's trap to open out in time, and were caught in column by a cross-fire Stellenbosch for him! Scare headlines in the papers at home! 'Another regrettable incident!' 'When will our officers learn sense?' 'When will they take their profession seriously?' He had quite recently smelt the railway, and had browsed on old papers, and knew the gush by heart! How he would like to have 'Constant Reader' ahead to guide now, and 'Taxpayer' alongside himself to advise! 28

This military response, to see such writings as unwarranted interference rather than a legitimate expression of public opinion, has again been characteristic of many twentieth century wars.

By way of summing up: it is not necessary to overdraw parallels, nor to project back onto a previous age the obsessions of our own, to show beyond dispute that the role of the mass news media in the Boer War was, and was recognised at the time to be, of central importance to its conduct. The Boer War was a media war, just as much as it was a political war, or a soldier's war, or a people's war. It is a sufficient starting place in our understanding both of this war and of warfare in general, for this fact to be recognised.
Endnotes


5. Winston, Media Technology and Society, 28; Eversley Belfield, The Boer War (London: Leo Cooper, 1975), 165-68.


10. Thompson, Easily Led, 244-45; Potter, 'The British Press and news gathering strategies'.


The graves of the 270 Canadian soldiers who died during the South African War are easily identifiable, even from a distance. Their large granite stones, with Canada inscribed on the top of their black facing and a large maple leaf below, stand out from among the simple wooden or iron crosses that mark the remains of the other soldiers who died in the service of British arms during the South African War. These memorials are the work of the Canadian South African Memorial Association, established in February 1902 to identify, mark and care for the graves of Canada's war dead. They speak eloquently of Canada's desire for distinctiveness within the imperial family, a desire that was enhanced by its soldiers' negative and positive relations with imperial troops.

Politicians and scholars have long seen war as a unifying force, especially in fragmented societies, an occasion to forge lasting memories and bonds of common experience. Certainly this was how the Mayor of Quebec City and later Premier of the province, EN Parent, viewed Canada's potential service in the South African War. In his farewell remarks to the men of Canada's first contingent of Canadian troops who embarked for South Africa from his city, he speculated that should the Canadian West 'ever cry out for separation from the East, the blood of lads from British Columbia, Quebec and the Maritime provinces will cry from kopje and veldt, we will be true to our past and remain united'. Perhaps an even better example of the effect of war on national identity is the construction of contemporary Australian nationalism, a movement that owes much to Australian participation in imperial wars, not least of all the Anglo-Boer War where some Australians have characterised themselves as the scapegoats of Empire. Similarly Canadians' perception of their soldiers' service with imperial troops reinforced their self-consciousness and sense of difference within the Imperial family.

Although the Boer War did not create this sense of Canadian distinctiveness, it did enhance it. Indeed three decades or more before the war began, some English Canadian intellectuals had set out to reinforce and define the 49th parallel, to map a nation from the fashionable contemporary notions of race, environment and institutions. In their Darwinian view Canada was a nation born and refined through struggle against nature, for borders, popular institutions and for a place within the Empire. It was a community bred from a Nordic environment, one that had climatically selected and refined particular European peoples. In Canada these peoples had been moulded by a British institutional heritage that framed their civil society, setting them apart from their lawless southern neighbours. Whether the country's British-American inhabitants had been formed more by their physical environment or their institutional heritage, and thereby were more American or British, remained an open and controversial subject. Most agreed, however, that whatever the British-American mix, Canada possessed a discernible identity within the British family.

They also determined to use Canada's participation in the South African War to assert that character and demand its recognition. In the words of Canada's Minister of Militia, Frederick Borden, Canada's participation in the South African War was nothing less than the voice of Canada announcing to the world that it was no longer a colony but a mature nation of the empire. Much of the contemporary pro-war press shared the Minister's aspirations. From the beginning they had insisted that Canadian troops fight as a unit under Canadian officers, a demand that Borden and his colleagues readily facilitated. Consequently within the constraints of its size, colonial status and modest contribution, the Minister made every effort to enhance the contingents' importance, extend its autonomy and affirm its Canadian character.
The Canadian Government named, organised and clothed its battalions to demonstrate their distinctiveness. They organised their volunteer soldiers into battalions under Canadian officers, rather than in companies and placed in British battalions as the British authorities had initially requested. The first two Canadian contingents were raised as temporary units under the authority of the Canadian Militia Act and answered formally to Militia Headquarters in Ottawa. The first three Canadian military units that were despatched to South Africa, the Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry, the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Royal Canadian Field Artillery, were designated to retain a sentimental association with their namesakes of Canada's Permanent Militia. The first unit, the Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry, was composed of eight companies, recruited regionally from the Atlantic to the Pacific. One of its companies was reserved for all of its francophone recruits, and was commanded by bilingual officers and non-commissioned officers.

Material distinctions were no less important. The Royal Canadians' brown canvas khaki uniforms, white helmets (later sensibly dyed coffee), heavy black boots, Sam Browne belts and Oliver equipment, as well as their small distinction of dress and kit and insignia, underscored their desire for differentiation. None was greeted by the men with greater pride than their Maple Leaf 'Canada' badge affixed to their helmet. Other units possessed comparable distinctions in name, dress and equipment. The Canadian Mounted Rifles had medal Canada badges on both of their shoulder straps, as well as small maple leaf badges worn on either side of their collars, and a large maple leaf on their service cap. During the war the Maple Leaf was employed in various contexts, to locate their campground and identify their group. Often it was crudely inscribed on a temporary monument marking the final resting place of a fallen comrade (long before it became the official mark of the Canadian South African Memorial Association). Indeed it was the Boer War that popularised the Maple Leaf as a national military symbol.

In South Africa, as the loss and the wear and tear of war obliterated these material distinctions, Canadian soldiers became conscious of, and often sensitive to the social and national distinctions that separated them from their imperial comrades. They noted their differences of accent and expression, preferences for songs and sports, of attitudes and manners. Some of the Canadian units, such as the Strathcona's Horse (ironically half of whom were British born), under the command of the legendary Sam Steele of the Mounties, went out of their way to construct an image of themselves as quintessential western Canadian frontiersmen, fearless, versatile rough riders from the Plaines, 'comparable to a Boer commando', somewhat indifferent to the more conventional rituals of warfare. Generally the Canadian volunteers preferred to serve in Canadian units and to be commanded by Canadian officers. And they displayed little tolerance for Canadians who aped British mannerisms.

In other ways too the war altered Canadian soldiers' perceptions of themselves and sharpened their sense of separateness. The British Army's initial difficulty dealing with the Boers' unorthodox methods of warfare challenged their confidence in British military leadership. Before the war Canadians had often been told by presumptuous British regulars, and their Canadian equivalents, that Canada's poorly trained citizen soldiers could scarcely conceive of standing by seasoned British regulars. But the Canadian troops who had fought at Lilibfontein, Rietfontein and at Hart's River, and who had seen British regular units flee, leaving the Canadians alone to face overwhelming odds, developed other views of their comparative martial skills. And when Canadian militia men were reminded that armies required organisation and structure, many Canadian veterans remembered the British Army's failure to provide its men with an adequate food and water supply, and their pathetically inadequate medical service, dispensed according to rank and title rather than need. Indeed so confident had some Canadian soldiers become of their own combat skills that Lieutenant Richard Turner, one of the three Canadian Victoria Cross winners at Lilibfontein, felt that the Canadians had 'taught the Regulars how to fight'. Soon after that same battle, Lieutenant EWB Morrison, another of Lilibfontein's decorated veterans, spoke for many of his comrades, when he expressed the hope that Canadians would fight their next war under Canadian officer and 'in one division'. He and many others were to see and be part of that Division.
Many Canadians, aided and abetted by contemporary Darwinian social analysis, drew
dubious though nonetheless significant conclusions from their observations. They blamed the
slowness, lethargy and slovenliness of some British units on social and physical causes, on
what was known as ‘race’ deterioration caused by urbanisation and industrialisation, and the
British hidebound, class cursed commitment to form, red tape and ‘five o’clock tea principles’.
And they came to see their country as a classless 'land of hope for all who toil', that might
serve a regenerative function within the Empire, even becoming the future seat of imperial
greatness.5

Tensions between Canadian and imperial troops re-enforced Canadians’ sense of
distinctiveness. Tensions took various forms, from recreational competitions, verbal sparring
and bar room brawls to more serious group confrontations. Some Canadian senior officers
may even have encouraged these milder contests. For example, many men in the
Strathcona’s Horse were convinced that their commanding officer, Sam Steele, was proud of
his men when the Canadians got the better of a brawl with their imperial comrades. Steele, a
shrewd manager of men, who led a unit half of whom were British born, never ceased
reminding his men that they were Canadians and that they were different. He seemed to
regard contests with the imperials as a means of establishing borders, defining and re-
enforcing differences and building morale.

Tensions and conflict between Canadian and British troops were not confined to the ranks.
Many Canadian officers felt snubbed and ostracised by British officers who made them and
other ‘colonial’ officers ‘feel that they were only members of the mess by, sufferance’.6 Conflict
between colonial and imperial officers, especially recently promoted, junior imperial officers of
tenuous social standing, reached such levels that both Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener
issued confidential orders regretting the ‘unfriendly spirit of regimental officers to members of
HM colonial forces’.7

Occasionally tensions between Canadian soldiers and their imperial officers reached critical
levels of misunderstanding. The most spectacular Canadian example of misunderstanding
entailed two troops of Canadian constables and their British superiors in Baden-Powell's
South African Constabulary, an incident that I have discussed in detail elsewhere.8 As an
inducement to the recruitment of the 1200 Canadians who were raised in the late winter of
1901 to serve in the newly formed South African Constabulary, Canadian recruits had been
led to believe that they would serve together as a unit, under the popular command of Sam
Steele. But when they reached South Africa they learned, much to their chagrin, that they
were to be broken up and grouped into twelve troops and placed in several of the
Constabulary’s four divisions, only one of which was commanded by Steele. Baden-Powell
had intended to go much farther and split up the troops themselves, but he was dissuaded by
the Canadian resistance and Steele's timely and authoritative intervention. It was not a good
beginning; nor was it the end of misunderstanding.

Social tensions seemed to be at the root of the subsequent difficulties. Few of the Canadian
constables came from the social class that Baden-Powell had hoped to recruit from 'all over
the Empire', those experienced, well-bred, skilled horsemen and land hungry settlers, which
he procured with little difficulty among the sons of the British gentry. While some of the
Canadian Constables were South African veterans, others were urban shop hands and
drifters; many were adventurers, wild, reckless and rowdy men, who had joined the unit in the
dead of Winter, and were anxious to participate in the fighting. But few had any inclination or
interest in settling into the more sedate, sedentary life of a constable in a quiet African town,
much less of turning their hand to farming.

The social distinctions and tensions between the Canadians and the others were palpable
from the beginning, though they were muted during the more mobile rough and tumble
conditions of warfare. Baden-Powell had recognised the social difference at once. While he
realised that in warfare the Canadians were hard working and "brave to foolhardy in the field",9
he noticed their resistance to sedentary consignments; and on one occasion he had sensibly
suggested trading his Canadian Constables for a comparable number of British Yeomanry
who possessed the desired social credentials. The British authorities, however, had refused
his request. Above all he worried about the Canadians’ suitability for civilian police work once
the war ended and they were consigned solely to the task for which they had been raised.
His worries were well founded. Much as Baden-Powell feared, once the war had ended and the Constabulary had been consigned to isolated, sedentary civilian employment, a serious crisis developed, precipitated by the need to reduce the size of the force. The cost conscious War Office had ordered the Constabulary authorities to reduce their numbers by some 40 per cent, an irresistible opportunity to monitor the force and weed out the 'rotters'. They determined, therefore, to reconstitute the civilian force along the lines originally envisaged by its founders, Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner to South Africa, and Baden-Powell, the Constabulary's first Commanding Officer. In remodelling the force the authorities sought to retain only the steady, able, educated men who would give no offence to the Boer population so 'easily offended by the slightest impropriety in language and demeanour'.

During this cleansing operation, the Canadians felt themselves to have been targeted, the victims of systemic discrimination, deception and the 'spiteful and petty tyranny of Imperial officers'. And they reacted strongly.

The conflict came to a head in two of the Canadian troops, numbers 14 and 17, recruited respectively in Saint John, New Brunswick, and Montreal. During a rigorous tour of inspection a supercilious imperial career officer, recently promoted from the ranks, had reported that the interior economy of these two Canadian troops was especially unsatisfactory. Discipline was lax and the men displayed no deference to rank and hierarchy. Men were insubordinate, ignorant of rules and regulations, lacked initiative, were 'mutinous, dishonest and drunken'. Upon the receipt of this devastating report the Divisional Officer Commanding reprimanded the Canadian Captains commanding these two troops and ordered them to restore order at once. When the Canadian Captains failed to comply with these orders, they were curtly informed that they were to be replaced by imperial officers.

Their troops' response was immediate and 'mutinous'. At first the men petitioned their Divisional Commander, denouncing the proposed transfer, making clear that they would serve only under Canadian officers who 'understand the Canadian disposition'. When their petition was refused, all the troops' non-commissioned officers demanded permission to revert to the ranks. This tactic was no more successful. And on the day set for the transfer the constables simply left their posts without orders and went into town leaving 'the district without police' and obliging the sub-divisional commander to replace them with constables from other districts. A visit from the Sub-Divisional Commander only exacerbated the situation. His attempt to address the men at dinner ended in confusion. The men's behaviour became threatening. They refused his order to fall in for rifle inspection, and as the subdivisional emissary was leaving the post 'shots were fired in the air'. At another post, the striking Canadian constables shot a government Cape cart 'into matchwood'. When the Sub-Divisional Commander sent an experienced superintendent to restore order he was greeted at the railway station and publicly hooted by the defiant constables. The Sub-Divisional Commander had clearly lost control of the situation.

In response nine 'leaders' of the striking constables were arrested and sent for trial to Bloemfontein. A board of officers assembled but failed to extract evidence from this tightly knit group, none willing to implicate the other. In the end it was impossible to establish individual guilt and no charges could be laid. Nonetheless they and 24 others were discharged, most with no entry on their defaulters sheet, and some whose conduct was described as 'very good'.

They and over 100 other Canadian constables returned to Canada angrily and publicly claiming they had been the victims of national discrimination. Their complaints received a sympathetic hearing in the press. 'Canadians are not, nor does the public opinion of this country demand that Canadians become the lackeys of English officers', wrote one irate correspondent. 'A Canadian trooper is a fighting man, he is not a soldier.' When the issue was raised in the House of Commons, the Minister of Militia, Sir Frederick Borden, requested the British authorities to open an investigation, which they did, an investigation that predictably cleared the Imperial officers of all blame. Although this issue soon ceased to be a subject of public debate, the public exposure of the constables' grievances helped shape and re-enforced Canadians' view of Imperial officers and the society they were thought to represent.
But this is only one side of the story. There is, of course, another more indulgent side to the story of conflict between Canadian and Imperial officers, best illustrated by two incidents, one involving Australian troops. The first incident occurred in early October 1900, soon after the completion of the Lydenburgh campaign and the break-up of Lord Dundonald's Brigade. The Strathcona's Horse, which had been part of Dundonald's Brigade, had been ordered to proceed to Pretoria, to await a new assignment; many hoped their orders would be to return home. While they waited at Machadodorp for a train to Pretoria the men and officers camped on either side of the rail, unprotected from the rain and thunder, relaxed and in a celebratory mood. In the evening the officers had difficulty maintaining law and order among their restless men, and some made no effort to do so, especially after the departure for Pretoria of their Commanding Officer, Colonel Steele.

Damp, cold, bored, and anticipating their immediate release from service, the men wanted alcohol. The more entrepreneurial among their number resorted to a standard trick to secure their objective from the quartermaster's store, by forging Major Belcher's signature. In no time at all they became drunk, noisy and disorderly, shouting and firing their revolvers in the air. The British Provost Marshal together with a British Major and a couple of mounted police came by to investigate. As the Provost stooped over to examine a suspicious-looking, crude 'bivouac with a light in it and in which a sergeant and corporal were making merry with a water bottle full of rum', one of the Canadians came up from behind the Provost and 'fired his revolver close to each side of his head'. In the dark and confusion the culprit could not be detected.

The shaken Provost immediately instructed several companies of British infantry to surround the Canadian squadron and ordered the merry-makers out on parade. The Canadians were marched for several hours until they had sobered up. The next day the authorities investigated the affair but took no action since 'we were irregular troops and our Colonel was away'. Needless to say, this incident received no publicity back home.

The second incident entailed a more serious disturbance in Cape Town, in December 1900, as the men of Canada's second contingent (the Royal Canadian Dragoon, the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the Royal Canadian Field Artillery) waited to board a vessel for their return passage to Canada. In fact celebrations had begun soon after the two mounted units left Pretoria by rail. At Kronstad, while their officers were being entertained with a champagne dinner by the resident Irish officer, the men commandeered a carload of beer, and proceeded to become disorderly, despite the threats of their officers and the British authorities.

Things deteriorated in Cape Town where they were billeted at Maitland Camp with about 500 returning Australian troops. The day after the Canadians reached the Cape, as they were loading their personal baggage aboard the Roslin Castle and guarding their guns and equipment, they heard rumours of high-jinks in the town, and they requested leave to spend their last night in Cape Town. The Camp authorities sensibly denied their request, careful as they were to avoid trouble and to make certain that all men were present and accounted for when the ship sailed the following day. Although Maitland Camp was some four miles from the town, and guarded by armed British troops, the Canadians decided to go to town anyway. The Australians joined them, and 'over a thousand men walked out of camp and marched into Cape Town ... sore as hell', and determined 'to have a good time before they sailed'.

Not all men escaped so easily. Officers, sentries and military police tried to stop them, and for some 'getting out was quite difficult'. One group hijacked a horse cab:

One of the men mounted the horse, another took the reins on the box, and the rest crowded in behind. Getting up speed they approached the sentries at the gate at a gallop. Being foot soldiers this 'cavalry' charge proved too much for them; and they were obliged to make way for the cab and its load.

The men headed straight for the bars on Adderley Street. Some men had just entered their first bar, when a military order arrived to sell no drinks to anyone. The hotel management's attempts to explain the order to the thirsty soldiers who were crammed into the bar was not a
success. The men literally took things into their own hands. The bar was 'shot up in wild Western fashion. Pistol bullets shattered the chandeliers. Men tried to shoot their monograms into the big plate glass mirror ... Others vaulted the bar and worked as volunteer barmen'. Once they had exhausted that bar's resources they moved on to the Grand Hotel where the manager cleverly informed the men that he had no authority to sell liquor but nothing prevented him from giving it away, so long as they left his bar intact. The men accepted his hospitality, respected his request and left behind three Canadian hats full of gold sovereigns as a gratuity. News of free drinks at the Grand spread quickly and brought a crowd of potential customers, packed solid for two city blocks about the hotel. 'Traffic was stopped. The military police saw they couldn't do a thing with the mob, so they did not try.'

But this was not only a Canadian riot. The Australians were also in town, on their way home and they had scores to settle with a 'Dutch paper' that had called them 'descendants of convicts'. The Australians had visited their accusers and 'had wrecked the plant and were now marching about the town looking for trouble in general'. The City police, incapable of containing the situation, called upon the military authorities. Soon 30 Cape Mounted Rifles arrived, 'supported by infantry patrols with fixed bayonets formed in line and drew their swords, then chose the most solid looking body of rioters, and advanced at a walk, broke into a trot, and finally a gallop. They used the flats and the backs of their swords and cracked many heads'. That was all that was required. The mob broke up and the men found their way back to camp, carrying their casualties of the sword and bar.

What is striking in this instance (as with the Machadodorp affair) is the British military authorities' indulgent response to the Cape Town riot. They initiated no extensive investigation nor did they make any effort to single out and punish the offenders and their leaders. Men who had failed to obtain leave were merely sentenced to seven days' detention, a meaningless punishment, given the number entailed and the fact that they were aboard ship. There is also a reference in Acting Captain REW Turner's diary that they 'paid for their spree like real men', perhaps by a voluntary fine or a collection to cover the property damages. Turner's light-hearted reference to the incident suggests that the military authorities had dismissed the event as youthful high spirits that had been readily contained, and that for political reasons (because they were colonial citizen soldiers) it would be unwise to pursue. Certainly the riot did nothing to quell the cordiality and enthusiasm of the official departure ceremonies for the Canadian and Australian troops. The British High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner, Lieutenant-General TWF Forestier-Walker and the Mayor of Cape Town, Thomas Bell, lavished praise on the colonial troops and thanked them profusely for their service. The City's Mayor even promised a souvenir for each soldier that would be handed down with pride to their families for generations. The City's spectators were no less warm in their reception of the previous evening's happy rioters as they marched peacefully through their streets to their vessels.

These are not the only examples of the British authorities' consideration for and indulgence of colonial troops. Charges of looting, and breaches of regulations were often overlooked or dismissed, an indulgence that British regular troops may not have enjoyed. All were based on the British recognition of colonial difference, an expectation that invited and encouraged colonial response including abuse of the indulgence.

Encounters with Imperial troops offered other, more positive inducements for recognition and distinction. Indeed they seemed to have encouraged and expected regional difference. For example, Baden-Powell made 'Canada' the password the first night after the relief of Mafeking in recognition of the Royal Canadian Field Artillery's contribution toward its relief. And senior British officers invariably went out of their way to meet, greet and thank Canadian troops for their service, extend them every courtesy and accede to their reasonable requests. Lord Roberts himself insisted on inspecting and thanking the remnant of Canada's first contingent, The Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry, before their departure from Pretoria; while in Bloemfontein General Kelly-Kenny and his staff, together with Major- General Robert Baden-Powell, turned out with a military band to meet their train, inspect and thank them. During these farewell ceremonies and on other similar occasions, Canadian officers and men were showered with flattery. Bands played Canadian tunes, such as 'Vive la Canadienne' and 'The
Maple Leaf Forever’, and the troops were invited to sing Canadian songs. At Bloemfontein Baden-Powell had invited Canadians to join his newly formed South African Constabulary, whereupon one of ‘the boys from D Company responded with a rendition of ‘The Land of the Maple Is The Land for Me’, much to the amusement of all including Baden-Powell. On other occasions British bands, bereft of Canadian melodies, played appropriate alternate tunes such as ‘Cock o’ the North’. Canadian troops appreciated the recognition, thoughtfulness and understanding, relished the excessive flattery and endeavoured to fulfil their expectations.

The courtesy of senior British officers was not entirely altruistic. Acutely sensitive to the politics of Empire, some senior officers seemed to have paid particular attention to the bi-ethnic Senior Dominion. For them and for British politicians Canada’s initial hesitant, controversial and somewhat tepid initial response to the war had been the cause of some concern, given the Dominion’s contemporary imperial popularity and centrality, and the British Government’s desire to demonstrate the Empire’s unity in adversity. Consequently they took the opportunity of the British victory at Paardeberg to give the Canadian troops an inordinate amount of credit for this significant and symbolic (on Majuba Day) victory. British politicians, press and artists picked up and embroidered the story of the final assault on General Piet Cronjé’s laager, much to the initial embarrassment of some of the Canadian soldiers who realised that their final assault was not entirely heroic: after all three companies had fled after the first Boer fusillade. According to this convenient instant legend Britain’s senior Dominion had avenged Majuba Hill, wiped out the stain of 19 years’ standing, opened the road to victory, and demonstrated the solidarity of the Empire. One gloss on the story even claimed that ‘few of this gallant company of Great Britain's defenders could speak English’.

Consequently most Senior British officers were very popular with the Canadian troops. The men and officers of the Strathcona’s Horse had a great affection for General Redvers Buller, as they demonstrated during Lord Strathcona’s official banquet for his battalion in London following the war, where the name of Buller evoked a particularly enthusiastic response. Earlier their Commanding Officer’s request to give three cheers for Buller during an official inspection had been refused owing to the presence of Lord Roberts! The men and officers were incensed at this petty refusal and the utilised the banquet as an opportunity to remedy this slight and make clear their affection for Buller. Lord Dundonald’s popularity among Canada’s South African War veterans later led to his appointment as General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia; though it did not assure its success. Canadians were equally impressed with Major-General Smith-Dorrien, who commanded three of the Canadian units at one time or another, and who led by flattery. These senior officers were not alone: Lord Roberts, General Baden-Powell, General HCO Plumber and Major-General Knox, enjoyed comparable reputations among Canadian troops for kindness, understanding and courtesy. The one, singular exception was Major-General ETH Hutton, whom the Canadians thoroughly and almost universally detested, a sentiment that the Australians may have shared; as he had served unsuccessfully in both countries before the war. But even his negative recognition, that Canadians were the worst thieves in the British Army (they had stolen his horse!) was an acknowledgement of their distinctiveness.

British senior officers, appreciative of the importance of local and regional identities in building regimental loyalty and esprit de corps, encouraged and reinforced their sense of distinctiveness. Their greetings and communications with Canadian troops, in language or music, invited Canadian troops to articulate a national persona within the Imperial family. Indeed British officers and popular writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling, anxious to demonstrate the diversity and utility of the Empire, provided language and character descriptions to articulate that difference. In speeches, official reports and stories they cast the colonial troops as youthful, courageous, resourceful, unorthodox and energetic. The Elgin Commission in 1903 described the Canadians and colonial troops as ‘half soldiers by their upbringing’, natural horsemen, observant scouts, whose officers share with their men mutual interests, and whose men are trained to think for themselves, with the result that they carry on should their leaders be killed’. The Lancet followed a similar line describing the Boers and colonials as physically larger, stronger, and more fit than the British Tommy, and ‘man for man ... incomparably superior to our workers in London or Manchester or Glasgow’.
Canadians were particularly fond of Darwinian descriptions of their difference from Imperial troops. They delighted in characterisations of their men as 'taller and sturdier than infantry of the line-grim, solid men as straight as poplars', products of their Nordic environment, 'Lords of the Northland'. It gave credence and authority to their sense of distinctiveness, and confirmed a generation and more of nationalistic rhetoric. These themes were taken up by Canadian soldiers and civilian writers during and after the war to fashion a more distinctive personality in war and peace.

Encouragement of colonial distinctiveness was not confined to individual senior British officers. It possessed an institutional embodiment in the British Army's regional and ethnic regimental system as represented by various Irish, Welsh and Scottish units. Consequently close association with British regiments invited imitation. While Canadian soldiers may have been critical of the quality of many British units (especially the City Imperial Volunteers), during the war Canadian soldiers developed deep respect and affection for a number of the Scottish and Irish units, including the Royal Irish, the Argyle Sutherlands, the Shropshire Light Infantry, the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, and above all the Gordon Highlanders.

The Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry, the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the Royal Canadian Dragoons all served with the Gordon Highlanders at one time or another, and they established a close rapport and friendship with this unit. The Gordons and the Royal Canadians had first met in Cape Town having arrived in South Africa at the same time. Subsequently they had been brigaded together and had camped and fought side by side all the way to Pretoria. During these months they had supported and assisted one another, raised tents and prepared meals when the other was returning from a difficult assignment. The Canadians possessed a great respect for the Gordons as men and as soldiers. For example, they were so impressed with the Gordons' performance during the battle at Doornkop, a battle that cost the Gordons 20 dead and 70 wounded, that the Canadians rose spontaneously as one man and cheered the Highlanders when they returned from the battle to camp, their pipes still sounding. According to one Canadian soldier it was 'the heartiest and most spontaneous thing' he had witnessed during the war. The fraternal bonds of comradeship and respect forged during this conflict led to their linkage with Toronto's 48th Regiment Highlanders after the war.

Close association with regular units, especially those with strong regional and regimental identities, such as the Gordons, invited emulation; and most Canadian units readily met the challenge. The Royal Canadians' first response was to name their campsite at Graspan, Maple Leaf Camp. Others Canadian units responded similarly: the Royal Canadian Field Artillery named their earthworks at Rustenburg, Fort Canada, and its four bastions, Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton and Winnipeg. Whatever internal divisions plagued some of the Canadian units, within the imperial family they constructed, cultivated and projected a collective national persona designed to set them apart. In each unit a few officers and men rose to the occasion, to design a symbol, compose a slogan, render a patriotic song or verse descriptive of their difference. In South Africa some men first learned the words and music of, and to identify with national songs, such as 'The Land of the Maple' or 'The Maple Leaf Forever'; the latter became something of a national anthem. Men soon came to describe their motives for recruitment in similar, patriotic language: they had enlisted to 'hold up the Maple Leaf Forever'; and they had consoled themselves that if they died 't'll help the Maple Leaf to Live'.

In other words, many Canadians who left Canada for South Africa as 'Sons of the Empire', returned 'Singing Their Own Canadian War Song'. In their patriotic lectures, stories and sermons about the war and reminiscences of their experiences, they constructed a national memory of the war that emphasised British military incompetence and failure, their mindless deference to class and social distinction, against which they compared their own energy, initiative, resourcefulness and freedom from constraints. Veterans began to believe their own rhetoric. As they gathered for their annual Paardeberg Day celebration, for years a patriotic anniversary (still religiously celebrated by the Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry), the memories of their failures, their strife, conflict, death, disease and discouragement gave way to a more refined, heroic version of the war and how it was won.
No tale became more heroic than the Battle of Paardeberg. According to one fanciful account, the simple knowledge that the Canadians were in the trenches had filled the Boers with such fear that they were persuaded to surrender. Soldiers recounted how Boer prisoners had remarked: 'You are not men, you are devils. We can stand the shooting of the average British soldiers but you Canadians are regular fire eaters and know no fear ... It's easily seen now what nation is going to rule the world'.

During and after the war the civilian population re-echoed these refrains and applied them to civic society. In their view Paardeberg was 'a bold declaration of nationhood'. According to the Prime Minister it was a declaration 'to the world that a new power had arisen in the west'. In the view of another commentator, Canadians had not 'rejoiced because Cronjé was defeated, but because their sons had become men in the eyes of the world'. All expressed the fond wish that from the victory of Paardeberg would spring a new patriotism based on unity and purpose. While that aspiration remained unfulfilled, the war shaped a military institution that some historians suggest achieved part of that agenda during the First World War.

During and following the South African War, the organisation, funding and inauguration of an impressive number of monuments in all parts of the country provided countless opportunities to propagate this construction of the war and reinforce these images. The war led to the creation of the Boer War Veterans Association, the South African Veterans Mutual Protection Association, the Patriotic Fund, the Soldiers Wives League and the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, and the South African Memorial Association that institutionalised these memories. It supplied native heroes: Harold Borden, William Knisley, Bruce Carruthers, Edward Holland (the VC recipient after whom Holland Barracks in Ottawa was named), and REW Turner. It provided memorable heroic battles, such as Paardeberg, Lilliefontein and Hart's River that called for remembrance and commemoration such as Paardeberg Day (still celebrated by the Royal Canadian Regiment), and Lilliefontein Day (still commemorated by the Royal Canadian Dragoons); and for a time Hart's River Day (celebrated by the Canadian Mounted Rifles); and for a time Hart's River Day (celebrated by the Canadian Mounted Rifles). Units such as the Strathcona's Horse and the Canadian Mounted Rifles owed their creation to the war. Units such as the Strathcona's Horse and the Canadian Mounted Rifles owed their creation to the war. Regular units that participated in the war adopted insignia and regimental marches inspired by the war, and proudly paraded their battle honours, as did many of the militia units who contributed men to the war.

In response to this new sense of self-confidence and independence, Canadians insisted that Canadian militia officers command their own militia, that their defence policy and militia organisation reflect their needs and assumptions. They developed distinctive kit and equipment, including the notorious Ross Rifle. The Minister of Militia, backed by the Commons' militia lobby and public support, used the 'lessons' of the war to reform and reshape the Canadian Militia. He increased the Militia estimates, enlarged its establishment, raised its pay scales, re-equipped it with new rifles and artillery and purchased a large central training base at Petawawa. He introduced higher standards of training and promotion and more serviceable uniforms. During the war he had used the opportunity to test tents, transport and ambulance wagons, water carts, hospital equipment and supplies, some of Canadian design. After the war he established an Army Service Corps, an Army Medical Corps, an Army Dental Corps, a Corps of Signals, a Corps of Guides, an Ordnance Corps, a Veterinary Corps and a Pay Corps.

The war also affected military policy and planning. It gave credence to the proponents of the militia myth, those who preferred a trained citizenry to a professional, standing army, a preference that shaped the direction of post-war military reform and re-organisation. Borden's decision to create a decentralised, citizen army of sharpshooters, his attempts to secure a dependable Canadian supply of rifles and ammunition, his subsidisation of rifle clubs, and his encouragement of Cadet Corps, military training in schools, and later Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts, were all inspired by the 'lessons' of the Boer War. So too was Borden's insistence upon Canadian military autonomy and pragmatic, co-operative military imperialism rather than imperial integration, all policies that enjoyed wide popular support.

In summary, then, the Boer War, Canada's first overseas war experience, became an important defining moment for the Canadian Militia. It was the crucible of the Canadian Army.
Endnotes

1. The Quebec Chronicle, 31 October 1899.
3. REW Turner Papers, Diary, 20 July 1900, National Archives of Canada (hereinafter NAC).
4. EWB Morrison, With The Guns in South Africa (Hamilton: Spectator Print Co, 1901), 258, 290.
5. Jeanette Duncan, The Imperialist.
9. Captain Charles Beer to ADSCO, E Division, 30 June 1903, Colonial Office, 526/3/24, PRO.
10. Pilkington to Chief Staff Officer, SAC, 24 July 1903, CO 526/3/24, PRO.
11. Mrs HS Massiah to the King, 21 October 1902, CO 526/3/24, PRO.
12. Petition to Colonel Pilkington, 30 September 1902, CO 526/3/24, PRO.
13. Altogether at least 720 of the 1208 Canadian Constables returned to Canada before the expiry of their service contract.
14. Mail and Empire, 11 April 1903.
15. The Montreal Star, 30 March 1903; Mail and Empire, 11 April 1903; Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 16 April 1903, 1027.
16. RP Rooke Papers, ‘A Record from Memory’, 26 April 1908, NAC.
18. WA Griesbach, I Remember (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1946), 312.
20. Griesbach, I Remember, 312.
21. J Kennedy Hill Papers, Diary, 25, 26 September 1900, NAC.
23. Ibid.
29. See, for example, Morrison, With The Guns in South Africa, 202.
30. W Hart-McHarg, From Quebec To Pretoria with the Royal Canadian Regiment (Toronto: W Briggs, 1902), 216.
32. The Montreal Star, 9 May 1900; Annie Mellish, Our Boys Under Fire; or Maritime Volunteers in South Africa (Charlottetown: privately published. 1900), 33; the quotation is attributed to a Colonel Notting of the Gordon Highlanders.
33. Canada, House of Commons Debates, Laurier, 13 March 1900, 1848.
35. For a time imperialists attempted to make Paardeberg Day an imperial day of commemoration, initially celebrated in Australia as well. I owe this information to the kindness of Craig Wilcox.
36. The Royal Canadian Dragoons’ regimental insignia consists of a springbok on a scroll; the Strathcona’s Horse regimental march is ‘Soldiers of the Queen’.
The Boer War came at a time when there was an active, and at times fierce, debate in the British Army about the future of horse mounted soldiers. Specifically that debate revolved around what armament horse soldiers should rely on as their primary weapon. In an age when military commentators were placing in increasing emphasis on the moral factors of war traditionalists were anxious to see the continued use and predominance of the *arme blanche*. Meaning literally the 'white arm', it was term used to describe all forms of steel bladed weapons. For infantry this meant the bayonet, for cavalry the term was synonymous with the sword, and more emotionally the lance. Intimately associated with the *arme blanche* were the shock tactics of the mass cavalry charge and the offensive place that cavalry had traditionally found for itself through such tactics. Reformists wanted to see the *arme blanche* relegated to a secondary place behind firearms, or even better for some, disposed of altogether. For them it was an anachronism threatening the battle utility of the combat arm that, in an age before the perfection of the internal combustion engine, still possessed the greatest speed and mobility. It was a debate that, interestingly, also had a definite divisions broadly reinforced by the position of those involved in the colonial scheme of things. Officers and theorists focussing on a potential European war tended to have a conservative outlook and those officers, both citizen and regular, who had been involved in soldiering in Britain's empire were often in the opposing camp. It made for an interesting debate and one that went back to well before the Boer War.

Despite their continuing social and military prestige European cavalry were having an increasingly hard time in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The technological revolution that had begun with the invention and widespread adoption of the muzzle loading rifle in the 1850s had continued through the second half of that century and culminated at the turn of the century with the general use of breech loading magazine rifles. These high-powered rifles charged, not with black powder, but with the high explosive smokeless powder that made Boer riflemen so hard to pick out on the veldt, gave a massive boost to the firepower of the defender on the battlefield. A development that was increasingly casting the role of cavalry, traditionally the offensive arm par excellence, as an anachronistic one. Faced too with rapid developments in artillery, and increasingly the machine-gun, there seemed an ever diminishing likelihood that European cavalry would be able to conduct the tactic that cavalrymen were still trained in, and that they were almost obsessed with on a doctrinal and emotional level, the massed charge. In the 1850s cavalrymen simply tried to ignore the possible impact of the technological development that was revolutionising the power of their infantry colleagues, but wars in both North America and Europe in the 1860s and 1870s soon caught the attention of even the most conservative horse soldiers.

Traditional cavalry played virtually no part in the American Civil War and the horse mounted soldiers of that war, on both sides, displayed a clear preference for using the firearms they carried rather than any form of bladed weapon. More often than not they dismounted in battle to use their carbines or, if they chose to remain mounted, their preferred weapon was the new revolver. The general consensus amongst American cavalrymen was that the modern battlefield was no place for a mounted man if it could at all be avoided, and it was certainly no place for a mass charge against infantry. Cavalrymen in the Franco-Prussian War also experienced considerable difficulties. Here, on ground where cavalry had been an important battle arm for centuries, infantry managed to turn cavalry charges, in the words of Michael Howard, into 'a line of kicking, bloodstained heaps' with alarming regularity. The sole successful large charge by cavalry during the war, by a German brigade at Vionville under quite favourable conditions, had been so costly in lives that it came to be known, almost
reverentially, as Von Bredow's Death Ride. These bloody experiences soon led to the conclusion that cavalry was now facing a situation that demanded some degree of reform. The great question was how much reform, and in what direction?

Many British observers of the American Civil War, foreshadowing to some degree what would happen after the Boer War, were content to simply write the lessons of that war off as aberrations caused by the unique local environment and American citizen armies. Some others, however, drawing also on the wars in Europe in the following five years, were willing to call for some drastic changes to the way British cavalry trained for and fought wars. Sir Henry Havelock discussed cavalry reforms and advocated the use of mounted soldiers armed primarily with rifles in his 1867 work *Three Main Military Questions of the Day*, but the first large monograph on the topic by a Briton was published by the Canadian, Lieutenant-Colonel George T Denison. In his 1867 publication of *Modern Cavalry* he advocated the reform of cavalry along broadly mounted rifle lines. In this way cavalry could once again become 'the most powerful, as well as the most useful, portion of the armies'. Taking into account the Franco-Prussian War he had much the same, though reinforced, message in his next book *A History of Cavalry: With Lessons for the Future*, published in 1877. Denison argued that three-quarters of a modern cavalry force should be made up of mounted riflemen who would be capable of fulfilling the traditional cavalry roles of screening, reconnaissance, convoying, outpost duties, turning movements, defensive operations, and his favourite American Civil War operation—the cavalry raid. The remaining quarter of this force would be made up by 'cavalry proper' but in his second book he advocated the disposal of the *arme blanche* for these troops and its replacement with the revolver, a weapon much more lethal in the close range fighting often done by traditional cavalry.

For Denison the adoption of a modern firearm and the accompanying tactics was the key to cavalry staking its place on the battlefield of the future. In his view the mobility and speed conferred by the horse were the great assets still at the disposal of cavalrymen, it was now up to them to modify their views about the roles and armament of cavalry so that the advantage was not squandered on what was now a very dangerous battlefield for exposed horsemen. Denison was probably the most influential British cavalry theorist in certain circles of the British Army, but others were decidedly sceptical.

The majority of British cavalrymen, focussing on the possibility of having to fight a European enemy, remained intent on preparing to fight the next war with the *arme blanche*. Their ability to do this resulted from the fact that though they were now willing to concede that charging infantry was foolish, they were not willing to concede that charging the enemy's cavalry was also going to be a thing of the past. With end of the Franco-Prussian War cavalry throughout Europe became intent on fulfilling the traditional screening, outpost and reconnaissance duties that had long been the less glamorous, but highly important, lot of cavalry on campaign. Implicit in these tasks was the requirement to disrupt and destroy the cavalry performing the same task for the enemy. It remained the firm faith of cavalrymen throughout Europe that this cavalry to cavalry combat would take place on horseback with lances and swords. For these men training and developing doctrine around the *arme blanche* remained the focus until well after the Boer War. They did not have the theoretical ground to themselves, however. Set against them were a number of officers who had underwent totally different experiences patrolling and fighting throughout Britain's colonial empire.

Mounted troops on colonial service did not have a European cavalry foe to prepare against, but were usually involved in the tasks of constantly patrolling and controlling large tracts of territory. This task often fell to infantry regiments and, as an expedient, local commandants and governors regularly took to mounting all or part of the infantry units under their command so that the job may be more efficiently and quickly done. Part of the 3rd Regiment of Foot was mounted to combat bushrangers around Sydney in 1825 and from this early experiment the Mounted Police was created by 1830. A body that Governor Darling viewed as 'of more importance than all the other troops put together'. The practice was common at the Cape Colony and in 1827 the first dedicated mounted rifle unit in the British Army was raised there from the already mounted elements of the Cape Regiment. The Cape Mounted Rifles was, in the words of one of their officers:
[A] well mounted and very serviceable corps, well adapted for the work which they were intended, viz, skirmishing and patrolling through large tracts of the country which we included in our frontier positions ... they wore a rifle uniform, with the addition of cavalry accoutrements, and were armed with double barrelled Victoria carbines ... A cavalry sword completed their equipment. They were taught to act mounted and dismounted as occasion required, [and] were admirable skirmishers.\textsuperscript{14}

Cavalry regiments on colonial service were also frequently required to become more proficient with their firearms and temporarily relegate their bladed weapons to second place.\textsuperscript{15} Improvised mounted infantry units were also used in larger colonial conflicts, proving valuable in the Zulu War of 1879, the First Boer War of 1880-81 and the Egyptian War of 1882. In these cases mounted infantry bodies were created largely because there was no, or an insufficient number of, regular cavalry available to fulfill the necessary roles on these campaigns.\textsuperscript{16}

The successes of ad hoc mounted infantry and mounted rifle units in colonial wars gave this form of mounted soldiering a firm toe hold in the doctrinal discussions that were taking place in the British Army in the second half of the nineteenth century. The theorising of Havelock and Denison was all well and good, but hard won colonial experience gave adherents of mounted infantry and rifle theories real ammunition to use in these debates. Even some conservative cavalrymen were willing to admit that mounted infantry was a good idea for use in the colonies, though generally they would not countenance the idea for a European battlefield.\textsuperscript{17} The reason that even conservatives were able to concede that mounted soldiers equipped with a rifle might be useful in the colonies was that, as Denison had pointed out, the rifle could give the horseman a strategic presence that the \textit{arme blanche} never could. British colonial experience and the American Civil War had demonstrated that mounted troops equipped with rifles and accompanied by horse artillery could operate independently and make up large columns that could launch themselves deep into enemy territory. Alternatively they could operate separately from, but in support of, another force. Being equipped with effective firearms meant that they could generally withstand efforts to destroy them or attack any type of force of appropriate size. This in essence was what the British Army wanted its colonial forces to be able to do. The ability to operate independently and swiftly over long ranges was a vital element to the British requirement for keeping control in its colonial possessions.

This factor was instrumental in gathering support in the British Army for the cause and it won over some high level adherents. General Sir Evelyn Wood wrote in his book, \textit{Achievements of Cavalry}, that:

\begin{quote}
There can be no doubt that, for the British Army, which must necessarily be employed more frequently in savage warfare, and over extensive tracts of country, such as are found in South Africa, trained and picked Mounted Infantry will prove of immense advantage, to the Army generally, in the future as it has done in the past ... \textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Britain's most prominent soldier of the period, Viscount Wolseley, was also something of a supporter. He claimed that an army that possessed mounted infantry 'and whose leaders know how to handle it, will have an enormous advantage over an army that adheres to a stereotyped employment of cavalry, infantry and artillery'.\textsuperscript{19} Men like these, however, were not advocating the reform of cavalry into mounted rifles, but the creation and maintenance of infantry units capable of being mobile by the supply of horses or some other beast of burden. Wolseley was in fact interested in mounted infantry as way to make use of mounted militia and volunteers in the defence of Britain from any potential invaders—an idea that the volunteers were not capable of fulfilling and that the yeomanry was decidedly against if it meant disposing of their swords.\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, in 1888 two mounted infantry schools were established in Britain for the training of detachments of regular army battalions in the required skills and tactics of mounted infantry.
In Australia the development of the mounted arm by colonial governments for colonial defence, rather than policing, had begun as early as the first years of the 1840s, but for the first decades it was a haphazard affair. The citizen volunteer corps that were formed were usually small, short lived, had variable or often nearly nonexistent official backing, and suffered from a lack of either internal or external military direction. Until the 1880s whether the small mounted corps of the Australian colonies set themselves up as cavalry, mounted rifles or mounted infantry depended, as often as not, on the individual whim of the person or persons who had undertaken to establish each corps. Colonial governments seemed to be aware that they should have some form of mounted troops but, anxious to put as little strain on their exchequers as possible, they seemed generally content to take whatever was on offer from enthusiastic citizens rather than make rulings about what form of mounted soldiery should defend the colonies. Though colonial governments usually made some steps toward uniformity it was not unusual, in the 1860s and 1870s, to find several mounted corps with different notional military roles within one colony. Both South Australia and New South Wales, with their thoughts on the treasury, looked into the possibility of using augmented Mounted Police rather than having to support mounted soldiers at different times before 1885.

From 1885, however, there was a marked change in the form of mounted troops to be found in the Australian colonies. From that year until the end of the decade the ineffective and inefficient volunteer mounted corps that previously been the mounted troops of the Australian colonies were replaced, at least in the larger eastern mainland colonies, by relatively large, stable and efficient units raised as partially paid militia. These units took various forms but there was emerging an evident preference for mounted infantry and mounted rifle units. Only in New South Wales would traditional cavalry remain a significant part of the pre-federation mounted troops of the Australian colonies.

The notion that mounted riflemen may be the best form of mounted soldiers for the Australian colonies was not necessarily a new one. Interested soldiers and citizens had been long aware of the value of mounted rifles in colonial situations. As early as 1860 the Launceston Examiner had expressed its appreciation of the potential military value of the local mounted rifle corps then being raised there.

It is not expected that [they] will ever be employed as regular cavalry; indeed in a country like Tasmania, densely wooded and full of broken ground and mountain gorges, regular cavalry would be almost useless, but as irregular cavalry and scouts the services of Mounted Rifles would be invaluable, and as such we rejoice at the addition which has been made to our defences.

The forecast use of mounted rifles, as what was broadly termed at the time as irregular cavalry, was a model that had particular appeal to the citizen soldiers of the Australian colonies. Both mounted troops and infantry were increasingly practising at this time what were broadly called skirmishing tactics. Roughly speaking these were the skills of ‘being proficient in marksmanship in the field, highly mobile, and capable of taking advantage of natural cover’. These were the sort of tactics the Cape Mounted Rifles had been using since the early part of the century and that light cavalry had been using somewhat longer on reconnaissance and outpost duties. It was experience in these irregular tactics that was reportedly behind the selection of the Indian Army-trained Colonel Tom Price to command the Victorian Mounted Rifles when it was raised in 1885.

The theoretical issues involved were also understood and in 1889 at least one South Australian parliamentarian urged his colleagues to consider the arguments of George Denison and establish a force of mounted rifle corps then being raised there.

Contributing to this colonial trend was the then common idea that it would be far easier to train citizen soldiers in the arts of being a mounted rifleman than it would be to train them as cavalrymen, and this idea gained wide acceptance. Drawing on this notion, others were inspired by the example of the Boer mounted riflemen that had defeated the regulars of the British Army at Majuba Hill and Liang's Nek in the First Boer War of 1880-81. In 1894 Edward O’Sullivan, a New South Wales parliamentarian, produced a pamphlet titled the Power of Mounted Riflemen. In it, besides betraying a marked interest in Denison’s arguments, he...
sought to draw parallels between the hardy Boer farmer and his Australian counterparts in a social as well as military sense. For him the Boers were 'graziers and farmers who correspond almost in every particular to our selectors'. Furthermore, the Boers had 'shown clearly that in forest or bush warfare the colonial soldiers are superior to the best trained troops in the world, and it indicates the kind of tactics which our volunteers should resort to if New South Wales is ever invaded ...'.

The upshot of these colonial sentiments was that, apart from in New South Wales where the Lancer Regiment, and in the late 1890s the 1st Australian Horse, constituted the only significant cavalry units in Australia, by the late 1880s only mounted rifle style units were generally thought to be of any real value to local defence. In 1890 an application to form a cavalry troop in Melbourne was rejected by the government for number of reasons, but key among them was a reluctance to raise any cavalry in the colony. One bureaucrat noted that:

As regards their wish to be enrolled as Cavalry [the minister] cannot recommend their application to the government. It would be unwise of the Defence department [sic] to encourage the formation of an arm of the service which was not likely to be valuable. What the colony required was an efficient and well-drilled body of men able to move rapidly about from place to place for purposes of locomotion (but fighting on foot). The Regt of Mounted Rifles fulfills these conditions and [the minister] would advise them to consider whether it would be wise to join this body. The opinion of the highest authorities at home as well as those in command here are strongly against Cavalry.

A few years later the Queensland Staff Officer for Mounted Infantry, Major Percy Ricardo, stressed in his preface for the new, locally created, Queensland mounted infantry manual that whilst that colony's mounted infantry may be required to carry out cavalry duties on campaign, 'it must be impressed on the men that they are in no sense cavalry, their horses being provided merely as a means of locomotion' [italics in original]. Contributing to this sentiment by local officers and officials was the generally pro-mounted rifle attitudes of a number of the Imperial officers who were sent to Australia to command and inspect in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Major-General J Bevan Edwards was sent to the Australasian colonies in 1889 to conduct a review of the defences. His review was wide ranging and his recommendations many but among them was an effort to encourage the use of mounted rifles as the mounted troops of the colonies. In his report he recommended that the cavalry corps of New Zealand would 'be of greater use if they were drilled and equipped as mounted infantry'. He told Victoria that 'no greater part of your force will be of greater use in war than the Mounted Rifles, and it is the arm most suited to the defence of the Australian Colonies ...'. New South Wales was urged to increase its mounted infantry regiment from its current 297 personnel to over 1000 organised into three regiments. In contrast the local cavalry bodies received virtually no support apart from the obligatory polite remarks.

The arrival of Edward Hutton, with the local rank of Major-General, as New South Wales Commandant in 1893, brought to Australia one of the British Army's most vocal and active advocates of mounted infantry. Though he was careful to praise the enthusiasm of the cavalry regiment under his command during his tenure in New South Wales, he was evidently more interested in mounted soldiers capable of using their firearms. During his time in New South Wales he renamed the mounted infantry the Mounted Rifle Regiment, reorganised the mounted forces into a brigade that, probably for the first time in Australia, could be called a combat formation rather than an administrative arrangement, and made the Lancers carry out some 'necessary changes in the method of carrying the firearms, and some alteration in tactical training, so as to develop the power of dismounted action....'. He wrote and lectured on the role of mounted troops in modern war, and supervised the creation of the Manual of Drill for the Mounted Troops of Australia. This manual diplomatically gave all forms of mounted soldiers in Australia a doctrinal place, but the publication had a marked focus on fire tactics. In the preface he wrote for the manual he revealed, not for the first time, the influence of George Denison in the formulation on his thoughts on the use of mounted forces and transferred them to the local context.
In no country in the world will a mounted force be found more necessary for military operations than in Australia. Distances are so great, transport away from the great lines of rail so difficult, that, as in America at the commencement of the great war of Secession [sic], 1862-65, so in Australia would success be to that force which had the best and the most completely equipped mounted force. It was entirely due to the magnificent force of improvised mounted troops which the characteristics of its inhabitants enabled the Southern States to put in the field that their initial success was due, and it was not until the Federal States, with their far greater resources, following in the footsteps of the South, similarly provided themselves with a powerful and efficient mounted force that the tide of success finally turned in their favour. So will, undoubtedly, be the result of any warlike operations which may in the future be conducted on this continent. Success will be to that army which can turn to account the splendid inherent resources which the Colonies of Australia possess in the supply of horsemen...

Though not a man normally described as diplomatic, Hutton displayed an ability to be so when it came to the mounted troops of New South Wales, being careful never to over praise or offend either arm of his Mounted Brigade. His successor in New South Wales, Major-General GA French possessed a limited amount of that quality, however. In his report on the colonial defences for 1897 he took a decidedly partisan position and dismissed the local cavalry as next to useless for the defence of the colony. He then told the government that 'I have no hesitation in advising that any extension of our Mounted Forces should be in the direction of Mounted Riflemen...'. His counterpart in Victoria in the late 1890s, Major-General Charles Holled Smith was of a similar opinion.

We want as many mounted rifles as we can get. They are essentially the arm for Australia. They know the country to be operated over, and they can ride. You don't want cavalry, for there are any amount of wire fences and other obstacles to the proper and efficient use of cavalry, but Mounted Rifles are absolutely the most important force in the defence of the colony, always excepting an adequate force of artillery at the Heads to work the guns. I cannot help thinking... how absurd it was in our campaign against the Boers in the Transvaal to employ such a large proportion of infantry. The Boers were practically mounted rifles and as such were, of course, able to outmarch our infantry everywhere. They were what mounted rifles should be—good shots and good riders.

His Governor was of much the same opinion and in 1897 Lord Brassey tried to convince the colonial and defence authorities in London, unsuccessfully, that Australia would be a perfect place to raise an auxiliary force of mounted rifles for service with the imperial army anywhere in time of war.

Given the general Australian preference for mounted rifles there is some irony in the fact that the first Australian troops to see active service was a detachment of the New South Wales Lancers. Sailing home from a period of training with the British regulars at Aldershot the Lancers disembarked at South Africa and, eventually getting attached to the Cavalry Division of Major-General Sir John French, marched off to fight the Boers.

The Cavalry Division, like cavalry in Europe 30 years before, was to have quite a difficult war. Cavalrymen in South Africa, having come south with lances, swords and their Martini-Metford carbines, found an enemy who had no intention whatsoever of obliging them by facilitating a glorious charge with the arme blanche. Though two squadrons of British cavalry had an initial success at Elandslaagte in October 1899 when they managed to successfully charge an already withdrawing Boer force, there would be few other opportunities, in the words of the Marquess of Anglesey, Elandslaagte proved to be 'the solitary genuine example of a profitable charge with the arme blanche in the whole war'. The men of the Cavalry Division were facing an enemy who, mounted on their hardy veldt raised horses, would, as much as possible, use the full, superior, range of their artillery and Mauser rifles when engaging their enemy. Cavalry, with a very few exceptions, never got close enough to use their swords or lances and often had trouble getting close enough to use their carbines—a weapon with an
extreme range not even half that of the Mausers of the other side. It is not so surprising then, that in October 1900 Field Marshal Lord Roberts, commander in South Africa and no friend of traditional cavalry, moved to alter the armament of cavalry. He ordered all lances and carbines withdrawn and replaced them the standard infantry rifle and bayonet—only the units of French's Cavalry Division were allowed to keep their swords.\(^{41}\) This largely formalised what had been the reality for nearly a year. That the regular cavalry of the British Army had to fight this war as mounted riflemen. Without this change the cavalry had become:

Big men on increasingly undersized mounts, too heavily equipped and armed with carbines much inferior to the enemy's rifles, prevented from conforming to their original tactics, yet loath to abandon them to new methods, [they] were now shown without any doubt to be powerless to exert any real influence on the course of the fighting.\(^{42}\)

The value of cavalry lay, not in their armament and ethos, but in the mobility and speed they derived from their mounts. Cavalry, however, no longer held this advantage as a monopoly.

In order to combat a highly mobile enemy the British Army increasingly began to mount its own soldiers on horses. Battalions of infantry regulars, drawing on the experiences gained pre-war in the mounted infantry schools, were soon mounted and the raising of new mounted rifle units from Britain and the colonies quickly became a high priority. Some of these troops, made into a Mounted Infantry Brigade, commanded by Edward Hutton, had proved themselves very valuable to Lord Roberts on the advance to Pretoria where they had restarted his stalled advance at the Vet River and had also managed to cut off a significant Boer force trying to retreat from Johannesburg to Pretoria. It was 'one of the few instances during the whole war in which a direct pursuit resulted in a sizable capture—and it was not made by the cavalry!'\(^{43}\) As the relatively conventional war of the first months transformed into a mobile guerilla war after the fall of Pretoria, cavalry had even less scope for its traditional role. What was emerging on the battlefields of South Africa, on both sides, was a single form of useful mounted soldier—the mounted riflemen, and British Army couldn't seem to get enough of them. In 1899 Captain Antill of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles wrote that the British:

[A]re sadly in want of mounted troops, and are sighing for mounted rifles. We could do with a few more thousand. They have lots of artillery but the difficulty in every fight is that the enemy get away without our being able to outflank them, being too weak in the mounted rifles arm. I have worked my men up very well. Pity there is not 1,000 of them.\(^{44}\)

The ascendency of the mounted rifleman in South Africa did not necessarily transform into a massive conversion of cavalry in the years following the Boer War, however. In Britain there was an increasingly heated debate about the role, place and form of cavalry and even in Australia, a place where the mounted riflemen had been dominant for nearly ten years, traditional cavalry found its defenders.

In Britain the reformists got the first shot off when Lord Roberts, now Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, abolished the lance, that most coveted but anachronistic cavalry weapon, for all but ceremonial use. In the Army Order that carried the message to his cavalrymen he wanted to 'impress upon all ranks that although the cavalry are armed with the carbine (or rifle) and the sword, the carbine (or rifle) will be henceforth be considered as the Cavalry soldier's principal weapon.'\(^{45}\) He then went further in 1904 and had an anti-

Conservative cavalrymen were nonplussed. There followed a decade long debate between conservatives and reformers that would not be settled, and even then not finally, until the eve of the First World War. The ranks of the vocal conservatives were well manned, but their
champion was the man who had commanded the Cavalry Division in South Africa, Sir John French. While commanding the Corps at Aldershot after the war he had allowed the 1st Cavalry Brigade to openly defy the lance abolition order and in late 1904, after Roberts had retired, he had successfully campaigned for the removal of the Roberts preface from the final edition of *Cavalry Training 1904*. In 1905 he publicly waded into the debate by providing a pro-arne blanche preface to a translation of a book on cavalry written by a Frenchman identified only as PS. In late 1904, after Roberts had retired, he had successfully campaigned for the removal of the Roberts preface from the final edition of *Cavalry Training 1904*. In 1905 he publicly waded into the debate by providing a pro-arne blanche preface to a translation of a book on cavalry written by a Frenchman identified only as PS. Providing prefaces to polemics on cavalry was to become a favoured tactic of French and Roberts over the coming years and in 1906 French did it again when he wrote a preface for another book written on the continent, Frederick von Bernhardi's *Cavalry in Future Wars*. French was not a fool and had seen the power of the rifle in South Africa but he remained convinced that cavalry that abandoned the arme blanche would be easy victims for European cavalry that remained focussed on their bladed weapons. Roberts, now retired, countered in 1910 by contributing his own introduction to *War and the Arme Blanche* by Erskine Childers. A book in which Childers, a journalist, novelist and author of one of the volumes of the *Times History of the War in South Africa*, made an attack on cavalrymen who felt that the Boer War and the use of fire tactics by cavalry was an aberration. This personal debate seesawed back and forth and French responded later that year with another preface to another book by Bernhardi, *Cavalry in War and Peace*, in which he attacked Childers and Roberts and invoked the sort of quasi-religious tone that cavalry conservatives were sometimes inclined to take, writing that:

I am convinced that some of the reactionary views recently aired in England concerning cavalry will, if accepted and adopted, lead first to the deterioration and then the to the collapse of cavalry when next it is called upon to fulfill its mission in war. I therefore recommend ... to read and ponder this book, which provides a strengthening tonic for weak minds which may have allowed themselves to be impressed by the dangerous heresies to which I have alluded.

French supported the author he was introducing in his assertion that though the war in South Africa, and more recently that in Manchuria, had provided some interesting highlights, it had not revealed any dramatic conditions that would affect the cavalry in any coming European War.

Roberts fired a final shot in 1911 with a preface to Childers' attack on French and Bernhardi in the book *German Influence on British Cavalry*. Central to Childers' arguments was his dismissal of the notion that European cavalry would only fight each other on horseback with the arme blanche. Childers wondered what would cavalry do if the rifle fire they were receiving was coming, not from infantry whom cavalry could not attack mounted except under the most favourable conditions, but 'unconventional cavalry, who, from a sense of fun or sane instinct for fighting, have determined to play a practical joke on the devotees of the pure faith'.

It was a question that conservatives were either unwilling or unable to answer, but it did not matter. The conservatives were in the majority, held most of the key positions in the British Army, and were not, in the end, particularly worried about what they saw as the radical ranting of an Irish born journalist come novelist and historian. Roberts and Childers produced a convincing intellectual argument in their various writings but they had no chance of out gunning the key officers that remained convinced of the power of the sword and lance in trained hands. Roberts had been retired but French had remained in the army and held a number of key appointments and since 1906 had been Commander-in-Chief designate for the British Expeditionary Force. In 1912 he was made Chief of the General Staff. He was ably assisted by the likes of Douglas Haig who was a passionate, if sometimes illogical, defender of traditional cavalry and Robert Baden-Powell who, as Inspector General of Cavalry from 1903 to 1907, had abandoned his past support for mounted infantry and supported French. Outside the army they were helped by Colonel Repington, the military correspondent of The Times. Men such as these ensured that *Cavalry Training 1907* had a pro-arne blanche preface, that in 1909 the lance was reinstated and that in 1913 the Army Council ruled that mounted infantry would have no place in any expeditionary force sent to a European war.
This is not to say that British Cavalry had remained in a total state of ossification. When still Commander-in-Chief, Roberts had ensured that the cavalry were rearmed with a rifle nearly identical to that of the infantry and from time to some officers even made the cavalry practice using it effectively, most famously the infantryman Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien at Aldershot in 1909. French had introduced machine guns to the cavalry and ensured that they were part of each regiment's establishment well before the First World War. He had also, evidently displaying that South Africa had taught some useful things, had also been moved to criticise cavalry with poor dismounted skills at the annual Aldershot manoeuvres in 1908, 1909 and 1910. The result of these limited reforms was that in 1914 British cavalry was able to act far more effectively dismounted than the cavalry of their French allies or German enemy, a fact greatly appreciated on the retreat from Mons. The fact remained, however, that in as late as 1913 as much as 80 percent of cavalry training time was devoted to training in shock tactics.

The part-time cavalrymen of Australia were no more willing to accept the strong anti-cavalry opinion coming out of the Boer War than were their regular brethren in Britain. New South Wales Lancers and the 1st Australian Horse found their public champion in 1901 when the journalist Frank Wilkinson wrote a small history of the two regiments. In it he attacked those who would seek to dispose of the armes blanche as operating on the 'supposition that the modern tendency is to extravagantly magnify the virtues of the new and experimental to the detriment of most things that have stood the test of time'. Like those of a similar bent in Britain he also sought to minimise the lessons learnt in South Africa and attacked what he saw as the:

[U]nsound conclusion that because cavalry—qua cavalry—have not been a pronounced success in this campaign, therefore the days of cavalry are numbered ... as though one could transplant the kopjes of South Africa to all future battlefields.

He then made a plea that the cavalry in Australia, especially the established units in New South Wales, should be maintained in the Australian military organisation. Another pro-cavalry voice was also heard from across the border when the Melbourne Cavalry, a small cavalry troop that had been established in 1899 against the wishes of the then colonial commandant, Charles Holled Smith, went public and told the local papers that they did not want to give up their status as volunteer cavalrymen. Their refrain, like that of not a few pre-federation units, was that they were being bullied by the new General Officer Commanding of the Australian Military Forces and that they should be able to take their place in the new Australian Army on their old terms.

The man they felt they were being bullied by was the seemingly omnipresent Edward Hutton, who had recently returned to Australia to command and organise the Australian Army. When it came to the organisation of a mounted branch for Australia there was never going to be much doubt about which way this long standing proponent of mounted infantry and mounted rifles was going to go. In 1902 he produced yet another manual for Australian mounted troops and in it his first words were:

Important as dismounted fire action of mounted troops has always been held to be, the recent improvement in fire-arms, and above all the introduction of smokeless powder, has given the fire action of mounted men a power which, in future, must materially modify, if it does not revolutionise, the tactics of the field of battle and the strategical combinations of a campaign.

When the Minister of Defence informed Hutton that for reasons of economy and efficiency it would be best to establish just one form of mounted arm in Australia, Hutton created the mounted rifle Light Horse regiments. These units were to train to carry out all the tasks of cavalry short of the charge with a bladed weapon, that is they were to fight on foot in both offensive and defensive operations, conduct reconnaissance and screening duties, and afford protection to all bodies of troops, both on the march and at the halt. Furthermore they were to be prepared to conduct long range strategic operations aimed at attacking the enemy's lines of communications or isolated garrisons. Fire tactics were to be the accepted norm and traditional cavalry now had no place in the schemes of Australian defence. The cavalry units
of the pre-federation era were converted to Light Horse in the first years of the twentieth
century and after the initial resistance the only serious discussion about the *arme blanche* in
Australia before the First World War was about whether the Light Horse should be issued with
bayonets or not.\textsuperscript{62}

The establishment of a national mounted rifle organisation such as this was in line with what
was being done at this time elsewhere around the empire with citizen based, partially paid,
mounted units. In Britain the yeomanry, having resisted for so long, traded their swords in for
rifles and the mounted troops of New Zealand and Canada too underwent a thorough
conversion to mounted rifles.\textsuperscript{63} Partly this was simply a reflection of the long standing idea
that it was easier to train citizen mounted soldiers as mounted riflemen than traditional
cavalry, but it would be wise not to underestimate the role of Hutton, and those like-minded, in
the development of the mounted troops of Australia in particular, and the empire in general.

The mounted warfare manual that Hutton wrote for Australia in 1902 was the theorising of
George Denison turned into doctrine. The regiments of the Australian Light Horse, like their
comrades around the empire, were the product of 40 years of doctrinal debate about the role
and place of mounted troops on the modern battlefield. The debate had been a long one but
the mounted troops of Britain's Dominions were, in the years between the Boer War and the
First World War, training and developing in such a way that they were in fact preparing for
what the next war would demand of them, the ability to fight as mounted riflemen. The
importance of the Boer War for the citizen mounted soldiers of the British Empire, and for
Australia in particular, was that it validated the generally established faith in mounted rifle
theory and brought about a significant degree of uniformity in its organisation and training.
The regular cavalry of the British Army made a far more ambiguous response to the lessons
of the Boer War and, despite their making a number of significant reforms, the dominant voice
there was that of the conservatives. When, in 1914, British cavalry was forced by the
conditions of battle to get off their horses and fight dismounted, the limited number of fire
oriented reforms that had been allowed proved their great worth. Ironically, this put British
cavalry in the position of being proving what its key defenders had been trying to deny for well
over a decade.
Endnotes

4. The charge commenced with about 800 men, of whom only 420 returned to German lines after charging the French gun line, their infantry supports and two brigades of French cavalry: ibid, 156-57.
7. Denison, Modern Cavalry, 10-11.
8. Ibid, xx.
10. Ibid, 420-29.
11. Denison, Modern Cavalry, v.
26. The Hon A Catt, South Australia, Parliamentary Debates, 4 September 1889, col 796.
27. Denison, Modern Cavalry, passim.
29. Ibid, 19.
30. Unsigned notes dated 10 December 1890 attached to letter from Victorian Assistant Adjutant-General to EJ Dye, 24 November 1890. B 3756/0, Item 1890/3749, National Archives of Australia, Melbourne.
33. Ibid, 12.
34. Ibid, 8.
41. Ibid, 236.
42. Ibid, 206.
43. Ibid, 173.
46. Cited in ibid, 396-97.
50. Ibid, xviii-xix; Bernhardi, *Cavalry in Future Wars*, 5.
54. Ibid, 63.
55. Ibid, 414.
57. Ibid, 2-4.
58. General Officer Commanding to the Minister of Defence, 13 November 1903, B168/0, Item 02/1631, National Archives of Australia, Melbourne.
60. Ibid, xii.
61. Ibid, xii-xiv.
The aim of this paper is to get beneath the 'shoot and ride' concept to examine aspects of the mechanics of mounted warfare and how it operated—or failed to operate—during the Boer War. Although the paper does focus on Australian and New Zealand examples and evidence, this is firmly set in the context of the broader conduct of the war by both the British and Boer leadership. As will be seen, the colonial contingents did play a major role, but their employment, and the conduct of the war as a whole, was firmly in British hands throughout.

The quintessential image of the war for most Australians and New Zealanders is the Light Horseman or Mounted Rifleman. Whatever their specific unit title, the image of the lean bushman holding his rifle and sitting on his horse is one of the most dominant of the contemporary period. The mounted rifleman appears on the cover of the Australian War Memorial's A Guide to the Battlefields and Memorials of the Boer War, Craig Wilcox's The Boer War: Australians and the War in South Africa, 1899-1902, and the Summer 1999 edition of the Australian War Memorial's official magazine, Wartime. His Boer equivalent appears on the front cover of the Spring 1999 New Zealand Defence Quarterly. This is quite rightly so—the Boer War, in all phases, was a war of manoeuvre and counter manoeuvre.

The delivery of effective firepower by mounted troops is largely a function of the quality of the weapons, the marksmanship, and the ammunition, and of the quantity of ammunition available. The Boer War saw some difficulties in all of these areas, particularly in its early stages. Marksmanship on the British side at least was seen as a problem, although the Banjo Paterson aphorism 'Think how often you're shot at—think of how seldom you're shot!' quoted in Peter Stanley's paper suggests that the Boers were not always accurate either. Despite this, the Elgin Report (the report of the British post-war commission into the war), was scathing of the quality of the marksmanship. This included the standard among the colonial troops. These were not, apparently, the natural marksmen of bush and prairie that they, and the British, had apparently believed. The tone of the Elgin Report in this area is one of disappointment and the post-war emphasis on musketry training in Canada was probably not an overreaction.

New South Wales volunteers had to pass a shooting test before enlistment or, if already serving, they had to be assessed as a 'first class shot'. Despite this, the Elgin Report (the report of the British post-war commission into the war), was scathing of the quality of the marksmanship. This included the standard among the colonial troops. These were not, apparently, the natural marksmen of bush and prairie that they, and the British, had apparently believed. The tone of the Elgin Report in this area is one of disappointment and the post-war emphasis on musketry training in Canada was probably not an overreaction.

The problem of poor marksmanship also gains some support from the amount of ammunition expended during the war. The Elgin Report notes that over 67 million rounds of pistol, carbine, rifle, and machine gun ammunition were fired by British and colonial troops during the two-and-a-half year war. It drily adds: "this certainly seems a large expenditure in proportion to the highest possible estimate of killed and wounded enemies." At the outbreak of the war the British Army was also in the process of changing over from the Lee-Metford to the Lee-Enfield rifle. Although generally regarded as of equivalent value to the Boer Mauser, the original issue of the Lee-Enfield had problems. Parts of the Regular British
forces had had the Lee-Enfield for some time but it was only when the Imperial Yeomanry was issued with the new weapon prior to deployment to South Africa that the problem was identified, namely that the weapon's sights had been incorrectly manufactured and shot 18 inches to the right at 500 yards—just the right distance off target to make a Boer at 500 yards very happy indeed. It was ironic, given the disdain in which volunteer or militia units were held, that they and not the Regular Army discovered the problem—as the Elgin Report noted with some embarrassment.7

Interestingly, it was also militia units in Britain that had brought to light problems with the Mark IV .303 inch ammunition which had caused its withdrawal just prior to the start of the Boer War. This was an expanding round and under conditions of excessive heat where dirt was present in the weapon the lead core tended to squirt through the small aperture in the nickel jacket of the round, leaving the jacket in the barrel. When the next round was chambered this led to a blow-back in the breech.8

While arguing that the Regular Army had not had this problem because they kept their rifles cleaner than the militia, the War Office rightly concluded that even Regular troops might have problems avoiding excessive heat and dirt in wartime and withdrew the round. The Elgin Report stated categorically that it was not the Hague Convention's ban on expanding rounds which caused the withdrawal of the Mark IV round in the late summer of 1899 (the four million rounds already sent out to South Africa were withdrawn on 17 October 1899). The result was that around 66 million rounds of the 172 million stock of .303 inch ammunition were withdrawn just prior to the commencement of hostilities with the Boer republics, leading to a crisis in stocks. For a while the situation was considered dangerous, but the required ammunition was in fact despatched to South Africa. This was despite grave concerns about the stocks available for home defence and fears that in the event of war with a European power, the British would have had no option but 'to fight them with expanding bullets'.9

Despite these early concerns over the ammunition supply and the effectiveness of the Lee-Enfield, their actual effects seem to have been minimal, and probably largely involved some loss of confidence in the equipment among the troops in the field, although this does not feature in the contemporary letters and diaries I have seen. Another potential problem issue was also fairly soon resolved. Cavalry units were equipped with a carbine, which had a shorter range than the rifle, and this placed British-equipped cavalry at a distinct disadvantage against the Boers. However, the carbines did prove effective in the blocking engagement by the remnants of French's cavalry division which preceded Paardeberg, and any disadvantage was removed when the carbines were replaced with the rifle during the course of the war.10

In terms of firepower, the British and colonial mounted troops faced some initial problems, but apart from the marksmanship issue none of these lasted very long into the war. The mounted troops, including the traditional cavalry units, therefore had the tools available to them to generate generally appropriate small arms fire during the course of the war.11

The issue of mobility is more complex and the rest of the paper will examine its importance and some of the problems with achieving it during the Boer War. The point that mobility was important does not need to be laboured, but it is worth reiterating. The campaigning distances in South Africa are large and the Boers were very mobile. To fight a mobile enemy required the British and colonial forces to adopt a similar level of mobility.12

Even in the more traditional warfare leading up to Paardeberg and the subsequent occupation of Pretoria, the Boer tactic of fighting and withdrawing before becoming decisively engaged was very effective against a slow-moving enemy. When the Boers did occupy fixed positions and stood and fought, mobility offered the British forces the opportunity of seizing the initiative. General French's great flanking march to Kimberley illustrates the value of mobility at the operational level to split the enemy and catch him flatfooted. His subsequent blocking of Cronjé's force which led to the destruction of the Boer force at Paardeberg is another good example.13
Perhaps the best summary of the importance of mobility is in the Elgin Report. Despite its ambivalence over the respective value of cavalry and mounted rifles, and its caution that South Africa was an atypical war, it stated:

In the late war the Boer force consisted entirely of Mounted Riflemen with, in the earlier stages, a certain number of guns, operating for the most part, in an unenclosed country which offers wide space for the movements of irregular horsemen. Except in Natal, and even there to some extent, infantry were at a great disadvantage in this war as against mounted enemies, and, for this reason, in the latter part of the war all active operations were carried out on the British side by mounted men.  

However, there were several constraints on achieving mobility which had an adverse effect on the British conduct of the war. Some of these arose from circumstances peculiar to the Boer War. Others arose from factors, or a disregard of factors, which are inherent and timeless in the employment of the horse in combat.

The first potential constraint was the number of mounted troops deployed to South Africa. The field force which embarked after mobilisation in October 1899 had a high proportion of infantry, with mounted troops constituting only approximately 2 per cent of the total (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Troop Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>4586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounted Infantry</td>
<td>1163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantry</td>
<td>31,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>4917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>1600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source: Elgin Report, 37}

The proportion of mounted troops in the 22,486 strong garrison already in South Africa at the outbreak of war may have been higher (although the figures given in the Elgin Report unfortunately include both Mounted Infantry and Infantry under the same heading). In addition, it was hoped to recruit eight to ten thousand light or irregular cavalry from among local British subjects in South Africa, particularly from those displaced by the Boer republics.

However, it soon became apparent that the type of country and the nature of the combat required large numbers of Mounted Infantry and Mounted Rifles. In the context of the discussion it is important to understand the distinction between these two troop types, and between them and cavalry. In the British documents there is a clear distinction, although the nomenclature of units in the colonies and general usage there did not apparently maintain this distinction.

'Mounted Infantry' denoted trained infantry (and usually Regular Army infantry at that) which had undergone additional training to allow them to ride into action. Once at the front, they would dismount and fight on foot, using traditional infantry tactics. 'Mounted Rifles' were essentially regarded as irregular cavalry. Equipped with infantry weapons but not trained as line infantry, they fought on foot but were not expected to be expert in traditional infantry tactics. 'Cavalry' were horsemen equipped with the sword or lance who generally fought while mounted, using traditional cavalry tactics.
At the outbreak of the Boer War the British Government accepted ‘mounted infantry’ from Queensland and New Zealand (although the first contingent of New Zealanders was actually designated as the first New Zealand Mounted Rifles) but then sent a rather unfortunately worded cable to the remaining Australian colonies and to Canada. This read in part: ‘firstly units should consist of 125 men; secondly, may be infantry, mounted infantry, or cavalry; in view of numbers already available, infantry most, cavalry least serviceable.’

The post-war enquiry produced the explanation that the cable’s intent was not to discourage the colonies from providing mounted troops per se, but from providing traditional cavalry. Sir Redvers Buller, who was the individual who had briefed Lord Lansdowne on the requirements and recommended the wording quoted above, stated that he remembered ‘saying that cavalry would be quite useless’. However, in answer to the question ‘But you did not mean by that to exclude mounted infantry?’ he replied:

No it was cavalry I had in my thoughts all the way through, because I know what irregular cavalry, if I may say so, our Yeomanry are. As cavalry they are of no use; they are very good mounted troops, but they are no use as cavalry.

Although the report concedes that ‘both Lord Lansdowne and Lord Wolseley admitted that the telegram in question may have been unfortunately worded’, it concluded that ‘it does not appear to have had any practically bad results’. Whether this is an accurate assessment or not, it does reveal a rather infantry-centric approach on the part of senior commanders at the time and may have caused some confusion among the colonies. The real requirement was soon realised however, and Lord Lansdowne notes that when more substantial colonial forces were discussed ‘a short time after’, the War Office accepted 4700 mounted men compared to 2400 dismounted soldiers.

However, two factors which did have a serious effect on British and colonial mobility during the Boer War were a general shortage of horses, particularly in the earlier stages of the war, and the widespread poor condition of the troop horses serving in South Africa. The first point might seem initially rather strange as during the 30-odd months of the war over half a million horses served in the Empire forces. The figures in Table 2 illustrate one of the reasons for the problem: the number of horses which died during the war.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Served</td>
<td>518,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Expended'</td>
<td>347,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Lost on voyage'</td>
<td>13,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survived</td>
<td>158,643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The odds of survival for a horse, then, were not good. Only around three per cent survived the war and none of the 40,000 or so Australian and only one of the 8000 New Zealand troop horses were brought home. The sheer scale of these losses, coupled with the difficulty of replacing them, led to problems which affected mobility, especially in the early years of the war.

There were several reasons for these losses. The first was that some horses never made it to South Africa. The Elgin Report records over 13,000 as 'lost on voyage’ (see Table 2). Some died of sickness, others in storms: the Glen Innes Examiner of 17 October 1899 records the loss of 100 alone on one ship in a gale off the South African coast.
A second reason was enemy action. Because a horse is a much bigger target than a man (and generally not so good at crouching behind cover) it has a greater chance of being hit by fire. In one action in May 1900, for example, a Lieutenant Rundle, who had arrived in the country with the New South Wales Lancers, had three horses shot out from under him. This was apparently a very common experience and perhaps explains why the future General Chauvel seems to have spent the aftermath of most actions in appropriating a Boer pony. At Eland's River, of the 1540 horses with the defenders 1378 were killed, around nine per cent of the total. At Wilmansrust some 80 horses peacefully tethered next to the Victorians' tents were cut down in the opening Boer fusillade.

However there were other hazards, natural ones, which caused horse casualties. The regimental history of the Royal New South Wales Lancers records two instances of groups of horses being killed by lightning strike—apparently a not infrequent occurrence on the veldt. Horses could also die from eating the wrong plant life. Vernon, for example, records a case of horses saved with considerable difficulty from a Boer-lit grass fire 'only to die some days later from eating tulip grass'.

Sickness too was a major problem. If disease was the common enemy of the Victorian soldier, it was arguably worse for his horse. Their frequently poor condition left them vulnerable to disease and many died. There were also the normal hazards associated with hard riding across rough terrain—broken limbs or lameness. All of this might help explain why in the first New Zealand contingent a surgeon's daily pay rate was £1-1-0 while a veterinary surgeon received £1-4-8.

One of the distinctive features of campaigning in South Africa during the Boer War was the sight of large numbers of dead horses, and descriptions of these are common in the accounts of Australian soldiers. Two typical examples, both from letters home to northern New South Wales written by Allan Cameron and published in the Glen Innes Examiner, give an idea of what was a fairly common experience.

We came past the place where Cronjé was captured [ie Paardeberg], and could scent it miles before we came to it. The horses are lying so close together that you could walk on top of them; and talk about smashed up wagons, I never saw such a mess before.

Between Bloemfontein and Kimberley it was something awful, the route was a scene of desolation, strewn with dead horses and oxen, with crowds of South African vultures hovering over them, and starving horses left by the British grazing on the scanty grass.

The last comment in the second extract illustrates one of the other main reasons for the shortage of horses and a key element in the reduced efficiency of those which lived. This is the harsh conditions under which they operated and the treatment they received. Here again another cherished view of the Australian and colonial participation in the war—our level of horsemastership, or care of horses—does not quite bear close scrutiny.

Like the natural soldier theory of bushmen being good shots, horsemastership among the colonial contingents is the subject of unfavourable comment in the Elgin Report. Despite praise in other areas, care of their horses is one area where colonials were not seen as meeting the same standards as British Regular cavalry. These were not necessarily of the highest standard either. Given the strong cavalry tradition, there was probably in 1899 still an element of Cardigan's view that it was disgraceful for any cavalry officer or even trooper to walk. This led to his famous 'sore back reconnaissance' in the Crimean War which resulted in the death of 80 of the 196 horses involved, and the permanent disabling of many others—all without any contact with the enemy.

This is a very serious problem for the use of horses in combat. In general they are not as resilient as humans and once they pass a certain point of fatigue, or under-feeding or watering, they never properly recover and are useless for further service. The key, unless an
endless supply of horses is close at hand, is not to take the horse past this point. However, this was difficult to do in South Africa given the nature of the country, the nature of the conflict, and problems of resupply.

As Kitchener pointed out, there is little that can be done to improve horsemastership once a war starts; it is largely a product of pre-war training and experience. Given the speed with which some colonial contingents were raised and despatched to South Africa, it is not surprising that this was an area of weakness. One contemporary explanation of why Australians were apparently not so careful with their horses as they might have been is that in the Australian peacetime environment horses were not worked as hard and replacements were easy to come by. Some attempts were made to improve horsemastership, though. One of the grievances cited by the 5th Victorian Mounted Rifles against their commander, General Beatson, after Wilmansrust (and which helped add to unrest and subsequent charges of mutiny against three soldiers) concerned exactly this. Apparently the soldiers concerned were particularly upset with General Beatson's habit of making the entire regiment walk for a day if he found any men whose horses had sore backs.

Some individuals and some units were of course better than others. The first New Zealand contingent, for example, took 252 horses with them, of which 13 died on the voyage. Despite the fact that on landing in South Africa they were deployed straight to the front, the New Zealanders believed that their mounts held out better than most. They also took great pride in their claim that they lost the smallest percentage of horses of any mounted unit during French's advance on Colensburg. However, losses were accepted as natural—the New Zealanders' pride came not from the complete avoidance of loss, but that their loss was the smallest. When the contingent returned home after its 12 months its members were also very proud that they could pass on about 20 of the original 252, all in good condition.

A survival rate of under eight per cent may not seem anything to boast about, but under the circumstances this was seen as a triumph, and confirmed that good horse-care could bring good results in South Africa. This was demonstrated in 1885, for example, when Baden-Powell completed a 600-mile reconnaissance of the rugged Drakensburg region, averaging 33 miles per day and finishing with his horses in 'tip top condition'. The key to Baden-Powell's success here (apart from not being shot at) was that he used two acclimatised horses which he kept properly fed and watered, and rotated them to allow them to rest.

This was not the case for the British and colonial forces in South Africa, especially at the start of the war. A variety of factors all led to problems with horses. Those from the northern hemisphere brought into the South African summer still had their winter coats. All imported mounts arrived in soft condition following long or very long sea voyages, during which there was no opportunity for exercise. On arrival, horses were often loaded straight onto trains, moved forward, and then deployed straight into combat or combat-related duties. Trooper Vernon records the fate of one such group of horses after a 25 mile (40 km) move in one day, writing in his diary that 'this long march and winter weather conditions proved too much for the "soft remounts" and many had to be destroyed'.

This was because once in the field the horses were worked hard. The New Zealand contingent, for example, recorded one three-day period during which their horses remained saddled, and this was by no means uncommon. Field conditions often involved inadequate watering and feeding, and, at least initially there was no proper remount system to replace losses or allow horses to be rested. As a result, horses died in droves (the 6th Dragoons alone lost 200 in one week, on a 170 mile advance in May 1900) and the performance of those which survived was degraded.

Horse feed and logistics played a very important part. Although the uninitiated may think that feeding a horse is easy—one simply turns it out to graze—the real situation is much more complex. The daily ration for horses on campaign is considerably more than just grass. Table 3 illustrates the British Army scale of rationing in the early part of this century.
There is clearly some variation here, depending on the size of the animal and the campaign area, and obviously lower rates often had to be accepted, at least temporarily, under the exigencies of combat. However, something similar to the amounts given for horses in Table 3 was required (less for Boer ponies) to keep a horse functioning properly.

This was not easy. The Elgin Report concedes that there were problems with the supply of horse feed.\textsuperscript{46} Given that the same report claims the supply of food for the men during the war was a success story, while many soldiers' accounts complain that food was often in short supply,\textsuperscript{47} the difficulties with horse feed were almost certainly worse than acknowledged. This problem derived from a variety of factors. The first was that because of the political sensitivity of the situation in the period leading into the war a conscious decision (unpopular though it was with sections of the army) was made to limit stockpiling and local purchase.\textsuperscript{48} In addition, the large quantities of supplies required were more than the transport could cope with. For example, Colonel Sir Edward Ward testified after the war:

\begin{quote}
Between 7th October and 2nd November the reserves at Ladysmith had increased to 65 days' breadstuff, 50 days' meat, including trek oxen, 46 days' groceries, and 32 days' forage for a force of 12,000 men. But to do this 'we used every train, poured in everything we could, brought up local supplies, and so on'.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

The level of the effort required to stockpile even this amount of supplies was very high indeed and, combined with the large quantities of horse-feed required, meant that the supplies for the horses were stocked at a lower level than for the men. The problems of scale here were compounded by general difficulties in the British supply system. At the start of the war the Army Service Corps was operating in peacetime mode, with no plans or capacity for expansion. It was initially unable to keep up with the demand for horsecflesh and horse feed. There was also no proper organised remount system, such as that existing in the Indian Army.\textsuperscript{50}

Resupply, particularly for the horses, therefore posed particular problems, and to reduce the strain on the supply system. Lord Roberts, for example, cut in half the daily ration of feed during the operations in the eastern Transvaal in February 1901.\textsuperscript{51} Grazing as a supplement was also a problem. There was a lack of local grazing, especially in the poorer parts of the country, and to graze the equivalent of 12lb of hay by itself would take a horse five hours. This amount of time was not always available under combat conditions, and would anyway seriously reduce the period available for movement. The limited availability of remounts was also compounded by a prohibition on commandeering local mounts, at least in Cape Colony.\textsuperscript{52}

Not surprisingly the performance of the horses dropped off rapidly under these conditions and the individual soldier and armies alike consequently suffered a loss of mobility. This affected the conduct of the war at both the tactical and operational levels and on several occasions prevented the exploitation of success against the Boers. During the post-war investigation into the war Field Marshal Lord Roberts commented on the general problems of horse condition and singled out the lack of fresh horses as the reason why the Presidents of the two Boer Republics escaped at Poplar Grove. Lord Methuen also claimed that the lack of fresh horses caused him problems at Belmont.\textsuperscript{53} French was perhaps lucky at the Riet River that the Boers failed to realise that he had only been able to deploy 1200 men to block them because of the
parlous condition of his horses. On a lower level, letters home from Australian mounted soldiers not infrequently mention problems in pursuing Boers because of the state of their horses or the lack of supplies.

All of this hampered the British war effort by restricting their mobility and allowing the Boers more freedom of movement than might otherwise have been the case. To their credit, though, the British did develop a system to overcome this. This involved large-scale purchase of foreign horses to overcome the lack of numbers in Britain. Horses were bought in Australia, New Zealand, India, Argentina, and in Europe. Interestingly, this also helped bring down prices. Horses purchased in Britain early in hostilities cost an average (to date of shipment) of £47-14-2 while the best price was from Argentina, at £8-3-9. The requirement for colonial mounted contingents to provide their own mounts also alleviated the situation, as did the setting up of a proper remount system. Later in the war depots were set up well forward where sick or tired horses could be exchanged for fresh ones and in turn rested and recycled.

Gradually the balance of mobility swung away from the Boers and towards the British and their colonial supporters, especially after the fall of Pretoria. The Boers, cooped up in smaller areas, with less support available from the country, began to have their own problems. However, mobility was not enough by itself. In the second phase of the war a combination of experience, the reduced weight carried on horses, and sound intelligence allowed very good results to be achieved by mobile columns. However, Allenby for one complained that Kitchener’s poor coordination of these mobile columns considerably reduced their effectiveness. Some columns covered many miles and expended much ammunition for very small results. At this point the British and colonial forces possessed a high degree of mobility, and in fact had probably progressed as far as they could in this regard under the circumstances. What was needed was to supplement this by a reduction in Boer mobility.

This was achieved by the blockhouse and barbed-wire system which seriously reduced the Boer capacity to manoeuvre. Ultimately the combination of highly mobile columns, good intelligence, and these counter-mobility obstacles proved effective. In December 1901 Kitchener predicted (correctly) that the Boers would not be able to hold out much past April because of a lack of horse feed.

Clearly lack of horse feed was not the reason for the Boer loss of the war; many other factors were involved. However, in their pre-surrender discussions the Boers always included a lack of horses and horse feed as one of the main reasons why they could not continue the war. Botha, for example, claimed 11,000 burghers were still potentially active in the Transvaal, but 4000 were without horses and the horses the others had were in poor condition. The Boers had simply reached the point where they could no longer employ their greatest strength—mobility.

Mobility was crucial to British success, and logistic considerations and the physical constraints on the use of horses in combat were a major problem for the British effort for a large part of the war. These difficulties did reduce combat effectiveness and arguably extended the duration of the conflict. Only when this situation was improved and the British developed measures to restrict Boer mobility, placing the Boers in a similarly difficult position, were the full conditions for victory met.

Mobility was a crucial factor in the war and one of the keys to victory—as it is today. So too was the associated ability to deliver firepower quickly to the appropriate place. In this respect, and despite some deficiencies, the colonial mounted citizen soldier—whether a New Zealand Mounted Rifleman or the Australian ancestor of the more famous First World War Light Horseman—did play a very real role in helping to win the Boer War.
1. This paper was invited as 'an ancient historian's perspective' on the use of the horse in the Boer War and I would like to thank Dr Chris Pugsley of the School of Classics, History and Religion of the University of New England for providing me with advice on available sources, especially New Zealand ones.

2. The conditions under which the firing takes place, including range, speed of the target, whether the firer is also under fire, also play a major role but are less easy to analyse from a distance of 100 years.

3. From 'Maxims of War', in R Campbell and P Harvie (eds), Singer of the Bush: AB 'Banjo' Paterson's Complete Works 1885-1900 (Sydney: Landsdowne, 1983), 493. However, witnesses at the post-war commission of enquiry generally (but not universally) argued that the Boers were better shots, especially at close range: Report of His Majesty's Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Concerned with the War in South Africa (London: HMSO, 1903), 48, para 84 (hereinafter the Elgin Report).


5. Elgin Report, 80, para 147.


9. Ibid.


11. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the debate between the utility of true cavalry and mounted rifles. There was considerable division of opinion on this issue at the end of the war (see the Elgin Report, 49-52, paras 88-93) and the topic has been covered in some detail in Jean Bou's paper (see above, 99-114). For what it is worth, my opinion on this complex issue is that mounted rifles were the most useful in South Africa, although mounted troops who could use the arme blanche did have their uses. Trooper Vernon of the New South Wales Lancers reported the success of the 9th and 16th Lancers' charge at Klip Drift, stating that 'it cleared all opposition, and from then on I never saw a position held if the intention of a lance charge was shown': PV Vernon (ed), The Royal New South Wales Lancers 1885-1985 (Sydney: Macarthur Press, 1986), 50-51 (hereinafter Vernon, RNSWL). The then Colonel Haig gave similar testimony in the post-war enquiry, Elgin Report, 49, para 88.

12. An interesting early precedent for this is the general increase in the professionalism of ancient Greek cavalry in the early years of the fourth century BC. This in large part arose from Greek experiences in campaigning in Asia Minor against an enemy who made considerable use of cavalry: IG Spence, The Cavalry of Classical Greece (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 150-51.


15. Ibid, 78, para 144.


17. Elgin Report, 77, para 143.

18. Ibid, 78, para 144.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.


22. Cameron, Boer War, 21.

23. Vernon, RNSWL, 56.

24. AJ Hill, Chauvel of the Light Horse (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1978), 19, 25, although the general shortage of horseflesh and the superiority of Boer ponies in the conditions would also have played a part in this.


27. Ibid, 58, although this was not a strictly South African phenomenon—the Glen Innes Examiner of 19 January 1900 (Cameron, Boer War, 26) records an Australian volunteer en route to the city to enlist for South Africa whose 'horse died from eating "shivery grass"'.


29. See, for example, Vernon, RNSWL, 54.

30. Glen Innes Examiner, 27 April 1900, in Cameron, Boer War, 36.

31. Glen Innes Examiner, 7 September 1900, in Cameron, Boer War, 67.
32. Elgin Report, 47, para 82.
34. Spence, Cavalry of Classical Greece, 38.
35. Elgin Report, 47, para 81.
36. Ibid, 80, para 147.
37. Field, The Forgotten War, 164.
38. Stowers, First New Zealanders, 68-69.
41. Vernon, RNSWL, 57.
42. Stowers, First New Zealanders, 69; cf accounts from Troopers Watson, King and Legh of 27 hours, 34 hours, and 48 hours in the saddle, Glen Innes Examiner, 7 September, 21 September, 12 October 1900, in Cameron, Boer War, 68, 74, 81.
43. Cf Hill, Chauvel, 21; Vernon, RNSWL, 46, 51-52. French's Cavalry Division was reduced to 1200 effective men after a day without water during his pursuit of 'Long Tom' at the very end of his arduous flanking march to Kimberley: Amery (ed), Times History, III: 413.
44. Vernon, RNSWL, 54.
45. Amery (ed), Times History, VI: 382 confirms these figures for the larger horses, but states that the authorised ration for smaller horses in South Africa was 10lb each of grain and hay.
47. Ibid, 116, para 228. Cf Vernon, RNSWL, 51, and the various letters of Troopers Cameron, Gribble, and Hands, and Corporal Martin, published in the Glen Innes Examiner, 27 April, 18 September, 9 November 1900, and 19 November 1901, in Cameron, Boer War, 34-35, 72, 84, 100-01.
49. Ibid, 118, para 233.
50. Ibid, 97, para 186.
52. Ibid, 117, para 233.
53. Ibid, 98-9, para 188.
55. Glen Innes Examiner, 9 November 1900, 1 October 1901, in Cameron, Boer War, 84, 100.
56. Elgin Report, 97, para 184.
58. Pakenham, Boer War, 546.
59. Cf Field, The Forgotten War, 159-60, for poor results relative to effort expended at the end of 1901 by Rimington's column.
60. In May 1902 more than 8000 blockhouses had been built, covering 3700 miles manned by 66,000 troops: Pakenham, Boer War, 537.
61. RL Wallace, The Australians at the Boer War (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1976), 534.
'MANUFACTURING SPONTANEITY'?
THE ROLE OF THE COMMANDANTS IN THE COLONIAL OFFERS OF TROOPS TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR
Stephen Clarke

During the 1970s a number of Australian historians—most notably CN Connolly in his article 'Manufacturing "Spontaneity": The Australian Offers of Troops for the Boer War'—challenged the orthodox view that the colonial offers of troops for the South African War were spontaneous and argued that the initial Australian response was 'manufactured' through the machinations of London and its imperial agents in the colonies. The seconded British Army commanders of the colonial military forces, or commandants as they were known, were criticised by the revisionists as being the main imperial conspirators in the Australian colonies. This paper re-examines the role of the commandants in the decisions of the colonial governments to offer contingents to the South African War, and specifically whether they were involved in an Imperial conspiracy.

At the War Office on 8 June 1899, three days after the collapse of the Bloemfontein conference which increased the prospect of war between Britain and the Transvaal, the commander-in-chief of the British Army, Lord Wolseley, proposed beginning preparations for an expeditionary force to be sent to South Africa. Wolseley's belligerent minute concluded, 'It would create an excellent feeling if each of the Australian Colonies, Tasmania, and New Zealand; furnished contingents of mounted troops, and that Canada should furnish two battalions of foot. Colonial and Imperial troops serving side by side in war had been the hope of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, since the Colonial Conference of 1897. A month after similarly contemplating rallying the Empire behind the cause of South Africa, Chamberlain finally, on 3 July 1899, instructed the governor-general of Canada, together with the governors of New South Wales and Victoria, secretly to request their respective governments to offer military assistance. The cable sent to New South Wales and Victoria asked:

Can you, without publicity, find out from authorities whether they would avail themselves of this opportunity to show the solidarity of the Empire. Such an offer, spontaneously made, would be welcomed here, & might have a great effect in South Africa.

The British colonial secretary also made it clear that while their military contributions would be used, the real value of the colonial offers were to be a political 'demonstration'. This is where Wolseley and Chamberlain differed: the soldier was keen for a fight and believed a military demonstration would provoke war while the politician looked upon it as a means to force the South African Republic into capitulation as he still hoped for a 'pacific settlement'. Chamberlain's request for military assistance is viewed by revisionists as the lynch-pin in their argument that the colonial offers of troops were not spontaneous. Long before the request's arrival in Sydney, however, the British commandant in New South Wales had been agitating for a colonial military commitment in South Africa.

On 27 June 1899, Major-General George Arthur French wrote to Colonel George Gough, private secretary to Wolseley, to 'put forward privately (as I cannot officially)' advice for the commander-in-chief on how to obtain colonial contingents. Only a day earlier, Sydney's Daily Telegraph had reported the New South Wales commandant as sanctioning the recent spate of volunteering within the colony's forces, and that perhaps he had initiated it. It had not been the first time that French had advocated active service for the colony's military forces as he had supported the Lancers' request to serve in India two years earlier. Now, in July 1899, French informed the War Office that in the event of war in South Africa large numbers of New South Wales troops would volunteer for service. He added that,
Our men are continually volunteering to go anywhere for the sake of Active Service, but hitherto, except Soudan [sic] 1885, have been bluffed off, as no one could say on what conditions they would be accepted. To my mind it is highly important for Imperial as well as Colonial reasons that such an excellent spirit should be encouraged.

With this as his stated motivation, French provided the War Office with the benefit of his twenty years experience of the self-governing colonies in order to secure the services of colonial troops. He believed his men would volunteer for war but not for longer periods and also be prepared to accept the same rates of pay and allowances as British soldiers for such short periods. However, the main obstacle remained:

The average Colonial Government has usually not got backbone enough to offer the services of their men who volunteer, if they have to bear the cost, and defend their action in Parliament when asking supplies to be voted, after all the war enthusiasm has evaporated.

French's solution was simple: the British Government should let it be known that if they accepted colonial troops they would meet all the costs. With this understanding, the commandant believed that the colonial governments could be encouraged to bear at least a portion of the expense. French anticipated the British Government's objection would be that they were paying British Army rates for a force 'much below that standard'. He argued that the real burden on the British taxpayer was maintaining a permanent standing army whereas under his plan colonial troops would be an expense only when used on active service. Beyond mere business considerations, however, the British officer argued that 'the immense moral advantages to England should not be lost sight of'.

The fact is that French looked beyond South Africa to the establishment of an imperial military system and actually informed Wolseley that he had drawn up a general scheme to provide a 'war reserve' of colonial troops for imperial service. The War Office would have to wait for another year to receive this scheme, however, as French's immediate concern was to secure the opportunity of active service for his colonial troops in the present crisis. Toward this end, he further provided the War Office with a scheme for 'a complete self-contained Force' of approximately 2500 men as an indication of 'what we in New South Wales could do in case our services are likely to be of use in South Africa in the next few months'.

French's private correspondence was a highly irregular act, if not illegitimate, but one not unexpected from an officer who while owing his present employment to the colonial government had spent his entire professional life in Her Majesty's Forces. There was also a more personal motivation, one not expressed to the War Office, as French was desperate to see active service which had so far eluded him throughout his long career. The added incentive of active service for French was that it might save him from what seemed like imminent retirement at the end of his present appointment. The actions of this aging imperial officer during the following months certainly mark him as a man who viewed South Africa, as he openly admitted, as the 'chance of a lifetime'. This mix of personal desire to see active service together with a genuine professional view of the potential role of colonial forces in imperial defence was at the heart of all the commandants' subsequent calls to go to South Africa.

The greatest significance of French's private correspondence of 27 June in the context of the present argument is that it was written a week before Chamberlain's telegram reached Sydney and was therefore an independent and spontaneous gesture. This fact has been missed by previous historians because of a contemporary copying error which dated French's letter as 27 July, instead of June, although this does not excuse the historians concerned for failing to question how it could be possible during an age of surface mail for a letter supposedly written in Sydney on 27 July to be the subject of discussion at the War Office four days later! There is absolutely no evidence that the British authorities had contacted French and highly improbable because the New South Wales commandant was insignificant as far as they were concerned. What French's actions superbly highlight is the penchant of British commandants for individual initiatives which often, albeit not always, accorded with the wishes of London.
French's primary concern about the financial question preventing a colonial military contribution was soon realised in London as the Colonial Office received the cabled replies to Chamberlain's request. From 5 July onwards, the governors of New South Wales and Victoria reported that while their governments would support the enlistment of already large numbers of volunteers by the British Government they were not inclined to incur the cost of sending a contingent themselves. The problem for the colonial governments was one of justifying what at this stage seemed unnecessary military expenditure, just as French had anticipated. The responses of the colonial governments came as a great disappointment to the Colonial Office, leading one official to remark with regard to a reply from Victoria: 'It is a pity the troops who are anxious to volunteer could not inspire some of their spirit into their premier.' It was something the commandants also regretted and were trying to bring about for their own reasons.

The first official offer of troops from a colonial government in the empire, in fact, was the result of a recommendation from a British commandant. On 6 July, Major-General Howel Gunter, the Queensland commandant, suggested to his premier that a contingent of 250 Queensland Mounted Infantry "be offered for duty with the Imperial troops in the event of hostilities breaking out between Great Britain and the Transvaal." With rather an undistinguished career and no war service, Gunter's motivation may have been, like his colleague in New South Wales, the desire to see active service although he never publicly stated it. The newly elected premier, James Dickson, took up the idea and, without parliamentary sanction, cabled the offer to London on 10 July. Gunter's letter did not mention that he was speaking for any volunteers which was later criticised in parliament. Dickson defended that the offer from the mounted infantry had been verbal and that he had no reason to doubt the word of his commandant. Even if the premier was correct, it is unknown whether this verbal offer was unsolicited or at the request of the commandant.

What is clear is that there is absolutely no evidence of collusion between the British authorities and the commandant despite Connolly's claims. He argues that because the Queensland offer came only days after Chamberlain's cable it is 'circumstantial evidence that it was not spontaneous', and suggests that the Queensland governor may have been tipped off by his southern colleagues although the short period of time between the arrival of the cable in Sydney and Melbourne on 4 or 5 July and Gunter's memorandum written on 6 July makes this highly improbable. Connolly alternately speculates that the Queensland governor may have received an unofficial communication from Chamberlain which he argues 'would account for an anomaly in the Colonial Office records: the fact that the draft of the cable acknowledging the offer is dated 10 July—the day before the offer was received'. He concedes that this may have been a clerical error, but it is Connolly who made the error for he misread the Colonial Office's reply which is not dated 10 July, as he claims, but 11 July, the day the offer was received, as one would expect. The Colonial Office official responsible for the Australian colonies, moreover, referred to the Queensland telegram as an 'unsolicited offer' and there was no reason for this official not to be telling the truth in an internal minute. The problem with Connolly's argument is that he is held captive by his thesis and will not admit that there were colonial offers of troops to the British Government which were spontaneous and not 'manufactured'—at least not from London. The most important point is that through the independent actions of the Queensland commandant came the spontaneous offer that Chamberlain had sought in vain from New South Wales and Victoria.

Amongst the congratulatory telegrams to the Queensland Government was one from none other than Major-General French who, as a former commandant in Queensland, was 'glad to see my old force well to the front'. The problem for the New South Wales commandant was to persuade his present government to follow suit, although he had not been idle in this area either. Throughout early July, the commandant had requested his regimental commanding officers to draw up lists of volunteers. In an interview widely published throughout the Australian colonies on 14 July, French could already claim that between 1200 and 1500 members of the New South Wales forces had volunteered to go to South Africa. In reaction to the news of the Queensland offer, he now advocated a self-sustaining federal force of between 2000 and 3000 men be sent in the event of war. He emphasised the 'merits' of sending an Australian contingent lay in the number of Australians employed in the Transvaal mines. Besides, continued French, there was the 'moral effect' of such action for the unity of the empire and upon the rest of the world who would see that 'Greater Britain, and not the British islands alone, has to be reckoned with.'
French's public statements were therefore consistent with his private communication with the War Office, albeit until it came to the sensitive matter of expense. French told reporters that colonial troops would have to be paid at the same rate as the colony's permanent troops which was not what he had told the War Office a fortnight earlier. In congratulating the patriotic offer of Queensland, French concluded, 'There is a lot of enthusiasm on the subject in New South Wales also, and it only needs an offer to be made by the Government to ensure the organisation of a most valuable body of troops'. With this blatantly political statement the commandant had issued a challenge to the government.

During this newspaper interview, French had also alluded to volunteering in Canada and mentioned that, 'They also have at their head a thoroughly live man in Major-General Hutton'. In fact, however, Major-General Edward Hutton, the former New South Wales commandant and fervent imperialist, had been uncharacteristically slow off the mark. It was only after the Canadian Governor-General, Lord Minto, a close friend of Hutton since their days together at Eton, had informed the General Officer Commanding on 17 July of Chamberlain's request and asked him 'privately' the minimum force which Canada might reasonably contribute toward military operations in South Africa that Hutton had swung into action. It is not possible to ascertain whether the governors or the governments in New South Wales and Victoria similarly showed Chamberlain's request to their commandants, although French's actions antedated its arrival. Once primed, Hutton immediately drew up a scheme for the despatch of a self-contained Canadian contingent of 1200 men. Despite his knowledge of the opposition of the Canadian Government to offering troops, Hutton nonetheless privately communicated his scheme direct to Chamberlain and assured the British colonial secretary that 'if the emergency arose I am well persuaded that the enthusiasm for military service would be spontaneous'. Thus Hutton even spoke the same 'spontaneous' language as the British colonial secretary. The British officer was indeed now in the imperial loop over South Africa, something the commandants in Australia seem not to have enjoyed, and Hutton's actions in Canada certainly came closest to those of an imperial conspirator of which he was later suspected. It had been the governor-general and not the imperial authorities, however, that had requested Hutton for Canadian troops. Indeed, the British colonial secretary and the War Office hierarchy distanced themselves from Hutton's subsequent communications possibly to prevent any accusation of conspiracy in the future.

Like his counterparts in the antipodes, Hutton's own reasons for pressing for a Canadian contingent were far from disinterested. War in South Africa offered Hutton the opportunity to advance his career as well as the chance to command colonial troops in the Field and to demonstrate the qualities that he had praised with such hyperbole throughout the 1890s. He later privately informed Chamberlain and the War Office hierarchy that as soon as the Canadian Government made a formal offer in the event of hostilities he intended to cable for the War Office's permission 'to offer my services to the Canadian Govt, for "employment with them, and if required with other Colonial Troops similarly employed"'. In support of his own selection for this command, Hutton contended that his previous colonial experience would enable him to overcome 'the difficulties of handling Colonial Troops'. With characteristic immodesty, Hutton believed that his appointment would also 'gratify the Canadian people' while his 'old Australian comrades would be glad to again serve under me'. With London suitably primed, Hutton only needed the Laurier Government to offer a contingent and toward this end he launched himself into a public and private campaign 'to raise military enthusiasm and active patriotism' throughout Canada to a level of 'white heat'. Laurier's tactic nonetheless remained, as one newspaper observed, to hold 'a block of ice to the back of Canada's neck'.

The New South Wales premier also had so far resisted the pressure being applied by Chamberlain, through Governor Beauchamp, as well as the independent manoeuvres of the commandant. Ironically, Premier George Reid utilised the numbers of volunteers collected by French to slip through the net. On 21 July, the premier informed the Colonial Office that some 1860 men from the New South Wales forces had volunteered although reiterating that his government was still not prepared to 'bear expenses'. Reid's 'offer' of troops enabled New South Wales to appear loyal while not committing the government to any action as he would later admit. Chamberlain was nonetheless delighted as the New South Wales volunteers met his requirements for a 'spontaneous' offer. While the British colonial secretary may have been satisfied, it was very unsatisfactory for the New South Wales commandant who would still be deprived of the chance of commanding a colonial contingent in South Africa.
In London, meanwhile, the imperial authorities were considering the general question of colonial contingents for South Africa. On 19 July, and in response to a request from the Colonial Office, the War Office laid down the ground rules for the acceptance of any troops which the Australian colonies might be willing to offer. It proposed that the British Government pick up the entire bill of any colonial military contribution, including the payment of the colonial troops 'at the existing rates of the permanent forces in the various colonies.' The War Office envisaged New South Wales and Victoria sending two companies and the other colonies one each, either infantry or mounted infantry, limited to 1000 all ranks. In the event of the companies being formed into a single Australian battalion, the War Office made it clear to the Colonial Office that it would select the battalion commander, regimental staff, and also one officer per company. This last condition reveals that the War Office had initially contemplated the Australian colonial forces fighting as a federal force which they later would oppose.

The Colonial Office viewed these terms as 'ample' and urged the War Office to gain Treasury approval even though the colonial contingents in question had not been specifically offered. Treasury refused, however, arguing that the present circumstances did not justify this expenditure particularly since the matter had not been before cabinet. This reply reveals that elements of the British Government at this stage were no more prepared than the colonial governments to sanction Chamberlain's expensive gesture of imperial solidarity.

In late July, French's private communication finally reached the War Office. His recommendations were exactly what the British authorities wanted to receive and, in fact, brought about a rethink. Wolseley and the Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne, were particularly interested in the commandant's view that colonial troops would be willing to serve on British Army rates of pay. The War Office forwarded French's letter to the Colonial Office with the suggestion that they may need to reconsider their proposal of 19 July which had suggested payment at the higher rates of colonial permanent troops. 'Genl. French is likely to be right. We ought to press this most strongly', observed the permanent under-secretary for the colonies. 'We ought to press it & accept it in the event of an expedition', added Chamberlain. The Colonial Office reply stated that French's 'position and experience gave much weight to the expression of his opinion' and that they agreed with the War Office that should it become necessary to renew the application to Treasury it would be advisable to modify the proposal concerning pay in accordance with the views of the New South Wales commandant. French also received a private reply in which, as he later recalled, 'I was just told generally, that it was favourably considered'. There the matter remained, however, until the crisis required further action. The impact of French's correspondence in London reveals the potential usefulness of the commandants to the imperial authorities although they were repeatedly under-utilised.

The relative silence of the British commandants from late July through to early September reflected a period whereby it seemed possible that the crisis might be settled by diplomacy; one suspects much to the anxiety of the commandants as it was for their aging patron Wolseley. When news of the South African Republic's final rejection of the British ultimatum appeared in Australian newspapers on 18 September 1899, once more the commandants came to the fore. With the newly elected Lyne Government in New South Wales playing a waiting game the initiative within Australia passed to Victoria where once again it was the British commandant leading the call for military intervention.

Major-General Sir C Holled Smith had served against the Boers in 1881 and experienced first hand the military humiliation of Majuba Hill. Whether intent on personal revenge or not, the Victorian commandant was certainly no less keen than his northern counterparts to see Australian troops on active service in South Africa. Back in mid July, and after weeks of unconfirmed reports of defence department circulars calling for volunteers, Holled Smith had publicly declared himself in favour of the colonies sending a united Australian force and had suggested to the government, albeit without success, his proposal be cabled to London. Now, on 18 September with Melbourne's Age declaring 'BOERS FOR WAR!', Holled Smith revealed in a warlike statement to the press the government's inaction during the previous months and relaunched his call for an Australian contingent with the suggestion of a meeting of his fellow commandants to arrange the details. During the following days the Victorian
Government duly took the decision to begin enrolling volunteers—the first overt act of recruitment by a colonial government in the empire—and invited the other colonial governments to send their commandants to Melbourne. The Victorian Government, as in Queensland, had acted on the advice of their commandant which as military adviser it was his job to provide but for whom it was also a matter of personal self-interest. As the senior military officer in Australia, Holled Smith would have expected to receive the command of any federal force sent to South Africa.

It seems by sheer coincidence the Queensland premier was also contemplating a federal force, except with his colony leading the way. Upon receiving the Victorian invitation, Dickson suggested the commandants instead convene in Sydney where there would be less danger of the host government seeking to take the spotlight. Meanwhile, the New South Wales Government was reticent over the whole idea of a commandants’ conference least its recommendations bind the government to sending a force. With assurances from the Victorian premier that the final decision would remain with the colonial government, Lyne reluctantly agreed to send French. Dickson now had no choice but to accede to the fact that the conference would take place in Melbourne. By this time, however, he had already taken further measures to prevent Victoria from grabbing the initiative. Throughout August and September, the Queensland commandant had been busy preparing a contingent ready for active service. On 21 September, and now aware of the Victorian proposal, Dickson cabled London for information required by Gunter together with a request for the earliest indication as to whether the contingent would be used. This cable seems designed to elicit a definite decision by the British Government in order to enable Queensland to stand apart from any federal initiative which might result from the Melbourne conference.

By this stage, the South Australian cabinet had also independently offered to the British Government 'some members of South Australian Defence Forces'. Connolly admits that ‘South Australia’s offer may well have been largely spontaneous, but the evidence is inconclusive’. This is as close as Connolly can come to admitting that there were spontaneous offers because the evidence with regard South Australia simply does not support any other conclusion. The acting-commandant Colonel John Stuart, a colonial officer, had provided Kingston with a memorandum which outlined that 100 troops had verbally offered their services during July and August. Generally, however, Stuart had not been as vigorous as his imperial colleagues in the eastern colonies. This reflected his appreciation of the limited role that his colony’s small military forces would be able to play in an imperial war and which possibly explains the generally less active role of the commandants in the smaller colonies. This also underlines why smaller colonies such as Tasmania and Western Australia were content to follow the lead of the larger ones and send their commandants to Melbourne.

The conference—or 'Australasian war cabinet' as one British journal described it—assembled at Victoria Barracks on Friday afternoon, 29 September 1899. All the Australian colonial commandants attended: the aforementioned Major-Generals Holled Smith, French and Gunter as well as Colonel Stuart, together with Colonel GH Chippindall and Colonel WV Legge representing Western Australia and Tasmania respectively. Apart from Stuart and Legge, the commandants were all seconded British army officers. Duly elected president by virtue of his seniority, Holled Smith welcomed his fellow officers and alluded to the fact that 'as Federation was so near, it seemed to him a fortunate circumstance that the military forces should be the first to give effect to its principles'. But the labours of these colonial commandants were anything but federal in spirit. From the outset, the commandants from Queensland and New South Wales opposed a federal force. Gunter argued that since there was no federal authority there could be no federal force while French thought it would take too long, for the various colonial governments to sanction a federal force and that it would miss the action in South Africa.

These were legitimate concerns although there were other reasons behind their opposition. Apart from the objections of their respective governments to a federal force, French and Gunter would have realised that such a force would mean only one commandant going on active service and that both of them would undoubtedly lose out to Holled Smith, who apart
from being the senior officer possessed a distinguished service record including experience of Boer warfare. Although Imperial officers, the commandants could be as parochial as their governments for political as well as personal reasons. The varying views of the commandants further reveals that their attempts to pressure their respective governments to offer contingents were individual campaigns and no collective conspiracy on their part.

An exasperated Holled Smith questioned whether it was worth continuing but French and Gunter wanted to discuss uniform rates of pay and allowances which were important irrespective of whether a federal force was sent or not. The following day the Victorian Minister of Defence, William McCulloch, attended the meeting, undoubtedly at the request of Holled Smith, to remind the commandants of why they had been invited to Melbourne. The Queensland commandant was singled out as the main obstacle and eventually Gunter revealed that Queensland was in a different position from that of the other colonies as it had already ‘pledged to send a force whether an Australian force is sent or not’. Despite Queensland's go-it-alone stance, McCulloch's appearance had fulfilled its purpose as the chastised commandants returned to their task with the understanding that the final decision would rest with their respective governments.

By Wednesday, 4 October, the commandants had drawn up a scheme for an Australian contingent of 2053 officers and men of all arms: general staff (30); 1 battery of field artillery (120); cavalry and mounted rifles (833); infantry (1010); and engineers and army departmental personnel (60). The commandants’ recommendation of a self-contained contingent, with a specifically large proportion of mounted troops, showed a commendable appreciation of the requirements of a campaign in southern Africa. Those present in Melbourne provided another explanation for their recommendation:

... if a sufficiently large force, representing all arms, be sent it will always remain intact as an Australian Contingent, capable of acting alone or in concert with the regular troops; but if a small force be sent, there is the probability of its being scattered amongst other corps of the regular service, or being tacked on to some other Colonial Contingent, and thus having its identity destroyed.

This demonstrates a genuine desire on the part of the commandants to develop a sense of national identity within the contingent which they realised would be significant to its esprit de corps in any campaign in South Africa but also important for the future development of the soon to be federated Australian colonial military forces. A distinctive Australian contingent would have a much better chance of fulfilling such an agenda than colonial units scattered all over southern Africa. It was a policy also being pressed by Hutton who similarly looked forward to war in South Africa as a great fillip to his efforts to develop a 'Canadian Army'.

The desire of these seconded British army officers to see their colonial contingents fighting as 'national' forces was, however, at odds with the War Office.

By the end of September, the British authorities were deciding how to turn the generally vague offers of assistance from the colonies into a show of imperial solidarity. It had been a telegram from the Victorian Government on 20 September, informing the Colonial Office of many offers of service for South Africa and wishing to know whether the British Government would pay, which had got the ball rolling in London. Chamberlain reiterated to the War Office that unless the colonial force was 'representative and officially organized, it would be of no practical value'. Two days later, Queensland's cable arrived urging a decision be taken on whether their offer would be taken up. On 27 September, the Colonial Office received another cable from Victoria requesting information on what type of troops would be required in anticipation of the commandants' conference.

At the War Office, Lansdowne was characteristically unenthusiastic about accepting colonial contingents since 'their presence means more sea & land transport, more expense, and more "congestion"'. As already shown, however, Wolseley was a firm advocate for utilising colonial forces and his minute in favour of their acceptance is worth quoting at length as it also represents the views of the British officers in Canada and Australia (a number of whom, such as Hutton and Holled Smith, were his protégés):
From a military point of view, of course our own disciplined soldiers would be better men in front of any enemy than the bulk of these volunteers from the Colonies. But it would impress all foreign nations if we would have fighting alongside of our Regular Army, a fighting body representing all or most of our great Colonies. It would, I feel sure, draw those Colonies still closer to the mother Country by creating a new bond of union between all parts of our Empire. There is no bond more lasting or that appeals more to the imagination than the comradeship of fighting side by side in a national war. I can foresee such great things in the future for England if we bring our Colonies "into Line" with her in a dispute such as that we now have with the Transvaal, that I feel we should not make light of these offers of service, nor estimate their value by any mere weighing of them in a cold-blooded, tradesman-like fashion.

This passage again emphasises the potential political importance of colonial military, participation in South Africa. Turning to more practical considerations, however, Wolseley jotted down that Canada, New South Wales and Victoria might contribute between 100 and 500 troops each, while South Australia and Queensland between 50 and 100 for a total number of between 400 and 1700 troops. New Zealand, Tasmania and Western Australia did not figure in Wolseley's calculations as there had been no word from these colonies. The commander-in-chief had also overlooked the fact that Queensland had offered a much larger force although War Office officials were busy composing lists of the colonial responses to date.

These lists are most interesting because, besides the Queensland offer of 250 men, the offers from the other colonies had only been vague expressions of support—still this did not prevent the War Office from presuming to allocate numbers. Most interesting, the private recommendations of the British commanding officers in New South Wales and Canada were considered as potential military contributions from these colonies. These calculations gave a grand total of 5300 colonial troops which was far in excess of what Wolseley had in mind to give a sense of imperial solidarity. In the end, the War Office went with the more cautious, as well as cost effective, proposal to accept only 1000 troops from the Australian colonies together with a further 500 troops from Canada which Wolseley and Sir Evelyn Wood had initially proposed back in mid July.

Some readjustment had to be undertaken with the arrival of a cable from New Zealand in late September offering a contingent of mounted rifles to be fully paid by the colony—another example of a spontaneous offer. The colonies were beginning to slide into a race of imperial patriotism, and Premier Richard Seddon—who proudly proclaimed his colony's offer to be the first by a colonial legislature—wished to see a New Zealand contingent landed first in Cape Town. It is difficult to ascertain what role the New Zealand commandant played in this offer due to a lack of sources, although with a pragmatic imperialist such as Seddon at the head of government the New Zealand commandant did not have to go to the same lengths as some of his colleagues across the Tasman to obtain this official military commitment.

On 2 October 1899, the War Office finally informed the Colonial Office of the terms on which it would accept colonial contingents. The War Office accepted the specific offers from Queensland and New Zealand and laid down numbers for the other colonies which Lansdowne 'would be glad to accept'. A total of 1575 colonial troops would be accepted with Canada to send 500 men; Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria 250 each; New Zealand 200 and South Australia 125, to be organised into units of 125 men and with no officer of higher rank than major. Tasmania and Western Australia were not mentioned since there had still been no word from these colonies although probably also because of the insignificant size of their military forces.

With regard to the numbers, Lansdowne explained that he had been guided by the nature of the offers already received together with a desire to see each colony fairly represented. There is a problem with this explanation since only Queensland and New Zealand had offered troops, which Lansdowne acknowledged, but nonetheless there were references to specific numerical offers of troops from Victoria and South Australia which had not been made. The other factor which guided the War Office was 'the limits which must necessarily be imposed
on such a force if it is to be fully utilized under the Staff at our disposal as an integral portion of Her Majesty's Forces in South Africa’. In other words, as Lansdowne later admitted, colonial troops had to be in units small enough to be attached to (indeed absorbed into) British regular units. With regard to the type of troops requested, in the case of Queensland and New Zealand the offers and acceptance were of mounted infantry, but the other colonies were to supply either Infantry, Mounted Infantry, or Cavalry. In view of the numbers of these arms already available Infantry will be of most and Cavalry of least service. Finally, colonial troops from the date of disembarkation in Cape Town would be treated as an integral part of the British forces and provided the same pay, allowances and pensions as regular soldiers.

In his evidence to the Elgin Commission after the war, French immodestly claimed that his letter to the War Office in late June had been responsible for these ‘proper arrangements’ which had in turn led to the rapid and successful organisation of the first colonial contingents as they had ‘set at rest the men's fears as regards pay or pension, wound expenses, or compassionate allowance for their families, and so forth, and had largely helped the Colonial Governments in going to their local Parliaments to provide funds in the early portion of the campaign’. The fact is that much of this detail had been worked out before French's correspondence had arrived at the War Office. The one condition which was significantly different and influenced by his advice, however, was that of pay. It will be recalled that French had privately assured the War Office that colonial troops would serve for British army rates of pay while simultaneously expressing in Sydney that he expected them to receive the pay of colonial permanent soldiers. What is the explanation for French's contradictory comments? It would appear that the commandant was trying to secure payment of his proposed colonial contingent at imperial rates of pay by the British Government as a form of subsidisation to reduce the cost of a contingent to the colonial government—thereby making it more likely that New South Wales would be represented in South Africa. Thus French not only went behind the back of his own colonial government but possibly also purposely misled the British authorities in order to obtain his personal goal of active service. This is not the end of the story, however, for what French had not known was that the War Office, prior to receiving his advice, had decided to meet the total cost of colonial participation in South Africa and, moreover, to pay the colonial troops at the rates paid to colonial permanent soldiers. The effective outcome of French's secret communication, therefore, was the cost not only to his own government but to all of the colonial governments of the difference between the British and colonial rates of pay (at least in the case of the initial contingents) for colonial troops did not serve for the Queen's shilling and their pay had to be topped up by the colonial governments. Fortunately, his colonial political masters did not learn of his private and costly intervention or else Major-General French might have ended his career being recalled to London at the behest of the colonial government. This episode highlights the very bungled nature of French's intervention.

The Colonial Office immediately cabled a summation of the War Office's conditions of service to the colonies on 3 October. The cable immediately brought an end to the commandants' conference in Melbourne as its instructions had 'upset the whole thing' so French recalled to the Elgin Commission after the war. He made a special point of informing the commissioners that the War Office directions over numbers and in favour of infantry over mounted troops were 'rather opposed to the views of the Commandants out there'. Most importantly, the War Office directions sunk any hopes held by the commandants of their colonial forces fighting as 'national' units. The fact that the commandants were planning to send a federal force while the War Office wanted small colonial units provides the greatest proof of the total lack of communication between London and the commandants and therefore of any imperial conspiracy.

The confusion over the infamous directive 'infantry most, cavalry least serviceable' provides another example of the lack of any communication. This extraordinary instruction which was severely criticised in the light of the campaign in South Africa was vigorously pursued by the Elgin Commission. Sir Redvers Buller told the commissioners that he had been responsible for the statement. Had Buller forgotten what Hutton had told him back at the time of the Jamieson Raid: 'Don't forget if you want men to lick the Boers ... you have a magnificent
Both Buller and Lansdowne represented to the Elgin Commission the infamous clause as a move designed to ward off unwanted amateur cavalry who were viewed as incompetent and not, as the Elgin Commission concluded, 'to discourage the Colonies from sending mounted infantry, or men capable of being turned into mounted infantry'. The sincerity of this explanation is supported by the fact that the proposals of the War Office together with Chamberlain's request back in July were for mounted infantry, but moreover by the actual acceptance of the offers of mounted infantry from Queensland and New Zealand. 'Both Lord Lansdowne and Lord Wolseley admitted', as the Elgin Commission noted, 'that the telegram in question may have been rather unfortunately worded, so as to convey a wrong impression of their meaning'. If the War Office had been in communication with the commandants this misinterpretation would surely have been avoided.

With the cable of 3 October, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and New Zealand concentrated on organising their own contingents and passing the legislation to despatch them. The smaller colonies of Tasmania and Western Australia now also quickly offered contingents which the British authorities duly accepted. The waverers—Canada and New South Wales—were now confronted with an application which not only thanked them for offers not made but told them how many men to send. Who had made these offers? It placed French and Hutton in a potentially awkward position because of their privately communicated offers of troops to the Imperial authorities. Unlike in Canada, however, the New South Wales Government does not seem to have suspected its commandant as they knew nothing of French's secret communication and, in any case, an official offer of sorts had been made back in July with Reid's notification that a specific number of troops were willing to volunteer for service. It seemed inevitable that the Lyne Government would now follow the other colonies and send a contingent, but an offer to volunteer from the detachment of New South Wales Lancers in England certainly provided further pressure in this direction.

Connolly claims that French colluded with Lieutenant-Colonel James Burns, commanding officer of the Lancers, in a 'plot' to ensure active service for the regiment and which he describes as 'even more devious' than French's clandestine correspondence with the War Office. However, Connolly does not provide one shred of evidence in support of his claim against French. On the contrary, French later berated Burns for the failure of a large percentage of his regiment to 'avail themselves of the opportunity (so sought after by other branches of the Force) of seeing Active Service in South Africa'. Admittedly, French would have approved of the plot between Burns and Captain Charles Cox, the officer commanding the Lancer detachment in England, if he had known of it. The evidence overwhelmingly points to the initiative for the offer coming from Cox as early as June, who during the following months bullied his men into volunteering, roped in Burns and the regiment's honorary colonel, Lord Carrington, into his plan, and deceived the British authorities, all with the aim of securing the opportunity of active service and thereby living up to his later nickname 'fighting Charlie'. The episode moreover illustrates that Australian colonial officers were just as eager to see active service as their British commandants and just as inclined to use duplicity to get their way.

After months of agitation on the part of the imperial officers to secure colonial participation in South Africa, it is ironic that when the contingents finally set sail in late October the commandants were left behind on the wharves. Apart from the War Office prohibition against officers above the rank of major being sent, the imperial military authorities believed that the commandants were required in situ to oversee the proper arrangements of the contingents. The commandants thus remained behind and worked extremely hard throughout the war to oversee the difficult task of preparing the contingents which for the most part they did a commendable job. The public farewells to successive contingents were particularly gruelling for the commandants with the realisation that they themselves were unlikely to see service in South Africa although not for a want of trying. It is not surprising that the indefatigable French repeatedly requested permission to get away to South Africa, even offering to serve below his rank such was his desperation, but all to no avail.
One officer who did take part in the South African War was Major-General Hutton, but not because of his endless pleas or in his capacity as the Canadian GOC. The War Office gave him a posting to South Africa as a means of extricating him from Canada with his public reputation intact. For the Laurier Government's suspicions over Hutton's involvement in a clandestine campaign to ensure Canadian participation in South Africa had led to a rapid deterioration of relations and eventually to moves to have the general recalled. Once in Africa, Hutton took command of a mounted brigade of nearly 6000 troops which included British regular units as well as the Canadian, Australian and New Zealand mounted contingents. 'It realises my dream of the last 10 years', Hutton told his wife on the day that Lord Roberts informed him of his command, adding that, 'The responsibility is very great, quite as much political and imperial, as it is military'. Indeed, Mutton's command was the first truly British imperial military force in history, establishing a pattern of military co-operation in the field that was to be repeated throughout the twentieth century. Hutton himself was only too aware of the historical significance of his command at the time:

It requires an intimate knowledge of our Colonies to realize how far reaching will be the effect of this campaign not for this generation only, but for the next 50 years, and how every incident and every fact connected with it will be a subject of story and criticism in every farm and in every cattle station from the Distant Prairie of Canada to the barren plains of central Australia.

[ ... ] I have good reason to be sanguine of success. God grant it may be so, as the importance of such success is beyond all words of mine to describe. Beyond doubt it will go far towards bringing forward that consolidation of the Empire, which so many of us are striving to achieve, and which in some crisis not far distant perhaps will prove the salvation of the mother country and her children.

It was a realisation shared by the commandants in Australia.

What then is the verdict of the role of British commandants in the colonial offers of troops to the South African War, and specifically did the commandants force the hand of their respective governments? This view was expressed at the time by very few people and although eagerly recited by some historians it gives far too much credit to the influence of the commandants over colonial society. The fact is that the commandants did not force the colonial governments to offer troops but did contribute to that decision together with a multitude of other factors, not least the growing public sympathy for participation in the colonies. The tens of thousands who enthusiastically poured onto the streets of the colonial capitals throughout late October to farewell the first colonial contingents surely cannot be dismissed as 'manufactured'? Recent historical research into the Canadian involvement in the South African War supports this conclusion. In his definitive study, Painting the Map Red, Carman Miller concludes that the decision of the Canadian Government to send troops to South Africa was 'a reluctant, politically motivated, capitulation to the strident demands of Canada's pro-war advocates, not the clandestine machinations of a handful of imperial conspirators'. If this is the latest finding over the Canadian decision to send troops— where traditionally the claims of an imperial conspiracy have been most profound—then the conclusion of this paper that the commandants contributed to the Australian decision to offer troops but were not the decisive factor suggests an accurate reappraisal. The most important point to note, however, is that there was no London-inspired conspiracy with the commandants although the simultaneous clandestine actions of officers such as Major-General French have given this impression. On the contrary, the manoeuvres of the commandants were independent initiatives motivated largely by their imperial aspirations for the colonial forces and their personal desire for active service. As far as the historiography of the Australian colonial offers of troops is concerned, therefore, no doubt it was not as 'spontaneous' as early historians have claimed but nor was it as 'manufactured' as later revisionists have argued.
Endnotes

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3. Minute by Wolseley, 8 June 1899, printed in 'Report of His Majesty's Commissioners appointed to inquire into the military preparations and other matters connected with the War in South Africa', 9 July 1903, 15-16, Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, 1904, vol 40 (Command 1789) [hereafter cited as RCWSA—Report]. For discussion of Wolseley's minute see Pakenham, The Boer War, chapter 7.

4. 'Confidential—Report of a Conference between The Right Hon Joseph Chamberlain, MP (Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies), and the Premiers of the Self-Governing Colonies of the Empire, at the Colonial Office, Downing Street, London, SW, in June and July 1897', 2-6, CO Confidential Print Misc No 111, CO 85/6, Public Record Office, Kew/Australian Joint Copying Project [hereinafter PRO/AJCP].

5. On 9 June 1899, Chamberlain drafted a letter suggesting that if it came to war the self-governing colonies should join with the mother country to assert British supremacy in South Africa, although it was not sent: J L Garvin, The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, vol 3 (London: Macmillan, 1934), 527. Australian, Canadian and New Zealand historians have been unaware of this evidence of the intentions of Wolseley and Chamberlain as early as June while Pakenham, The Boer War, 70, ignores its colonial dimension.

6. For the full text of Chamberlain's handwritten secret draft telegrams to the Governors of New South Wales and Victoria sent on 3 July 1899, see CO [internal], 3 July 1899, Australia (General) No 17213, CO 418/6, PRO/AJCP. The emphasis is mine.

7. This is further evident from the fact that Chamberlain requested detachments from only the New South Wales Lancers and the Victorian Mounted Rifles together with a few Canadian troops.

8. Copy of Chamberlain to Minto, Secret, 3 July 1899, Hutton Papers (hereinafter HP), vol 2, Add Mss 50079, 143-44, British Library (Note: a microfilm copy of the Hutton Papers is held at the Australian Defence Force Academy Library, Canberra). For the differing expectations of Wolseley and Chamberlain see Pakenham, The Boer War, 78-79.

9. Major-General GA French to Colonel [George] Gough, 27 July 1899 [sic 27 June 1899], File No 079/8809, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP. Connolly, 'Manufacturing "Spontaneity"', 113, and Bridges, 'New South Wales and the Anglo-Boer War', 54-55, both cite French's letter while Field was not aware of its existence because he confined his research to Australian sources.

10. Daily Telegraph, Sydney, 26 June 1899, 5; Field, The Forgotten War, 10.

11. Major-General Sir George Arthur French (1841-1921). Educated RMC, Sandhurst, and RMA, Woolwich. Commissioned Lieutenant Royal Artillery, 1860; Captain, 1872; Major, 1881; Lieutenant-Colonel, 1887; Colonel, 1892; Colonel, 1894; Major-General, 1900. Adjutant Kingston, Canada 1862-66; Inspector of Warlike Stores Quebec, 1869-71; Inspector of Artillery, Canada 1871-73; First Commissioner North-West Mounted Police 1873-76; Inspector Warlike Stores Devonport, 1878-83; Commandant Queensland Defence Forces, 1883-91; Commanding Royal Artillery Dover, 1891-92; Chief Instructor School of Gunnery, Shoeburyness, 1892-93; Colonel on Staff and Brigadier-General RA Bombay, 1894-96; Commandant New South Wales Military Forces, 1896-1901. No war service. Retired full pay, 1902. CMG, 1877; KCMG, 1902. Colonel-Commandant Royal Artillery, 1912-21.

12. For French's 'war reserve' scheme see French to Wolseley, 1 May 1900, File No 091/2180, WO 32/8302; see also File No 266/59, WO 32/6365, PRO/AJCP.

13. Bridges, 'New South Wales and the Anglo-Boer War', 55, observes that the size of the force seems overly optimistic although French may have been thinking of a united Australian force which he publicly declared himself in favour a few weeks later.

14. Sydney Morning Herald, 3 January 1902, 6; see a similar reference in Field, The Forgotten War, 10.

15. Connolly, 'Manufacturing "Spontaneity"', 113, and Bridges, 'New South Wales and the Anglo-Boer War', 54-55. The typed copies of French's letter in the War Office and Colonial Office files are dated 27 July 1899 which is an obvious clerical error because Wolseley's first minute on this letter is dated 31 July 1899 see File No 079/8809, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP. French also discusses his 'letter addressed to Colonel Gough, from Sydney, of the 27th of June, 1899' in 'Minutes of Evidence taken before the
Royal Commission on the War in South Africa', vol 1, 340, paras 8019-22, Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, 1904, vol 41 (Command 1790) [hereinafter RCWSA—Evidence].

16. Gov NSW to SS Cols, Telegrams 5, 9, 12, 14 July 1899, NSW Nos 17284, 17790, 18083, 18303, CO 201/625; Gov Vic to SS Cols, Telegrams, 5, 12 July 1899, Vic No 17285, 18082, CO 309/148, PRO/AJCP.

17. For evidence of this being the main reason for both governments' reluctance see Gov Vic to SS Cols, Secret, 2 August 1899, Vic No 23754, CO 309/148, PRO/AJCP. It is also the conclusion of Field, The Forgotten War, 11 -12; Connolly, 'Manufacturing "Spontaneity"', 110; and Bridges, 'New South Wales and the Anglo-Boer War', 50-1.

18. Minute by JA [Anderson], 14 July 1899, filed with WO to CO, 13 July 1899, Vic No 18218, CO 309/148; see also minutes by EW [Wingfield], and JC [Chamberlain], both 10 July 1899, filed with Gov NSW to SS Cols, Telegram, 9 July 1899, NSW No 17790, CO 201/625, PRO/AJCP.


20. Major-General Gunter to Chief Secretary Qld, 6 July 1899, printed in 'Queensland Troops for the Transvaal', 1, Queensland Votes & Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, 1899 (2nd Session), vol 1, AAS (hereinafter Queensland Troops for the Transvaal).

21. Chief Secretary to Gov Qld, 10 July 1899, GOV/A35, Queensland State Archives, Brisbane; and Gov Qld to SS Cols, Telegram, 10 July 1899, Qld No 17905, CO 234/68, PRO/AJCP.


23. Premier Dickson in Qld PD, 1899, vol 82, 340 (11 October 1899). Headquarters did receive an offer to serve in South Africa from two infantry officers on the day of Gunter's proposal but none as such from mounted infantry units: see OC A Company 3rd Regiment Queensland Defence Forces Headquarters, 1 July 1899, letter presumed destroyed but registered on 6 July 1899 in 'Register of letters received Queensland Defence Forces Headquarters (respecting the South African Contingents)'

24. See telegram drafted by EW [Wingfield], 11 July 1899, filed with Gov Qld to SS Cols, Telegram, 10 July 1899, Qld No 17905, CO 234/68, PRO/AJCP.

25. Minute by JA [Anderson], 11 July 1899, filed with Gov Qld to SS Cols, Telegram, 10 July 1899, Qld No 17905, CO 234/68, PRO/AJCP.

26. Minute by JA [Anderson], 11 July 1899, filed with Gov Qld to SS Cols, Telegram, 10 July 1899, Qld No 17905, CO 234/68, PRO/AJCP.

27. Field, The Forgotten War, 14.

28. French to Premier Dickson, 14 July 1899, PRE/A28,1899/2352, QSA, which Dickson noted in his diary on 14 July 1899, Dickson Papers, OM67-13, item 4, Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane.

29. AAG NSW to OC 3rd NSW Infantry Regiment, 14 July 1899, AWM1, item 14/1, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, see also Daily Telegraph, 11, 17 July 1899, 5, which alludes to a 'circular' or 'call of arms' from 'Headquarters' while the Colonial Military Gazette, Sydney, 15 July 1899, 43, criticises the practice of requesting volunteers as 'undignified'; also Field, The Forgotten War, 10-11.

30. The following account is taken from the fuller report in the Argus, 14 July 1899, 5; see also Daily Telegraph, 14 July 1899, 5; Brisbane Courier, 14 July 1899, 5; Adelaide Advertiser, 14 July 1899, 5; and Colonial Military Gazette, 29 July 1899, 57.


32. Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Thomas Henry Hutton (1848-1923). Educated Eton, Commissioned Ensign 60th Rifles (King's Royal Rifle Corps), 1867; Captain, 1879; Major, 1883; Lieutenant-Colonel, 1889; Colonel, 1893; Major-General, 1901; Lieutenant-General, 1907. Passed Staff College (psc), 1881. DAAG Aldershot, 1887-92; ADC to Queen Victoria, 1893; Commandant New South Wales Military Forces, 1893-96; AAG Ireland, 1896-98; GOC Canadian Militia, 1889-1900, GOC Commonwealth Military Forces, 1901-04; General Administering Eastern Command and GOC 3rd British Division, 1905-06. Served South African War, 1879-81 (Zulu and Transvaal Campaigns, mentioned despatches), Egyptian Expedition, 1882; Sudan Expedition, 1884-85 (mentioned despatches); South African War, 1899-1902 (mentioned despatches). Reward for Distinguished and Meritorious Service, 1904. Retired 1907. Colected to organise 21st Division during the First World War but resigned command in early 1915 due to ill-health. CB, 1894; KCMM, 1900; KCB, 1912. Colonel-Commandant King's Royal Rifle Corps 1908-23; Colonel 6th Battalion Special Reserve King's Royal Rifle Corps, Honorary Colonel 4th Light Horse (NSW Northern Rivers Lancers) and 9th Light Horse (NSW Mounted Rifles); Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey.

33. Mentioned in Hutton to Chamberlain, Confidential, 28 July 1899, HP, vol 1, Add Mss 50078, 178-87.

35. Hutton to Chamberlain, Confidential, 28 July 1899, HP, vol 1, Add Mss 50078, 178-87.
36. Chamberlain to Hutton, 14 August 1899, HP, vol 1, Add Mss 50078, 188-89, simply acknowledges Hutton's letter of 28 July 1899 without even a mention of South Africa. The War Office hierarchy did not even reply.
38. Hutton to Wolseley, 4 September 1899, File No 079/9073, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP, also a copy together with a similar letter to Wood, 1 September 1899, HP, vol 9, Add Mss 50086, 130-5, 199-208; and another to Chamberlain, 4 September 1899, vol 1 Add Mss 50078, 190-92, and for mention of sending another copy to Buller see Hutton to Minto, 3 September 1899, vol 2, Add Mss 50079, 198-200.
41. Gov NSW to SS Cols, Telegram, 21 July 1899, NSW No 19112, CO 201/625, PRO/AJCP.
43. WO to CO, Secret & Immediate, 19 July 1899, Australia (General) No 18813, CO 418/6; for the War Office minutes see File No 079/8758, WO 32/8207, PRO/AJCP.
44. Minute by JA [Anderson], 19 July 1899, filed with WO to CO, Secret & Immediate, 19 July 1899, Australia (General) No 18813, CO 418/6; and CO to WO, 20 July 1899, File No 079/8758, WO 32/8207, PRO/AJCP.
45. WO to Treasury, 21 July 1899, File No 079/8758, and Treasury to WO, 21 July 1899, WO No 079/8783, WO 32/8207; also enclosed with WO to CO, Secret & Immediate, 26 July 1899, Australia (General) No 19641, CO 418/6, PRO/AJCP.
46. Minutes by Wolseley, 31 July 1899, and L [Lansdowne], 1 August 1899, File No 079/8809, WO 32/8208; and WO to CO, 8 August 1899, Australia (General) No 20939, CO 201/626, PRO/AJCP.
47. Minutes by EW [Wingfield], 10 August 1899, and JC [Chamberlain], 12 August 1899, filed with WO to CO, 8 August 1899, Australia (General) No 20939, CO 201/626, PRO/AJCP.
48. French refers to a reply in RCWSA—Evidence Vol 1, 340, paragraph 8023. Connolly, 'Manufacturing Spontaneity', 13, and Bridges, 'New South Wales and the Anglo-Boer War', 55, argue that the War Office was concerned with a definite assurance that they would pay Australian colonial troops at imperial rates and meet the cost of transport and rations, although without the correspondence there is no evidence for this claim.
49. CO to WO, 15 August 1899, together with minutes, File No 079/8850, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP.
50. For Wolseley's gloom over the prospect of peace see Pakenham, The Boer War, 78.
51. The Lyne government was reluctant to make any decision until parliament reconvened in mid October, wary of the controversy that had surrounded the offer of the contingent to the Sudan Expedition back in 1885: Field, The Forgotten War, 18, and Bridges, 'New South Wales and the Anglo-Boer War', 57-59.
52. Major-General Sir Charles Holled Smith (1846-1925). Purchased commission as Ensign 60th Foot (King's Royal Rifle Corps), 1865; Lieutenant, 1869; Captain, 1877; Major, 1882; Lieutenant-Colonel, 1885; Colonel, 1892; Major-General, 1900. Employed Egyptian army, 1883-92; Governor-General Red Sea Littoral and Commandant Suakim, 1888-92; Commandant Victoria Military Forces, 1894-1899. Served South African War, 1899-91; KCMG, 1892. Honorary Colonel 70th Australian Regiment (Ballarat).
53. Age, Melbourne, 12 July 1899, 7; Defence Department circulars mentioned in Argus, 28 June 1899, 7.
54. Age, 18 September 1899, 5.
55. Argus, 19 September 1899, 5.
56. The decision to enroll volunteers is conveyed in Secretary of Defence Vic to Holled Smith, 20 September 1899, CRS A6443, item 421, National Archives of Australia, Canberra; for the commandants' conference see Premier Vic to Premier NSW, Confidential Telegram, 20 September 1899, 'Contingents to South Africa', 40, NSW VPLA, 1900, vol 3 (hereinafter 'Contingents to South Africa').
57. Premier Qld to Premier NSW, Confidential Telegram, 19 September 1899, 'Contingents to South Africa', 39. The Queensland telegram does not appear to have influenced the Victorian proposal: see discussion of it by the Victorian defence minister at the subsequent commandants' conference: ibid, 52.
58. Premier Vic to Premier NSW, Telegram, 21 September 1899, 'Contingents to South Africa', 40.
59. See correspondence between Gunter and the Chief Secretary between 3 August and 20 September 1899 printed in Queensland Troops for the Transvaal', 3-9.
60. Chief Secretary to Gov Qld, 21 September 1899, enclosing Commandant to Chief Secretary, 20 September 1899, GOV/A35, QSA; and Gov Qld to SS Cols, Telegram, 22 September 1899, Qld No 25418, CO 234/68, PRO/AJCP.
61. Gov SA to SS Cols, Telegram, 4 September 1899, SA No 23578, CO 13/153, PRO/AJCP.
64. See Stuart's comments in Daily Telegraph, 17 July 1899, 5.
65. Navy and Army Illustrated 9: 154 (13 January 1900), 453.
66. The following discussion of the conference is derived from its proceedings printed as an appendix to 'Contingents to South Africa', 50-55.
67. Report of the Conference of Military Commandants, held at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, on the 28th September, 1899, and the following days, 4 October 1899, CRS A6443, item 285, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
68. See statement by Holled Smith at the conference: 'Contingents to South Africa', 50.
70. CO to WO, Secret & Immediate, 21 September 1899, forwarding telegram from Gov Vic to SS Cols, 20 September 1899, filed with File No 079/9112, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP.
71. Gov Qld to SS Cols, Telegram, 22 September 1899, Qld No 25418, CO 234/68, PRO/AJCP.
72. Gov Vic to SS Cols, Telegram, 27 September 1899, Vic No 25975, CO 309/148 PRO/AJCP.
73. Minute by L [Lansdowne], 25 September 1899, File No 079/9112, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP.
74. New South Wales had officially indicated that 1860 troops had volunteered for service but a War Office official nonetheless went with French's private assurance that the colony could send a force of 2500 strong. Similarly, despite the strong doubts of the Canadian governor-general that his government would approve of despatching Hutton's proposed field force of 1200 men, the same official noted that "Maj Gen Hutton says it is "practically certain" that the Government will offer a contingent".
75. Minutes in File No 079/9112, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP.
76. Gov NZ to SS Cols, Telegram, 28 September 1899, NZ No 26243, CO 209/259; see also Gov NZ to SS Cols, 29 September 1899, NZ No 30214, CO 209/259, PRO/AJCP.
77. Ian McGibbon, The Path to Gallipoli: Defending New Zealand 1840-1915 (Wellington: Government Print Books, 1991), 106-9; J Crawford with E Ellis, To Fight for the Empire: An Illustrated History of New Zealand and the South African War, 1899-1902 (Wellington: Reed in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1999), 12.
78. WO to CO, 2 October 1899, Australia (General) No 26740, CO 418/6, PRO/AJCP.
80. RCWSA—Evidence, vol 2, 340-41, paras 8024, 8033.
81. Compare the conditions in WO to CO, 19 July 1899, Australia (General) No 18813, CO 418/6, with WO to CO, 2 October 1899, Australia (General) No 26740, CO 418/6, PRO/AJCP.
82. See a minute referring to French's advice on pay in File No 079/9112, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP.
83. French is reported on 7 July 1899 as saying that if the colonial troops went to South Africa they would only receive the imperial rates of pay which one week later he contradicts with a statement that they would receive the pay of colonial permanent soldiers: Argus, 7, 14 July 1899, both 5. It is uncertain whether French really believed colonial troops would serve overseas for imperial pay. Later in 1899, he denounced the CDC's policy to raise an Australian regiment of the British Army because he did not believe colonial troops would serve for imperial pay: French to PUS Chief Secretary NSW, 25 November 1899, enclosed with Gov NSW to SS Cols, Secret, 15 December 1899, NSW No 2410, CO 201/825, PRO/AJCP. On the other hand, the Lancers had offered to serve in India for imperial rates of pay back in 1897.
85. Queensland and New Zealand receiving slightly different telegrams in recognition of their specific offers. Copies of the Telegrams to Gov Qld, Gov NZ, to SS Cols, and Gov-Gen Canada all sent on 3 October 1899, are found in File No 079/9295, WO 32/8209; a full copy of the War Office's letter of 2 October was sent to the colonies in SS Cols to Govs NZ, Qld, SA, NSW, Vic, and Gov-Gen Canada, 5 October 1899, filed with WO to CO, 2 October 1899, Australia (General) No 26740, CO 418/6, PRO/AJCP.
86. RCWSA—Evidence, vol 1 342, paras 8056-57.
87. Ibid, 341, para 8030.
89. Hutton to Buller, 19 January 1896, HP, vol 8, Add Mss 50086, 95-96.
90. RCWSA—Report, 77-8.
91. Ibid, 78.
92. The South Australian commandant, Colonel JM Gordon, working in London at this time, in fact, was not even consulted: JM Gordon, The Chronicles of a Gay Gordon (London Cassell, 1921), 233-34.
93. Gov WA to S Cols, Telegram, 5 October 1899, together with minutes, WA No 26944, CO 18/226; for Tasmania see Gov Tas to SS Cols, Telegrams, 9, 12 October 1899, Tas Nos 27120, 27819, and Gov Tas to SS Cols, 23 October 1899, Tas No 32830, CO 280/402, and for the War Office's acceptance see WO to CO, 11, 17 October 1899, Tas Nos 27598, 28412, CO 280/402, PRO/AJCP.
95. Connolly, 'Manufacturing "Spontaneity"', 113.
96. AAG NSW to OC NSW Lancers, 23 November 1899, AWM1, item 14/1, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

97. For an account of this episode see Bridges, New South Wales and the Anglo-Boer War’, 49-50.

98. For the War Office attitude toward the commandants’ requests to go in command of their colonial contingents see minute by Lansdowne, 21 September 1899, File No 079/9073, WO 32/8208, PRO/AJCP. The South Australian commandant, Colonel JM Gordon, did manage to wrangle a posting in South Africa as a special service officer but then he was a retired British officer and already had been absent from his command for two years in his capacity as inspector of warlike stores in London: Gordon, The Chronicles of a Gay Gordon, 232-33.

99. It was ‘arduous work’, recalled the Victorian commandant: ‘Sketch’,46-77, Major-General MF Downes Papers, Australian Defence Force Academy Library, Canberra; see also evidence of French and Penton to the RCWSA—Evidence, vol 1, 341-47, 359-61. For the government’s appreciation of their services see Gov-Gen C of A to SS Cols, 23 November 1901, Australia (General) No 45921, CO 418/10 (French), Gov Vic to SS Cols, 15 November 1899, Vic No 36281, CO 309/148 (Holled Smith); Gov Qld to SS Cols, 6 January 1900, Qld No 5592, CO 234/70 (Gunter); Gov-Gen C of A, 22 October 1899, Australia (General) No 40450, CO 418/10 (Chippindall), PRO/AJCP.

100. See, for example, French’s farewell speech to the Bushmen Contingent in February 1900: Sydney Morning Herald, 1 March 1900, 7; Field, The Forgotten War, 135; also Hutton to Wolseley, 2 November 1399, HP, vol 9, Add Mss 50086, 136-44.

101. French to PUS Chief Secretary NSW, 26 October 1899, AWM1, item 14/1, AWM; French to Chief Secretary NSW, 26 February 1900, 5/6536, 1900/5094; and French to PUS Chief Secretary NSW, 2 April 1900, 5/6541, 1900/7797, Archives Office of New South Wales, Sydney.

102. Morton, Ministers and Generals, 156-61.


105. Miller, Painting the Map Red, 48.
THE BOER WAR:  
ARMY, NATION AND EMPIRE  

TOMMY CORNSTALK:  
A SOLDIER’S IMPRESSION OF THE WAR  
Peter Burness

Tommy Cornstalk, by JHM Abbott, was first published in June 1902. The author described it as ‘being some account of the less notable features of the South African War from the point of view of the Australian ranks’. In its time, it was quite widely read as an historical novel.

I believe that Tommy Cornstalk is a valuable account of the Australian Boer War experience. This value is enhanced when Abbott's background, and the context within which he wrote it, is understood. Accounts in the book are based on real incidents and the observations are derived from actual events.

The author of Tommy Cornstalk, John Henry Macartney Abbott, was born on Boxing Day 1874 at a place called Haydonton in New South Wales. His father was Sir Joseph Abbott, a prominent solicitor and eventually a heavyweight in the rough and tumble of late nineteenth century New South Wales parliament. 'Jack' was just six years old, and had a younger brother and sister, when his mother, Matilda Elizabeth, died. His father remarried three years later. Another son and three daughters were born from that union.  

When he was a young boy, Abbott saw the first Australian troops go off to war. He was thrilled by the spectacle. He was ten years old when the New South Wales Contingent marched through Sydney, amid wild crowds, to board the troopships carrying them to the Sudan in March 1885. Much later, he was in his seventies when he wrote about it. He, his brother and his sister, had a good vantage point for the parade since their father was a government minister. The recollection, he said, was one of the most important impressions of his early childhood.

Like his father, and other male family members, Abbott was educated at King's School, Parramatta. He was a member of the First XV for two years, and was the School Vice-Captain in 1893. Later he attended the University of Sydney. I suspect that his decision to abandon further studies, and the prospect of a professional career, was a disappointment for his father. Anyway, we know that he chose to do rural work, going bush, and working on some family properties.

Physically strong and robust he had little trouble in adapting to the rugged outdoor life. He seems to have been content to live rough in the bush, and to mix with the stockmen and station-hands. He spoke like a bushman; for the rest of his life his speech was described as often 'slovenly colloquial'. Even in these early years, his lifetime burden, the 'demon drink', took an early toll. He was also cursed with a volatile temper. It is said that he suffered 'a mental breakdown' while still in his twenties.

Intelligent and well-educated, Abbott enjoyed writing, and eventually developed this into a career. In 1897 his first literary contribution, a poem, 'Lord, Think of the Lambs', was published in the Bulletin.  

Abbott saw active service in the early stages of the Boer War. His unit was raised from men already serving in the pre-war volunteers, so we can presume that he had some military training before going to South Africa. However, it may not have been much. We find that, although his family background was more like that of some of the officers in his regiment, he was a trooper when he sailed for South Africa.
It is significant that he served in the 1st Australian Horse Regiment. This was a part-time, citizen cavalry regiment raised in 1897 by Kenneth Mackay, a grazier and member of parliament. Mackay would have known Abbott's father. The regiment was formed in the New South Wales country districts and from its beginning had troops in the Scone and Belltrees districts around where the Abbotts had properties. Jack was with a group of men who came down from Scone to go into camp in Sydney before finally embarking for the war on 17 January 1900.5

The 1st Australian Horse did not go to South Africa as a whole regiment. Instead it called for volunteers from among its officers and other ranks to provide a separate 'service squadron' for the war. It was a small unit; less than 150 men. However these troops arrived in South Africa in the early stages of the fighting and, with a sister squadron from the New South Wales Lancers, became a part of the British Cavalry Division, and took part in many important actions. The early contingents from the Australian colonies were composed of men already serving in the forces; very soon appeals went out for civilians in the towns and on the farms to join newly raised regiments. Some from the 1st Australian Horse, who had been unable to get away with the service squadron, joined the later units. Ultimately the regiment supplied more men for the war than any other of the pre-war New South Wales regiments. It also suffered the highest number of fatalities.

Jack Abbott spent ten months at the war, mostly with the Australian Horse, before he was invalided home. Less than a year later Sir Joseph Abbott died in 1901. He had been ill for a long time and his passing came as no shock to the family. Jack's uncle, William, became the family patriarch. As proud as his uncle was of Jack's acclaim following the publication of Tommy Cornstalk in 1902, he held great concerns for Jack because of his drinking and bohemian lifestyle. Uncle William's distrust of his financial management seems apparent in his will; he left large sums to his brother's sons, except Jack who received only the interest on an investment. After his uncle's death in 1924, this provided Abbott with some limited regular income, although it seems that he was not entrusted with a lump sum.6

The artist and writer, Norman Lindsay, got to know Abbott sometime before the First World War. He described him:

Physically, he was big man, with a finely built strong body, and a rather long face, and all his features were good—a straight nose, well-cut lips, and a fine brow, but with that extension in the length of the jawbone which indicates pugnacity and obstinacy when aroused to action. In youth he must have been extremely handsome. Little John Dalley, five foot odd, who saw the embarkation march of the contingents for the Boer War, singled out Abbott as one of the finest-looking men he had ever seen. In uniform, trained to the minute, and mounted on a fine troop-horse, he must have set amorous ardours twitching in every girl who saw him passing out of her young life forever.7

Abbott's war service obviously had a profound effect on him. In later life he was proud to be an old soldier, and often mentioned the fact. He was a long time member of the South African Soldiers' Association of New South Wales. As a veteran-author he contributed the entry on the South African War to The Australian Encyclopaedia.8 He retained an attachment to, and performed a similar role for, his old school.

Abbott's account of war service. Tommy Cornstalk, is one of the earliest examples of Australian war literature. It was well received, and brought him some small fame. The success of the book encouraged him to turn to freelance writing. He went to London soon after the war, where he published another book, in 1903, titled Plain and Veldt, which dealt further in part with South Africa. An Outlander in England, and Letters from Queer Street, followed in 1905 and 1908.
Letters from Queer Street has been described as semi-autobiographical; in fact, I would suggest that all of his early books are. It tells of the hardships of living rough and broke in London. It is about the sad struggle to become established as a writer, and hints at the dark and wild side in Abbott's nature.

Abbott's time in London was not all bad. He did find work, and wrote for the Daily Telegraph and The Spectator, and other journals. He also had books published. By 1909 he was back in Australia, living in Sydney. Evidently this was about the time that Norman Lindsay met him. Lindsay provides a brief description that gives a glimpse of the nature of the man. Abbott was becoming involved in writing Australian historical novels, and Lindsay was interested in doing illustrations for him. He wrote:

I suggested that we collaborate on a novel of the period as told by a sergeant of the Rum Corps, which he was to write and I was to illustrate, and I handed over to him my New South Wales 'Historical Records', and a considerable number of works dealing with that period, many of them rare editions and difficult to obtain. That, I may add, was the last I ever saw of them. He did start on the novel, and wrote a couple of chapters. He introduced me to his landlady as his 'partner', which was an onerous election, for she began sending me accounts for his upkeep. I began to find that his bouts of going on the booze cancelled out any pleasure I had in his spells of sobriety. And he never finished the novel.9

Despite this, Lindsay saw a great deal more of Abbott during their lifetimes. I need only to sketch the outline of Jack Abbott's later career, before we return to the subject of his Boer War service.

Over the next forty years Abbott wrote more books, together with hundreds of articles, series, and serials, which were published in the Bulletin, The Lone Hand, Truth, and World's News and other journals. Most of his stories were based on early Australian pioneers and colonial history. Despite the volume of his writing, he was often in financial trouble, and he was declared bankrupt in 1923.

Abbott was over 50 when he married Katherina ('Rina') Wallace, herself an author, in Sydney, in 1926. In 1942 he was awarded a Commonwealth Literary Fund fellowship. However, by 1948 ill health had stopped his writing. He was eventually admitted to Rydalmere Mental Hospital where he died on 12 August 1953. He was buried in the Anglican section of Rookwood Cemetery.10

My own appreciation of Tommy Cornstalk is largely derived from two incidents. I have long had an interest in the history of the 1st Australian Horse Regiment. In my research I found that Tommy Cornstalk was a rare and very welcome account of the unit's service in the Boer War from a soldier among the regiment's ranks. The second occasion that I came to value this book was in more recent years when I was working on the development of the Memorial's Boer War gallery. For that exhibition, the staff decided to include quotes from soldiers' experiences, particularly as they related to the various types of objects that we were exhibiting. Abbott's descriptions of daily life provided us with a valuable source.

In the preface of Tommy Cornstalk, Abbott says: 'In these pages the author has striven to show other Australians ... what some phases of campaigning were like, as viewed from the standpoint of the Australian ranks, and has occasionally ventured to say, as an Australian, how things have impressed him'. The book's first chapter goes on to explain the title. 'Tommy', of course is the generic name for a British soldier, while 'Cornstalk' is a New South Welshman.

Abbott describes the 'Cornstalk':

So Tommy Cornstalk is generally a long-limbed fellow, with a drawling twang, to whom anything in the nature of sport appeals most strongly ...
The Bushman—the dweller in the country as opposed to the town-abiding folk—the real Cornstalk, is, to all practical purposes, of the same kind as the Boer ... His soldiering is mainly of the present. The only discipline he really knows is the 'discipline of enthusiasm’. He may have made many sacrifices for his volunteering. He may have been accustomed to ride miles to his parades. His shooting may have cost him time and money ... [but u]ntil he has signed his attestation paper, almost until he has embarked upon the troopship, he has never thoroughly been 'under the whip'! ...

And, at first, he does not take altogether kindly to it. He has been a free man ... He may have been to school with some of his officers, may know them intimately in civil life. It is even possible that, in his own district, he may occupy a social position above that of his officer ... Tommy Cornstalk (is) ashamed to be seen walking He is essentially a horseman—and generally a horsey man ... In Australia the possession of a horse carries with it something of a guarantee of respectability and solvency. A man who cannot read is far less to be pitied than one who cannot ride.11

Compare these extracts from Abbott's first chapter, with the following from Gullett's volume of the Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18, describing the lighthorsemen. The language is similar.

They began their campaigning strong in the first essential quality of mounted soldiery; they instinctively understood and loved their horses. They were self-respecting men, accustomed to hard-working, independent lives. Like all citizen soldiers, they found rigid discipline irksome, but to all the essentials in that discipline their obedience was instant and absolute ... So far as a distinctive type has been evolved, it is to be found among men from the country districts, where there is a preponderance of young men long of limb and feature, spare of flesh, easy and almost tired in bearing, and with a singular native grace of posture.12

Abbott says that 'most of the rank and file of the troops who went to South Africa from Australia were of the Bush'. Here is an early expression of the belief that the Bushman was a natural soldier. This idea that found support, but less substantiation, in the later Anzac legend.

While the Australians may have shown an adaptation to the conditions on the veldt, and proved themselves resourceful and useful troops, particularly in scouting and such work, talk of being natural soldiers can be easily exaggerated. To be fully effective, soldiers need good leadership, discipline, training, equipment, and experience. Abbott's unit's pre-war training may have helped them, but they would also have had to learn on the job very quickly. The greatest deficiency among the Australian units was often the lack of military experience among the young officers; many troop leaders had little more service than their troopers.

To what extent was Abbott one of his Tommy Cornstalks? Quite a lot, I suppose. Later, he lived most of his life in the city. Certainly, as a young man, he was probably more representative of the Australian soldier in South Africa than of the later men of the AIF overall where the representation was drawn far more widely and from a mainly urban society. On the other hand, can anyone who maintains a meticulous diary, is a keen observer, a sensitive and gifted writer, or writes a definitive personal account of his war service, be truly representative of the ordinary mass he tries to represent?

Clearly, while on active service, Abbott was a good and intelligent soldier. In South Africa he was promoted to corporal, and was then selected for a temporary commission in the British Army. He was transferred to the Royal Field Artillery as a second lieutenant some time about August 1900. However, shortly after this he became ill. Sickness, particularly typhoid, usually took a toll on most men. He was sent to hospital before being invalided home.
Abbott was not out of place among the men of the squadron he was with. His age and occupation was quite typical of the rest of his squadron. In his other book, *Plain and Veldt*, which I include in this consideration, Abbott describes the military camp in Sydney before the troops embarked for the war. It seems to be based directly on his experience. We can compare it with what we know of the composition of his unit. Abbott wrote:

> There were squatters, jackeroos, shopmen, policemen, bank-clerks, loafers. Gentleman and cad shared their brown blankets. Wealthy men borrowed 'fills' of tobacco from men who were seeking to evade their creditors. Policemen rubbed shoulders with thieves. Boundary riders fraternised with sheep-stealers. There was one in a certain tent who had been a priest, and another who was a baronet. It was not so much patriotism, as a longing for adventure and excitement, which possessed most of those who filled the camp and hung about the rifle range all day.  

Certainly these men could be found in his Australian Horse squadron—although I would not like to try to identify the thief, and I do not know about a baronet.

Although there were fewer than 120 men in camp with Abbott's service squadron, the unit contained a good share of remarkable, and of ordinary, men. For example, there were two troopers with interesting connections: Herbert Bridges, was a dealer from Moss Vale. His brother, William Throsby Bridges, was a regular soldier who would become famous as the commander of the 1st Australian Division AIF; and died at Gallipoli. Then there was Walter Legge who had been studying for the priesthood at Mary's Mount, Goulburn (could this be the priest?), before he joined up for the war. His brother was also a professional officer, and another to command an AIF division in the First World War. He was Lieutenant-General Legge, whose appointments included Chief of the General Staff.

There were others in the squadron who would make a mark of their own. Trooper Donald Cameron, an earnest young stockman in the Belltrees troop, would one day lead the 12th Light Horse in their charge at Beersheba. His cousin, William, also serving, would become the local member for Scone in the New South Wales parliament. Another who came in from Scone with Abbott was Trooper Cecil Granville. He would command the 1st Light Horse Regiment in the First World War. Their sergeant, Charles Hargrave, would be mentioned in Lord Roberts' final Boer War despatch. Hedley Kirkpatrick, like Abbott, was commissioned in the British Army in the field. He became an officer in the 6th Dragoon Guards, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. And, there were railwaymen, an Aboriginal, station-hands, and farmers. A policeman is not hard to find: Trooper Henry See had been one.

Abbott's background fitted him comfortably among these men. However his birth and education may have been more like those of his officers. There is some evidence of this in the dedication of *Tommy Cornstalk*. The book is dedicated to the memory of 'WRH—killed in action at Diamond Hill, June 12, 1900'. It is a simple research task to discovery that this must refer to Lieutenant William Rupert Harriott who was killed serving with the New South Wales Mounted Rifles. He was 23 years old—possibly a boyhood friend. Abbott's second book, *Plain and Veldt* was dedicated to 'Bushmen and Bushwomen'.

To what extent was Abbott's own unit representative of the Australian contribution overall is a more difficult question. The 1st Australian Horse had been raised in Australia before the war and these men had some level of military skill and training. It was also a Volunteer unit (it became Partially-Paid in 1900), made up of enthusiastic, unpaid, part-time soldiers. It was comprised of a particular cross-section of male society that may not necessarily have been the same as the men who responded to the general call for enlistments for war service. It was also a cavalry unit. This meant that the men were equipped with sword and carbine, and trained to fight from horseback, and for the charge. Almost all of the other Australian regiments in South Africa served in the mounted rifles role.

*Tommy Cornstalk* was not intended as a direct historical narrative. In the preface Abbott explains that the two 'Battle' chapters are not meant to represent any particular engagement, but is rather a kind of composite portrait of half a dozen or more.
Despite this, the descriptions are valuable in revealing the soldiers’ general experiences and their feelings, such as the frustration in trying to find and engage the Boers. He writes: ‘We march, and march, and march day after day, week after week, and we never come to hand-grips with our wily foe. Will they ever stand and fight us?’

When a battle does commence, the cavalrymen obey orders, and manoeuvre, rarely knowing what is actually happening, or where the enemy is. There are a couple of descriptions in these chapters that locate the action as being based, in part, on an experience at Sanna’s Post, outside Bloemfontein, and also a later action fought outside of Johannesburg. These were some of the actions in which Abbott took part, and he presents them as a telescoped single battle. In the story, the day of the battle commences much like any other:

They were strange figures that huddled amongst the rocks. Unshaven, dirty, wolfish faces looked grimly out from woollen caps and mufflers as the tired men sat in their blue-black overcoats, with the great collars sticking up about their cars, carbines resting across knees, the thin reck of disreputable pipes tingeing the clear air. We gathered up haversacks and water-bottles, and wended our weak way down the slope to where the poor limp horses and the profane horse-holders hung their heads and cursed the cold night respectively.

Histories tell us that on 29 March 1900, the Cavalry Division encountered the enemy near Karee Siding. Early in the afternoon the scouts drew fire, and the regiment in which the Australian Horse squadron was serving was sent to reinforce a flank. Feeling safe, because they had not drawn any fire, the Australian officers moved their troops down in close order to cross a creek. Suddenly a shell landed amongst them, followed by Pom-Pom fire. The first shell burst in front of Lieutenant Wilkinson’s troop and Troopers Martin, Wessell, and Bonner, and their horses, all crashed down. John Bonner was killed outright, while Martin was wounded in the leg, and Wessell in the arm.

This is how Abbott described the moment:

In the flash and roar of the bursting shell, you see the stricken man throw out his arms. As the horse rears backward he comes to the ground clear of him, and lies spread-eagled with limbs outstretched, and blackened, bleeding face staring dumbly into the smiling heavens.

God!—it was sudden. His brother is beside him, lifting a white, horror-stricken face, as he holds the battered head upon his knees.

‘Come on, you fellows; never mind that man,’ cries the troop-leader, trotting back to where you pause like a crowd at a street accident. You ride past the dead man. It makes you feel bad inside, but wild to rush the fifteen-pounder on the second ridge which did the work.

Later that day the Boers slipped away towards Brandfort. The British infantry occupied the abandoned positions, and the cavalry rode back to their bivouac. Shortly after arriving back to camp the ambulance brought in Bonner’s body wrapped in his green regimental greatcoat. He was buried that evening.

It is the quality of his observations, and descriptions, of what are ordinary moments, that makes Abbott’s work unique among the Australian writers of that war. Consider his description of a typical morning scene in a camp out on the South African veldt:

Already the cooks are astir. They are breaking up biscuit-boxes for fuel, and kindling their fires round the piled up ‘dixies’.
The world seems very still, and lifeless, and cold. As the day becomes more and more daylike, the long dry grass shines white with frost, and the huddled heaps of blankets are grey and stiff with it.

The heaps on the ground stir, and roll. Strange figures in woollen nightcaps emerge from them slowly, and, one by one casting off their coverings, sit up, blinking and sleepy-eyed. They rise to their feet, full dressed, and stretch themselves. A hasty shake and the buckling on of spurs is the only toilet. A sergeant comes striding down his troop, inquiring sarcastically whether the remaining heaps of blankets would like cups of tea brought to them. Corporals move about kicking up the sluggards. Slowly and stiffly man after man staggers, half-awake, to his horse, and commences to rub him down with more or less energy. Blankets are folded, white and wet still, and put on the horses' backs to serve as saddle-cloths. Then the bare saddles are girthed on, carbines struck into 'buckets', and swords slipped into their 'frogs'. Where the heaps lay are only the scanty domestic utensils—men's tins and meat cans—haversacks and bandoliers.

So you mount your feeble steed, already weighed down by a load as great as yourself, and lurch along to where your troop is forming up in its squadron and regiment beside other squadrons and regiments. The bivouac-ground is deserted save by the inevitable laggards or men with sick horses who must follow slowly. Nearly everyone is smoking.

Now you are off – the horses' legs swish-swishing through the long grass; the mess-tins rattling against the carbine-butts; bits jingling musically; the bright sun just peeping over the edge of the world on your right hand; white puffs of tobacco smoke drifting up into the clear air. The veldt is turning to burnished gold.

Equally well described are some significant events. Take for example, the period following the British Army's triumphal entry into the Boer capital (Orange Free State), Bloemfontein. This victory was followed by an epidemic of enteric. It is a reminder that disease was the constant enemy of the Victorian soldier. Abbott wrote:

One remembers too well that awful period of waiting at Bloemfontein whilst the army rotted inactive, and the little cemetery under the old fort filled and overflowed; when officer, and comrade, and inferior went down alike before the sickle of the grim reaper—enteric. There is too sad a memory of the delirious, dying men who babbled, in the close wards, of far-off places where there were peace and love. There is no forgetting the carts that rumbled through the streets loaded with those stiff, blanket-shrouded shapes, which had been vigorous men—the dwindling squadrons, the crowded sick-tents, the unfed, unwashed, unhappy men who filled them, will never cease to linger in one's memory.

The Australians did good work in South Africa. It is interesting to note that Abbott's little squadron of part-time bush cavalry was attached to the famous British regular cavalry regiment, the 2nd Dragoons, The Royal Scots Greys, during its service with the Cavalry Division. The Historical Records of The Royal Scots Greys described the Australian Horse as a "fine squadron... [which] did excellent work on all occasions". Abbott also described the association:

Isn't it something for a one-horse volunteer crowd like you to be a squadron of such a regiment as the one you are with—a regiment which was fighting before there was an Australia, a regiment which saw Waterloo and Balaclava? And another thing—isn't it something to have shown a regiment like that how to scout, how to take cover, how to ride, how to shoot, how, in short, to play this particular game as it should be played?

Even allowing for youthful confidence and enthusiasm, and exaggeration, the passage gives an insight into how the Australians saw themselves. Whether or not Abbott's squadron was as good, or better, than the British cavalry is open to debate. However it should at least be
acknowledged that these men had only a fraction of the regulars' training and military experience. In no other war have Australian troops been expected to transform themselves from civilians to soldiers engaging the enemy in such short time. Of the hardships of mounted service, Abbott wrote:

We have dug latrines, and buried mules, and made graves. We are crawling with vermin. We are tired, and stiff, and hungry.

Why did we ever come? This isn't charging into battle. This isn't racing through the foe. This isn't getting the Victoria Cross. Where is all the 'pomp and circumstance of war'? Where are the bands and the martial music to play us into action? Where are the clouds of drifting smoke we've read about? Where's that 'thin red line' and all those gorgeous uniforms that used to make war picturesque, and romantic, and spectacular? Where's anything but dirt, and discomfort, and starvation, and nigger-driving? Who wants to participate in a shabby war like this?

Then he reflects:

Oh, you growling swine, Tommy Cornstalk! What about the hour or two when the people were howling mad over you, when girls you didn't know came and kissed you, when the effusive males who didn't go themselves handed you bottles of beer to quench the magnificent thirst you had cultivated betwixt barracks and boat? How did you feel then?\(^\text{22}\)

Jack Abbott provided a unique 'insider's' view of the war. Victorian issues, values, and attitudes come to the surface. At times his writing shows normal human frailties, intolerance, and racism; both in the army of which he was a part, and in himself. There were other Australians who wrote about the war, notably 'Banjo' Paterson, Frank Wilkinson, and William Reay. They were war correspondents. Abbott was different, he was a soldier in the ranks.

There is much more available in Tommy Cornstalk. Abbott writes about soldiers, generals, the Boers, black Africans, the veldt, and the British. But, in conclusion, it is worth returning to what Norman Lindsay had to say about him. Lindsay reflected kindly at the end of his reminiscences of Abbott:

But at this date, reading Tommy Cornstalk again, as I did before sitting down to write this profile, I can think well of Abbott. Not only the sober Abbott, but that streak of dangerous man in him, for it carries with it a reckless disregard of danger. He was of the substance which makes for the finest fighting man, and that was his true vocation. And his country owes him a debt, in that he put on record the emergence of the Australian fighting men on the stage of world warfare. He helped to create the legend of courage and endurance in battle which they have so finely vindicated in two world wars. And that is a big thing to have done.\(^\text{23}\)
Endnotes

2. *As You Were*, 1948 (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1948), 72.
8. Arthur W Jose & Herbert James Carter (eds), *The Australian Encyclopaedia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1926), 482-44.
15. Ibid, 105-6.
19. Ibid, 141.
22. Ibid.
Paterson, a Sydney lawyer turned part-time and then professional writer, was 35 at the outbreak of the war. He had enjoyed growing recognition from the school of bush-oriented writers working (mostly in Sydney) and fame from the publication of a string of ballads through the 1890s. Paterson became a master of the literary bush ballad, that is, the form developed—perhaps perfected—by the generation of writers active from the 1880s. These writers expressed a great knowledge of and affection for the outback, employing a strong, dramatic narrative form, often with an ironic or comic touch. The literary bush ballad reflected the growing expression of a distinctive Australian identity in the final decades of the century, a movement also apparent in literature generally (much disseminated by the Sydney Bulletin) and in the development of a self-conscious national group of artists. Though Australia was rapidly becoming—and remains—one of the world's most highly urbanised countries, the image of the bushman—and from the South African War the bushman soldier—became one of the dominant impressions of Australians at war.

The imperial and bellicose sentiments of his early South African verse present an ironic contrast to the first verse that Paterson published. In 1885 outrage at the death of General Gordon at Khartoum provoked the Government of New South Wales to offer a contingent to serve with the British force in the Sudan. Within weeks a force of 770 infantry and artillery had been raised and despatched, the only colonial contribution accepted by Britain. Despite the contingent's popularity—a crowd of 200,000 gathered around Sydney Harbour to farewell it—radical opposition to the contingent existed. On the contingent's return—on a wet winter's day, accompanied by many fewer spectators—Paterson published bitterly sarcastic but anonymous verse in the *Bulletin*: before the contingent's departure and after its return in June 1885. The first, 'El Mahdi to the Australian Troops', explicitly questioned the involvement of an Australian colony in an imperial conflict:

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And wherefore have they come, this warlike band ...  
Men of Australia, wherefore have ye come? ...

To keep the Puppet Khedive on the throne,  
To strike a blow for tyranny and wrong ...?³
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Fifteen years later, as an established author, Paterson was selected to travel to South Africa as special correspondent for the major newspapers in Sydney and Melbourne. Banjo Paterson was an obvious choice. He was, and remains, the most celebrated of the bush writers of the 1890s. The proof is in the reception of his first published collection, *The Man from Snowy River and other Verses*. Published in October 1895, the first edition sold out within a week, selling 7000 copies within the year. It is almost certain that he has to this day outsold every other poet in Australian literary history.

Through 1899 the British commandants of the military forces of the six Australian colonies, and many of their members, had taken a keen interest in the crisis in South Africa. Several commandants had urged both their own governments and the War Office to offer or accept colonial forces, and on the outbreak of war each hastily raised and despatched the first of half a dozen contingents they would send to the war. By the war's end over 12,000 Australians would serve with Australian colonial or commonwealth units, a third of them enlisting twice (hence the familiar figure of 16,000 volunteers), with several thousand more serving in British or South African units. Until the formation of the federal Commonwealth Horse in 1901, Australians served in small colonial units distributed among larger imperial formations and columns. (This explains Paterson's satirical fantasy in which a War Office colonel, hearing of Tasmania's offer of 85 men, exclaims: 'I've seen bigger armies on the stage at Drury Lane'.⁴)
Banjo Paterson travelled to South Africa with the first volunteers to leave from New South Wales. Arriving in Cape Town late in November he immediately fell among and confirmed his talent for mixing with titled and influential men and women, a gift enhanced by his profound knowledge of horses. His encounters with Alfred Milner, Winston Churchill, Lord Roberts and Rudyard Kipling formed the basis of his gossipy recollections, *Happy Dispatches*, published in 1934. Paterson's memoir comes as a surprise. Though greeted as 'the Wild Colonial Boy, the bronco buster from 'the Barcoo' (an image that he played up to), Paterson was no rough bushman. The son of a pastoral family, he attended Sydney Grammar School, trained as a lawyer and played polo at Government House. Paterson's knack was to be able to find common ground with whomever he met, and his ability to mix with and speak for and to stockmen and shearers explains his insights into and his impact upon contemporary Australia. Despite his understanding of the working people of outback Australia, though, Paterson was no bush radical. (Not so his friend and fellow writer Henry Lawson who immediately expressed his scepticism of the war and of the need for Australians to join it. He became an articulate representative of what became a growing anti-war faction in Australia.)

Paterson appears to have been inadvertently but actually duchessed by his contact with the titled and influential British figures in South Africa. Within days of arriving in South Africa he found himself, on the strength of his reputation as a horseman, escorting the Duchess of Westminster and Lady Charles Bentinck hunting near Cape Town. Paterson was entranced, and the entree he gained into the highest circles—and the opportunities for reporting the war that followed—placed him literally in the Commander-in-Chiefs camp: Paterson's experience of war and his observations of its conduct and effects would produce in him a profound disquiet, an ambivalence which goes far to explain the uneven quality and tone of his South African verse.

Reaching the Orange River front between 'Black Week' and the beginning of Roberts' offensive, Paterson reported the war as the New South Wales troops saw it. He sent detailed reports to Australia that document the great British advance which raised the siege of Kimberley in February and went on to capture the Orange Free State capital of Bloemfontein in April. He remained to cover the occupation of Pretoria and Johannesburg, returning to lecture on the war later in 1900, by which time he was sometimes booed off platforms as insufficiently bellicose, or even 'pro-Boer'. Paterson's reports still make lively reading; arguably the single largest body of writing by an Australian written about the war at the time.

**Paterson's South African Poems**

Paterson published about 20 poems from South Africa. Though the exact dating of their composition is uncertain, they suggest a trajectory of his changing commitment to the war, from jingoistic imperialist to disillusioned nationalist.

Several are slight pieces. Two were composed aboard the transport *Kent* on the voyage to Cape Town. The first, 'There's another blessed horse fell down', is a relic of the difficulties of transporting horses by sea. The other, 'The Rum Parade', was written for a concert on board the *Kent*, and expresses bellicose sentiments acceptable to the eager volunteers:

> We are ready for a march upon Pretoria.  
> And we'll pay off all the scores on old Kruger and his Boers ...

'The Reveille' celebrated the New South Wales Lancers, a squadron of which had volunteered for active service while on duty in Britain. It begins: 'Trumpets of the Lancer Corps/ Sound a loud reveille'. Paterson later regretted its gauche jingoism and never reprinted it, but others are just as inconsequential. 'Santa Claus' imagines the arrival of Father Christmas in camp. The gifts he brings are symbols of empire—a frond of a New Zealand fern, a bloom of English rose'. In keeping with the literary conventions of empire, Paterson praised Scots, in two poems. 'Jock' celebrates in trite and conventional tones heroic and warlike Scottish soldiers, while 'The Scotch Engineer' is a spirited tale of a civilian engine driver who takes an armoured train to relieve an ambushed column at the cost of his life.
The reality of war first intrudes in 'Maxims of War':

Firstly, when fighting the Dutchman, make it your cardinal rule—
Think he's a rogue if it please you: never believe he's a fool ...  
Parties of twenty for scouting—easy to see and to smother.
Neither can fight nor keep hidden—neither one thing nor the other ...

Finally, never get jumpy—e'en though the fighting is hot!
Think of how often you're shot at—think how seldom you're shot!

All the same, the poems include several laudatory, superficial pieces, such as 'Cape Mounted Rifles', to be sung to the tune of 'Botany Bay', probably for a camp smoke concert:

Now when you've done talking of trifles,
I'll sing you a song of the war—
A song of the Cape Mounted Rifles,
The dandy South African Corps.

The declarations of imperial loyalty are complemented by praise of other Australian contingents, in 'Queensland Mounted Infantry':

There's a very well-built fellow, with a swinging sort of stride,
About as handy sort as I have seen.
A rough and tumble fellow that is born to fight and ride
And he's over here a-fighting for the Queen.

He's Queensland Mounted Infantry—compounded 'orse and foot.
He'll climb a cliff or gallop down a flat.
He's cavalry to travel but he's infantry to shoot.
And you'll know him by the feathers in his hat!

The Kiplingesque 'orse is a reminder that in Bloemfontein in May 1900 Paterson met Kipling.

'Johnny Boer' expresses a grudging respect for the enemy:

But when you're fighting Johnnie Boer you have to use your head;
He don't believe in front attacks or charging at the run,
He fights you from a kopje with his little Maxim gun.

But after all the job is sure, although the job is slow,
We have to see the business through, the Boer has got to go.
With Nordenfeldt and lyddite shell it's certain, soon or late,
We'll hunt him from his kopjes and across the Orange State.

Following Roberts' army into the Orange Free State, Paterson saw war more realistically, and the cosy fellowship into which he had fallen in the early weeks became supplanted by a scepticism all the more fervent for the contrast with his earlier sycophancy. Paterson's disillusionment with the British Army is apparent from the bitter 'Our Underpaid Army', the 'our' referring to Britain rather than Australia. He deplored how 'each little cheap success/ Is quite enough to set the country yelling':

And D.S.O.s thrown out like pom-poms shelling.
With people drinking, Mafficking and brawling,
Our frenzied self-laudation is appalling!

'There is no hope', he concluded, 'the whole concern is worked/ In the sole interest of the "upper classes"'. The same idea animates 'Bandy Burke', a sergeant major who 'Of course ... couldn't afford/ to take a commission—he does the work/And the credit goes to a Lord'.

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The later poems reflect a more mature disillusionment. 'Fed up' expresses the frustration of a cavalryman who complains that: 'We never get a chance to charge, to do a thrust and cut'. 'Commandeering' reveals the impact of war on occupied Boer civilians. 'Right in front of the Army' is a sardonic but ephemeral jibe at the ardour of all the new arrivals at the front to see action. 'That VC' satirises the desire for glory that many men entertained, in which a wounded man declines an offer to carry him to safety through a hail of bullets, denying a would-be hero a chance of being decorated. A fantasy, 'Driver Smith', describes how an ambulance driver from Sydney captures Paul Kruger and ends the war.

In 'No Class' Paterson expressed the disappointment of those who thought that 'When we took Pretoria we thought the war was done'. The poems of the war's guerrilla phase are more satisfying artistically, and are couched more in keeping with the conventions of the literary ballad form in which Paterson excelled. In one of Paterson's first expressions of an exclusive Australian nationalism, 'Our Own Flag' prophesies that 'We will carry our own flag up to the front/When we go to the wars again'. 'On the trek' is a more reflective piece. It anticipates both the troops' disenchantment and the growing nationalism that became a by-product of Australian encounters with other imperial troops:

When the dash and the excitement and the novelty are dead,
And you've seen a load of wounded once or twice,
Or you've watched your old mate dying, with the vultures overhead—
Well, you wonder if the war is worth the price.
And down along Monaro now they're starting out to shear,
I can picture the excitement and the row;
But they'll miss me on the Lachlan when they call the roll this year,
For we're going on a long job now.

'I Joined a Contingent'—a composite of ballad and spoken recitative—describes how an Australian who had joined 'in search of promotion and pay' shams death to avoid having to advance:

I'm alive, so I'm gay
On my five bob a day
As a Mounted Australian Cur.

This acknowledgement of cowardice and the grimness of 'The last parade' is far from the optimism of 'The Reveille'. Banjo, the horse-lover, expressed his feelings for the Australian horses who died in their thousands on the veldt, speaking through one of the survivors:

We froze on the wind-swept kopjes
When the frost lay snowy-white,
Never a halt in the daytime,
Never a rest at night!...

Over the sea you brought us,
Over the leagues of foam:
Now we have served you fairly
Will you not take us home?

Given the alacrity with which their riders volunteered for what they believed would be an exciting war, the aggrieved tone is ironic. Banjo's final verse on the war, 'Concerning the African War', published in the radical Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper in London in 1901, is a 'bitter, sarcastic and scathing parody of Kipling:

Now listen to me and I'll tell you my views concerning the African war!
And the man who upholds any different views, the same is a rotten pro-Boer!
(Though I'm getting a little bit doubtful myself, as it drags on week after week:
But it's better not ask questions at all—let us silence all doubts with a shriek!)
"With French to Kimberley"

"With French to Kimberley", Paterson's longest war poem, and the only one which can stand comparison with the best of his bush ballads, offers two avenues of analysis. First, the degree to which it can be used to understand the British advance on Kimberley and the Australian role in it: to consider the poem as history. Second, it suggests questions about what Paterson's verse contributed to Australia's understanding of its part in the war. "With French to Kimberley" can be read as the hinge of Paterson's encounter with and transformation by the war. The earlier, optimistic phase of his encounter with the war ended with his exposure to the sights of the fighting and the advance, so costly in the horses he loved.

The poem describes the audacious six-day 'flank advance' of Major-General John French's Cavalry Division from the Orange River to Kimberley. Its description of the advance parallels his long dispatch posted from Kimberley on 17 February. The poem compresses into 58 lines the feeling detailed in reports of several thousand words. Clearly, it is not intended to be a factual account, but it closely follows the course of events and can be read as a narrative:

The Boers were down on Kimberley with siege and Maxim gun;
The Boers were down on Kimberley, their numbers ten to one!
Faint were the hopes the British had to make the struggle good—
Defenceless in an open plain the Diamond City stood.
They built them forts with bags of sand, they fought from roof and wall,
They flashed a message to the south, 'Help! Or the town must fall!'
Then down our ranks the order ran to march at dawn of day,
And French was off to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.

He made no march along the line; he made no front attack
Upon those Magersfontein heights that held the Seaforths back;
But eastward over pathless plains, by open veldt and vley,
Across the front of Cronje's force his troopers held their way. 14
The springbuck, feeding on the flats where Modder River runs,
Were startled by his horses' hoofs, the rumble of his guns.
The Dutchman's spies that watched his march from every rocky wall
Rode back in haste: 'He marches East! He threatens Jacobsdal!'
Then north he wheeled as wheels the hawk, and showed to their dismay
That French was off to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.

His column was five thousand strong—all mounted men—and guns:
There met, beneath the world-wide flag, the world-wide Empire's sons;
They came to prove to all the earth that kinship conquers space,
And those who fight the British Isles must fight the British race!
From far New Zealand's flax and fern, from cold Canadian snows,
From Queensland plains, where hot as fire the summer sunshine glows—
And in the front the Lancers rode that New South Wales had sent:
With easy stride across the plain their long, lean Walers went.
Unknown, untired, those squadrons were, but proudly out they drew
Beside the English regiments that fought at Waterloo. 15
From every coast, from every clime, they met in proud array
To go with French to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.

He crossed the Reit and fought his way towards the Modder bank.
The foeman closed behind his march, and hung upon the flank.
The long, dry grass was all ablaze 16 (and fierce the veldt fire runs);
He fought them through a wall of flame that blazed around the guns!
Then limbered up and drove at speed, though horses fell and died;
We might not halt for man nor beast on that wild, daring ride.
Black with the smoke and parched with thirst, we pressed the livelong day
Our headlong march to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.
We reached the drift at fall of night, and camped across the ford. Next day from all the hills around the Dutchman's cannon roared. A narrow pass ran through the hills, with guns on either side, The boldest man might well turn pale before that pass he tried, For, if the first attack should fail, then every hope was gone: But French looked once, and only once, and then he said, 'Push on!' The gunners plied their guns amain; the hail of shrapnel flew; With rifle fire and lancer charge their squadrons back we threw; And through the pass between the hills we swept in furious fray, And French was through to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.

Ay, French was through to Kimberley! And ere the day was done We saw the Diamond City stand, lit by the evening sun; Above the town the heliograph hung like an eye of flame: Around the town the foemen camped—they knew not that we came; But soon they saw us, rank on rank; they heard our squadrons' tread; In panic fear they left their tents, in hopeless rout they fled— And French rode into Kimberley; the people cheered amain, The women came with tear-stained eyes to touch his bridle rein, The starving children lined the streets to raise a feeble cheer, The bells rang out a joyous peal to say 'Relief is here!' Ay! we that saw that stirring march are proud that we can say We went with French to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.

'With French to Kimberley' offers a triumphant version of an admittedly audacious and in the end successful military operation. Its assertion of imperial unity and military achievement is, perhaps, not surprising. But there are, of course, significant differences between the campaign described by Paterson the poet and the events described by Paterson the journalist.

The poem refers obliquely to the hardships of the march, but barely at all to its human and equine cost. Only in his dispatch does he describe the 'pitiful' sight of exhausted British infantry collapsing, 'half delirious with heat and thirst', so far gone that many let their helmets roll off as they lay waiting for the ambulances. In the poem the advance continues regardless of hardship, but in the dispatch he describes the horses as 'starved and worn out, dead tired before they start from want of feed and ... rest'. The entry into the besieged town, a moment of high drama in the poem, is in the dispatch 'a great anti-climax', the heliograph exchanges bedevilled by the besieged wariness that the Boers had 'been playing all sorts of tricks'. Though in the poem the 'hail of shrapnel flew' in the charge at Klip Drift, the dispatch describes only 'a shot or two' as 'really the only shots fired by the Boers at the relief. In the poem the starving Europeans cheer: in the dispatch Paterson also notices the 'blacks ... all around our camp eating the horses that fall weak and are shot... like a crowd of vultures ... poor wretches'. Sunstroke, shooting horses, starving blacks and the confusion of reality had no place in the high diction of imperial unity under decisive command defeating foemen and Dutchmen to the pealing of bells.

Baptisms of Fire: Banjo and Bean

How could it be otherwise, we might ask? It is difficult to recapture the innocence of a century ago. Paterson wrote before domestic readers recognised the brutal realities of the war in South Africa, and long before the First World War shattered for ever the illusion of war's glory. A fragment of a short story by Henry Lawson, Paterson's friend and fellow writer, illuminates the innocence. In Lawson's story, 'Telling Mrs Baker', Jack, a drover, has to break the news to a man's widow that he is dead, but strives to conceal the fact that he drank himself to death. As he sits in the parlour of a house in Solong, a small town in outback New South Wales, spinning a plausible lie about Bob Baker's end, he stares at an engraving on the opposite wall depicting Blucher meeting Wellington on the field of Waterloo. 'I thought the artist had heaped up the dead a bit extra', he thinks, '... I wouldn't like to be trod on by horses even if I was dead'. He was unable to imagine a scene which no Australian was to have to confront until 1915.
There is in this a paradox. Paterson's South African verse arguably constitutes the longest, most popular, accessible and widely disseminated accounts of Australia's part in the war. If only because they appeared in his *Collected Works*, the war poems reached many more readers for much longer than any other Australian account of the war. The only rivals for the palm can be other correspondents' necessarily ephemeral newspaper reports, published during the period of greatest interest in the war. At the same time, even the reports and verse of Australia's most popular writer failed to ignite in his fellow Australians the sort of response which was to colour not only the Australian 'baptism of fire' in the First World War, 'but arguably to shape Australians' understanding of their military experience. Despite the creation of an Australian Federation on 1 January 1901, the conjunction between Australian national identity and the war in South Africa remained muted.

In 1914 another, larger Australian volunteer force enlisted in another war. First committed to battle in the landing on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, its ordeal was immediately reported and celebrated by war correspondents, particularly the British Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and the Australian Charles Bean. Bean in particular, both in his newspaper dispatches and in the official history published from 1922, described the landing in terms of heroic nationalism. His rhetoric—regarded as the progenitor of the 'Anzac legend'—has dominated Australian military historiography, whether as gospel or foil, shaping a canon of military historiography that still dominates Australian military writing. Paterson's 'With French to Kimberley' could conceivably have anticipated this reaction. Paterson was Australia's most popular writer (he was far better known in 1900 than Bean was in 1915), the war was popular; the campaign was both arduous and successful. There are several reasons why the poem did not. First, Australians were hardly united in believing in the war: substantial numbers remained either sceptical, indifferent or opposed to it. Second, Paterson wrote about events a year before the federation of the Australian colonies: the prevailing parochial 'colonial nationalism' was too tepid and declining an allegiance to justify such a reaction. Third, Paterson celebrated an Australian—or rather a New South Wales—membership of an imperial family. He—and most of his readers—were proud to serve 'Beside the English regiments that fought at Waterloo'. They regarded themselves as 'Australasian Britons', comfortable with a dual identity and closely attached to their British heritage. Only in the First World War would Australian disillusionment with the assumption of British superiority—a reaction beginning in South Africa—be supplanted by a pride in Australian achievement, and that would demand more than a creditable performance by a squadron of lancers. Lastly, perhaps most importantly, despite his stature as Australia's premier nationalist author, Paterson's ambivalence toward the war prevented him from expressing a strong, coherent view. In the end his verse expressed the same trajectory as much Australian opinion followed, from gauche jingoism through sober realism to disillusionment and doubt.

Without trying to make more of Paterson's verse than it can sustain, it is important to recognise that it constitutes not only arguably the first substantial Australian cultural response to war, but also the most significant medium by which the Australian part in the war was expressed and understood.
I am grateful to Mr Daniel Pask of the Australian War Memorial for his assistance in locating relevant sources for this article.

3. Rosamund Campbell and Philippa Harvie (eds), *Singer of the Bush, AB 'Banjo' Paterson: Complete Works 1885-1900* (Sydney: Lansdowne, 1983), 41. Paterson maintained his rage: after the contingent's return he contributed an anonymous verse: 'So you're back from your baptism of glory! And you bring a few spots on your hands./ That our country may change her sad story./ To the wail of the blood-guilty lands!'. Clement Semmler, *The Banjo of the Bush: The Life and Times of AB 'Banjo' Paterson* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), 56.
4. John Hirst, in his paper to this conference, reminded us that Paterson's pro-war verse would probably not have been welcomed by his former vehicle, the less respectable *Bulletin*.
6. Quoted in ibid, 104. The Barcoo is a river in western Queensland.
9. The poems Paterson approved of appeared in later editions of his verse, notably *The Collected Verse of AB Paterson* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1927). The entire body of work is included in Campbell and Harvie, *Singer of the Bush*, though it is unclear whether they were necessarily written in the order in which they are arranged.
10. The poem was published in the Bulletin on 19 May. Curiously, Australia's first Victoria Cross was awarded to Captain Neville Howse of the NSW Medical Corps, who performed exactly this action at Vredfort in June 1900, not only while Paterson was still in South Africa but possibly after reading that issue.
11. A region of high plains and alpine pasture in the southeast of New South Wales.
12. A river in the central west of New South Wales.
14. Paterson recounted how he cadged lifts to join the column, camping on the night of 11 February by a deserted farm. This, he found, lay just inside the Free State border, and he reflected on finding himself in hostile country' for the first time. Hostile, but familiar—Paterson noted how the country looked very much like Queensland, around Longreach. In October 1999, driving over the same country in company with Craig Wilcox, I was struck by its similarity to the semi-desert of northern Eyre Peninsula in South Australia.
15. This is not poetic licence. The New South Wales Lancers squadron was brigaded with the 6th Dragoon Guards, the 14th Hussars and squadrons of the Royal Scots Greys and Inniskilling Dragoons, the Lancers operating interchangeably with the British regiments of greater antiquity.
16. Paterson's dispatch describes how the grass was set alight by 'careless soldiers': his expression of it here ('and fierce the veldt fire runs') is a classic example of his style.
17. This stanza describes the charge at Klip Drift, in which French sent his cavalry, as Leo Amery in *The Times History* put it, 'straight in front down the open valley'. Lamenting that the experiment was never repeated, Amery, and many others, concluded that 'the part played by cavalry in the main attack ... is one that will grow in importance in wars of the future', LS Amery (ed), *The Times History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, vol III (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1905), 392-95.
18. Paterson perhaps allowed Australian readers to infer that the lancers in question were of New South Wales—the only others named in the poem. They were in fact the British 9th and 16th Lancers.
The great nineteenth century Prussian general, Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, ‘The Elder’, once declared that no operations plan survives contact with the enemy. But no one has suggested—least of all Moltke—that an army or a commander contemplating a military operation should have no plan. The same can be said about previous experience of war. A new war is likely to have such a different shape and character from the previous one that previous experience might be found to be of no value, or indeed, even misleading. Army commanders are often accused of preparing for the past war rather than the future one. But no one has suggested that previous wartime experience is not valuable in an army about to embark on a new war.

The Nature of the Australian Army

Despite this note of caution, there are a number of reasons why it might be worthwhile examining the influence of the Boer War on Australian commanders in the First World War. The first of these concerns the citizen nature of the Australian Army. The Australian Army, known then as the Commonwealth Military Forces, came into existence in March 1901 following Federation two months earlier. It was formed out of the forces of each colony and, like those forces, consisted primarily of part-time soldiers. This approach to defence was confirmed in the Defence Act 1903, which stipulated that Australia would have no permanent army and that the part-time militia forces that formed the bulk of the army could not serve outside of Australia. The only full-time soldiers would be the gunners manning the forts at the capital cities and major ports, the engineering and technical staff who looked after the forts, and a small cadre of training staff for the militia. The largest formations in the militia were the brigades located in each state, and the brigade and battalion commanders were almost always militia officers. As a result of this policy, on the outbreak of the First World War Australia had to raise a special force for service overseas—the Australian Imperial Force, or AIF—and the officers of this force were mainly drawn from the militia.

By contrast with Australia, Britain had a large regular army whose officers had had many years of operational service and extensive peacetime training. British officers had served not only in the Boer War but also elsewhere in Africa, such as West Africa and the Sudan. Almost all the British officers serving in India had had some form of operational experience, generally on the North-West Frontier. The officers of the AIF were very inexperienced and it is therefore reasonable to ask to what extent this inexperience was alleviated by the service of some of them in the Boer War.

It is curious that the Australian official historian of the First World War, Charles Bean, generally disregarded the influence of the Boer War on the 1st AIF. His references to the Boer War relate primarily to its demonstration of aspects of the Australian character, rather than to its contribution to the development of military expertise. In Anzac to Amiens, for example. Bean wrote:

It is true that Australians had served in the Sudan and South Africa—and these were impelled by some of the same motives that were to stir them in 1914, excitement in adventure, determination to stand by the old country in crisis. But despite the very stout showing at Eland's River and elsewhere, those really serious tests were regarded by Australians, and by such as the outside world as were interested, as something of a picnic.
Bean might have down played the influence of the Boer War for several reasons. Only 16,000 Australians served in the Boer War as against over 330,000 in the First World War. Furthermore, as the First World War saw the development of military techniques far beyond those employed in South Africa, at first glance, there seemed little that could have been learned in South Africa that could apply in the First World War. One suspects also that Bean did not look at the military value of the Boer War experience because it did not fit with his image of the Australian soldier of the First World War. If the Boer War experience was found to be valuable, then it implied that soldiering was a demanding technical profession that needed as much experience and training as possible. This notion was at variance with the view that citizen soldiers—called from sheep station and country store—could match it in battle with the more professional armies of Europe. Bill Gammage has argued that two opposite lessons were drawn from the Boer War depending on the prior beliefs of those who drew them: ’Those who thought natural ability sufficient to make a good defence force provided for a voluntary defence system in the First Commonwealth Defence Acts ... [while] Advocates of training began urging the expansion of Australia’s defence forces’.

Australian Nationalism

The second reason for examining the influence of the Boer War relates to the development of an appreciation of Australia as a separate nation. Australian soldiers might have gone to South Africa as part of separate colonial forces, but when they arrived they discovered that they had much in common with each other. Furthermore, the British higher command encouraged this approach. For example, when infantry units from Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania arrived at Cape Town on 26 November 1899, the local British commander formed them into a single unit known as the Australian Regiment. They were later joined by a New South Wales contingent. The commander of the Australian Regiment was Colonel JC Hoad, a Victorian permanent soldier, who later became Chief of the General Staff and an advocate of a nationalist approach to Australian defence. It is true that there was much bickering between the state components of this force, particularly between Hoad and the commander of the New South Welshmen, Captain JG Legge, and the Australian Regiment was eventually broken up. But the seeds for the formation of later national forces were planted. A history of the regiment, published before Federation, was called Australians in War.

The achievement of 300 Australian Bushmen from four colonies at the defence of Elands River in August 1900 emphasised the value of the Australians fighting together. Later a major serving with the Victorian Bushmen wrote to the Defence Minister in that state that the Boer General De Wet was their ’main trouble, but if the Colonial Troops were put together we would soon have him’.

After Federation the new Commonwealth of Australia sent eight battalions of Commonwealth forces to South Africa. They were known as the Australian Commonwealth Horse. All but two of the battalions arrived too late to see any action.

If the Boer War encouraged many members of the colonial forces to think of themselves as Australians they were also forced to confront their relationship with Britain. On the one hand it was stirring and satisfying to become part of the Imperial Army. The colonial forces became an integral part of the Imperial Army while many special service officers filled staff positions in that army. On the other hand at times there was irritation at their treatment by the British. After the shameful episode at Wilmansrust, the Melbourne Punch attributed much of the blame to British officers who were ’no more fit to handle a body of irregulars than a mule is fit to command eagles’.

Several officers who served in the Boer War shaped views among both regular and militia officers in Australia during the following decade. A key officer was Major-General Sir Edward Hutton, General Officer Commanding the Commonwealth Military Forces from 1902 to 1904. A British regular officer, Hutton, considered himself to be something of an expert on colonial forces, having been commandant of the New South Wales forces and commander of the Canadian Militia in the 1890s. In South Africa he commanded a brigade of mounted riflemen.
which included Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and British units. He became an
enthusiast for colonial citizen soldiers, and in Australia worked to prepare an army that could
be sent overseas in support of the Empire. His proteges were William Bridges, Harry
Chauvel and Brudenell White, described by some historians as the 'Imperialists'. The
Imperialists were seen to be in competition with the 'Australianists', led by Major-General
Hoad and Lieutenant-Colonel Legge, both of whom (as noted earlier) had served in the
Australian Regiment. They favoured the formation of an Australian Army that could be used
only in the defence of Australia. Ironically, Hoad and Legge were antipathetic towards each
other. Many of the policies of the Imperialists and the Australianists could exist together, and
during the First World War Imperialists like White and Chauvel displayed some of the strongly
nationalist attitudes usually associated with the Australianists. While Hutton and Hoad had
probably formed their views about these issues before the Boer War, the war undoubted
ly influenced their thinking about them.

The issue of the relationship between Australian forces operating within a larger British or
Imperial force was important in the First World War and even more important in the Second
World War. Indeed the problems of managing a coalition of forces with disparate sizes and
influence are still with us today in East Timor, only in this case Australia is the larger force. It
is, therefore, worthwhile to attempt to discern the extent to which the Boer War experience
influenced the attitudes of Australian commanders to coalition warfare in the First World War.

The Extent of Boer War Experience

The First World War began only 13 years after the end of the Boer War and, in general terms,
anybody who served in the Boer War would have been at least in his mid 30s in the First
World War. This meant that most of the AIF's brigadiers could have served in the Boer War.
There were, of course, exceptions: Brigadier-General Henry Gordon Bennett, who
commanded the 3rd Infantry Brigade from December 1916 to the end of the war, was born in
April 1887 and was therefore too young to have served in South Africa.

There is no evidence that the first senior command appointments of the AIF were made on
the basis of Boer War experience. The commander of the AIF, Major-General William
Bridges, had served in the Boer War but was, in any case, the logical choice for the
command. A permanent officer, he had attended gunnery courses in the United Kingdom, had
been the first Chief of the General Staff, had served at the War Office in London, had been
the first commandant of Australia's Royal Military College, and at the outbreak of war was the
Army's Inspector-General. But only two of the first five brigadier-level commanders to be
appointed had Boer War service.

It has been suggested that the shape of the AIF was determined partly by Bridges' Boer War
experience. At the outbreak of the Boer War the British Government had requested the
colonies to send units of 125 men that could then be fitted into larger British units. As a result
few Australian officers received command experience at regimental level. As noted earlier,
Hoad commanded the Australian Regiment for some months before it was disbanded. The
colonies deployed regiment-sized force; colonial officers commanded these but did not
command at higher levels. (The colonies deployed seven contingents with strengths of more
than 500 men.) The commanders of the Australian Commonwealth Horse battalions received
little active service experience, as most battalions did not see action.

At the outbreak of the First World War the Australian Government offered a contingent of
20,000 men for service overseas. The British Government accepted but suggested that the
contingent consist of two infantry brigades, one of light horse and a field artillery brigade
(regiment). This force could easily be fragmented and distributed among larger British
formations as had happened to the Australian colonial contingents in South Africa. According
to Bridges' biographer, Bridges was resolved not to allow this to occur again. On Bridges'
recommendation, the Australian Government proposed sending a complete division, three
brigades of artillery and a light horse brigade. As Charles Bean put it: The stand thus taken by
the far-sighted sardonic soldier-statesman was the first and greatest step towards settling the
character ... of a national Australian army ... In the stand which he had made General Bridges
was actuated by pure Australian nationalism.
Within six months of the beginning of the war the AIF had been deployed to Egypt and had been expanded to four infantry brigades, three light horse brigades and a divisional artillery. Of these eight brigadier-level commands, officers with Boer War experience held only three. These were Sinclair-MacLagan, Chauvel and Ryrie. Sinclair-MacLagan was a British regular officer on loan to Australia and had served as an infantryman in the advance from Natal into Transvaal. He commanded the AIF’s 3rd Infantry Brigade. Chauvel was an Australian regular officer with extensive mounted rifle experience in the Boer War; he commanded the 1st Light Horse Brigade. Ryrie was a militia officer also with considerable mounted rifle experience in the Boer War; he commanded the 2nd Light Horse Brigade. The other commanders, without Boer War experience, were all militia men: McLaurin (1st Brigade), McCay (2nd Brigade), Monash (4th Brigade), Hughes (3rd Light Horse Brigade), and Hobbs (artillery).

Boer War veterans were well represented, however, in the senior staff appointments of the 1st Australian Division. The two senior staff officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Brudenell White and Colonel Victor Sellheim, had Boer War experience, but were probably selected because of their senior positions at Army Headquarters. Nonetheless, of the 15 officers on the 1st Division Headquarters (not counting the ADCs and those of lieutenant rank), 12 had served in the Boer War. The heads of the supporting units—the artillery, engineers, signallers and divisional train—were all Boer War veterans (although not in their specialty) except for the commander of the artillery.

By the end of the First World War the AIF had expanded to five infantry divisions, and Australians also formed a large part of two light horse divisions. During the war the Australians were commanded directly by a total of 20 officers of major-general rank or higher. Six of these officers were regular British imperial officers. Birdwood commanded the Anzac Corps, the 1st Anzac Corps and the Australian Corps, and had administrative command of the whole AIF. Godley commanded the New Zealand and Australian Division and the 2nd Anzac Corps. Walker commanded the 1st Australian Division, Smyth, the 2nd, HV Cox, the 4th, and Hodgson, the Imperial (later the Australian) Mounted Division. Four of these six officers had served in the Boer War and Cox had other active service. Another officer, Chaytor, who commanded the Anzac Mounted Division, was a New Zealander; he had served in the Boer War.

That leaves 13 Australian officers who reached the rank of major-general during the war. Of these, nine served in the Boer War. Also, of the 13 generals, six were regulars (or at least could be counted as regulars), all of whom had served in the Boer War. Thus almost 70 per cent of the Australian generals had fought in the Boer War.

It is a different story with the brigadiers. A total of 76 brigadiers commanded or served with the Australians. Of these, 15 were British or Imperial officers, one was a New Zealander and another was a South African. But of the 15 listed as Imperial officers, four (Sinclair-MacLagan, Glasfurd, Davies and Anderson) were in Australia at the outbreak of war, enlisted in the AIF and were on the AIF promotions list. Of the remaining 59 Australian brigadiers, only 23, or 37 per cent, had served in the Boer War. Interestingly, of the 59 Australians, 16 were permanent soldiers and of these, eight served in the Boer War. On the face of it, then, the Boer War had a limited influence on the Australian commanders at brigadier level with greater influence being found at higher levels. In attempting to discern the degree of this influence it might be best to consider it under a number of headings or categories.

**Higher Direction and Administration**

The first category concerns the higher direction and administration of the AIF. The first commander of the AIF was Major-General Bridges and, as has been noted, he was instrumental in ensuring that the AIF went overseas as a complete division rather than as separate brigades. Bridges arrived in South Africa in December 1899 as a special service officer for service ‘for instructional purposes’ with the Imperial forces there. At that time Major Bridges was a highly trained artillery officer, having spent two years on gunnery courses in Britain followed by a long period at the School of Gunnery at North Head. Bridges served in South Africa until April 1900 when he became ill and was sent to England for convalescence.
the following month. He was on operations for a little over three months, serving primarily as an artillery staff officer in Lieutenant-General John French's cavalry division. At first he was a member of the divisional artillery staff and later with one of the brigades. While it is hard to quantify, this would have been invaluable experience for an Australian regular officer who would otherwise have had little opportunity to see large forces in the field, let alone on operations, in view of his later command of the 1st Australian Division, it is significant that Bridges was on the headquarters of a division in South Africa. This experience gave Bridges a degree of credibility as the commander of the 1st Division that he might not have otherwise had, especially when dealing with British regular officers in Egypt.

In South Africa, Bridges was also able to meet many people, such as General Sir Ian Hamilton, who were later to figure prominently in the First World War. While it is claimed that in South Africa Bridges 'made observations which determined his attitude towards Australian expeditionary forces in future wars', this is partly speculation based on his later decisions concerning the AIF. It should be noted, however, that in his command of the AIF in late 1914 and early 1915 Bridges was quite content for Imperial commanders to take over much of the administration of his force, and this had a deleterious effect on the force's administration. In South Africa he had served on the headquarters of forces that included Australians but had not served directly with Australian units.

When Bridges was mortally wounded at Gallipoli he was succeeded, in due course, as commander of the AIF by Lieutenant-General Sir William Birdwood, the commander of the Australian and New Zealand Corps. Birdwood remained commander of the AIF until the end of the war and commander of the corps until May 1918. An officer of the British-Indian Army, Birdwood had extensive operational experience including over two years in South Africa. Between December 1899 and August 1900 he served with General Buller's army advancing from Natal into the Transvaal, but after recovering from a wound joined the staff of General Lord Kitchener. Within a few months Kitchener succeeded Field Marshal Lord Roberts as commander-in-chief in South Africa. As Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Birdwood had the task of meeting the fresh contingents arriving from Australia and making 'sure that they were started off on their enterprises well equipped and in good heart'. He generally kept in touch with the needs of the mounted units. In his autobiography Birdwood wrote:

I have always felt that my close contact with these excellent fellows laid the foundation of my very happy relations with the Australian and New Zealand troops throughout the War of 1914-18. Indeed, it was because he realised how well we had got on together in South Africa that Lord Kitchener selected me to command the combined Australian and New Zealand Army Corps in 1914.

Birdwood genuinely believed that he had a close rapport with Australians and this influenced his method of command of them throughout the First World War. But he was supported for almost the entire period of his command by Brudenell White who was GSO1 of the 1st Australian Division until he became Brigadier General Staff of the Anzac Corps during the Gallipoli campaign. White was the driving force behind the administration of the AIF and also the brains behind the tactical handling of the Anzac Corps.

White had only limited service in South Africa. As a young permanent army lieutenant, he arrived in South Africa in February 1902 with the Queenslander of the First Battalion of the Australian Commonwealth Horse, which served with De Lisle's Australian Brigade in a sweep through Transvaal towards Bechuanaland. When peace was announced on 31 May 1902 he wrote in his diary that they were glad, 'but I would have liked to see a little more fighting'. One of his biographers wrote:

Brudenell learned many things from this Boer War chapter of his life, adding them to his growing fund of military knowledge. He learnt some very succinct lessons in the command of troops in difficult circumstances, and gained an understanding of the character of Australians as soldiers; it was information that was to stand him in good stead during the Great War that lay ahead of him and something that General Birdwood was to absorb from him in those later wartime years.
In a letter home White described the advance towards Bechuanaland in which the British commander deployed 20 columns each of about 1000 men in an extended line of 80 kilometres, so clearly he had taken the opportunity to appreciate large scale operations.\textsuperscript{17}

Three other influential figures in the administration of the AIF were Brigadier-Generals Victor Sellheim, Thomas Griffiths and Thomas Dodds. All were regular officers, although Griffiths was really a military clerk rather than a field soldier (he had been secretary of the Military Board). Sellheim was the chief administrative staff officer of the 1st Australian Division and later commandant of the AIF administrative headquarters in Egypt and London. In Egypt he really took hold of the AIF's administration when Bridges' arrangements had left it in absolute chaos.\textsuperscript{18} Griffiths, who had been Assistant Adjutant General of the AIF, succeeded him as commandant. Dodds was Adjutant General at Army Headquarters and then Deputy Adjutant General of the AIF in 1917-18. He was a great proponent of the 'Australianisation' of the AIF by appointing Australian officers to the senior command positions.\textsuperscript{19}

Both Sellheim and Dodds served in South Africa. Sellheim was a temporary major and served in British battalions and then was adjutant of the Queenslander Mounted Infantry in the advance to Pretoria. For a while he was the chief staff officer of a mounted unit commanded by Major Chauvel. Dodds was adjutant of the 5th (Queensland Imperial Bushmen) contingent. When his force was attacked and almost overwhelmed by a superior force of Boers he rallied the surviving Queenslanders and held on until help arrived. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and was mentioned in despatches.

Before we leave the higher direction of the AIF, mention should be made of the influence that the South African War had on several senior British officers who commanded Anzac forces in the First World War. Examples are Generals Sir Ian Hamilton, Sir Henry Rawlinson and Sir Herbert Plumer, who commanded Australian and New Zealanders in South Africa and developed a high regard for them.

**Infantry Command**

The second category for examining the influence of the Boer War concerns operational experience in command of infantry operations. The conduct of First World War infantry operations differed from that in South Africa, although there were many lessons for those wise enough to discern them. The British Army believed that the Boers had been successful because of their marksmanship. In fact, as Thomas Pakenham explained in his detailed study of the war, 'the smokeless, long range, high velocity, small-bore magazine bullet from rifle or machine-gun—plus the trench—had decisively tilted the balance against attack and in favour of defence. The world learnt this lesson the hard way: in the bloody stalemates of the Dardanelles and Flanders'.\textsuperscript{20} These operations in South Africa included the manoeuvre of infantry battalions against an enemy with well-sited defences. Few Australians were able to experience this sort of fighting as most served in mounted units.

Three key AIF officers, however, had experience of these operations. Alexander Sinclair-MacLagan was the adjutant and then a company commander in the 1st Battalion the Border Regiment. This battalion fought as part of Hart's Irish brigade at the disastrous battle of Colenso during the relief of Ladysmith. He served in South Africa until November 1900, was wounded and awarded the Distinguished Service Order. He served in Australia twice on loan and was appointed commander of the 3rd Infantry Brigade of the AIF. He gained the confidence of Bridges who thought the 3rd Brigade was his best and thus chose it for the initial landing at Gallipoli.\textsuperscript{21} MacLagan's brigade major, Charles Brand, was also a permanent officer with Boer War experience. Bridges' judgement was proved right. By his actions on the first day at Anzac Cove MacLagan may have saved the battle. In 1918 as commander of the 4th Division MacLagan planned the successful battle of Hamel. Brand was a very successful commander of the 4th Brigade for over two years.

It is worth noting that of the four original battalion commanders of the 3rd Brigade that made the initial landing at Gallipoli, only one had served in South Africa. The proportion was the same in the 1st and 2nd Brigades.
John Gellibrand was an Australian who had graduated from Sandhurst and served as a regular British officer until shortly before the First World War. Like MacLagan he commanded an infantry company in the battles leading to the relief of Ladysmith before falling ill. He wrote copious notes analysing the lessons to be drawn from them. He was a staff officer on the 1st Division Headquarters at Gallipoli, commanded infantry brigades from 1916 to 1918 and then commanded the 3rd Division.

A similar figure was Duncan Glasfurd, a British officer on loan in Australia at the outbreak of the First World War. He had been adjutant of the 1st Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in the battles of Modder River and Magersfontein, during the relief of Kimberley. One of the really bizarre images of these battles was that of the highlanders lying in their kilts in the open under enemy fire. The backs of their knees were without protection from the sun and, according to one victim, soon blisters were being raised "as big as the palm of your hand". Glasfurd was severely wounded in October 1900 and later saw action in British East Africa. Like Gellibrand, at Gallipoli he was a staff officer on the 1st Division Headquarters, succeeding White as GSO1 and commanding a brigade on the Somme until mortally wounded in November 1916.

When the commander of the 1st Brigade was killed two days after the Gallipoli landing, Harold Walker, a British officer who had served in the Boer War, succeeded him. Walker later commanded the 1st Division after Bridges was mortally wounded. James McCay who commanded the 2nd Brigade and John Monash, who commanded the 4th at Gallipoli, had not served in South Africa. McCay was brave but was wounded and relieved in July by a permanent officer (Forsyth) who had not served in South Africa but had served with a cavalry brigade in India. McCay's command of the 5th Division in 1916 was not successful. Monash served as brigade commander throughout the Gallipoli campaign and showed his inexperience. Pedersen has argued that his performance was better than that claimed by Bean. That Monash became a successful division and corps commander reflects not only his intelligence and planning ability but also the fact that if a commander could survive the early period of inexperience, the experience of the new war was more valuable than that of the old.

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Brigades fought as infantry at Gallipoli. The commanders of the first two, Chauvel and Granville Ryrie had, as mentioned earlier, extensive experience in the Boer War and demonstrated their ability to lead men at Gallipoli. The commander of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade was the elderly FG Hughes, who had not served in South Africa. When he proved incompetent, Jack Antill relieved him. A regular officer, Antill had commanded a squadron of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles in South Africa and at times acted as regimental commander.

Two other Boer War veterans proved to be highly capable commanders at Gallipoli. Major William Glasgow had won a DSO in South Africa. At Gallipoli he was promoted to command his light horse regiment, was given command of the 13th Brigade the following year and became commander of the 1st Division in 1918. Harold (Pompey) Elliott was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for service in South Africa. He commanded a battalion at Gallipoli, and the 15th Brigade from 1916 until the end of the war. He was one of the AIF's outstanding commanders.

A question mark hangs over the performance Major-General Gordon Legge, a regular officer who commanded the 2nd Division at Gallipoli and on the Somme in 1916. It has been claimed that Legge lacked experience. After the 2nd Division's failed attack at Pozières in July 1916, the British commander, General Sir Douglas Haig, wrote in his diary that some of the Anzac Corps divisional commanders were "so ignorant and (like many Colonials) so conceited that they cannot be trusted to work out unaided the plan of attack". Yet Legge probably served longer in South Africa than any other Australian. He arrived in South Africa in December 1899 as commander of the New South Wales infantry units and served in the Australian Regiment. Later he was adjutant of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles. When his company returned to Australia in December 1900 he stayed on as intelligence officer with De Lisle's column. He left South Africa in July 1902 and reached Australia in October 1902. He was apparently
happily married and had a young child when he left for South Africa. Perhaps he stayed on for a second year to try to redress the criticism of his command in the first year. Legge's biographer has pointed out that his performance in South Africa "left a cloud over the significant aspect of his capacity for field command". He received neither promotion nor decoration for his South Africa service. When his senior and demanding staff appointments in Australia and his attachment to the War Office are taken into account, it is evident that he was not an inexperienced officer, but the Boer War service did not seem to have helped his later career.

The three brigades of Legge's 2nd Division had a less trying experience at Gallipoli than those of the first contingent. The commander of the 5th Brigade was William Holmes, a militia officer with extensive service in South Africa. He went there as a lieutenant and returned as a brevet lieutenant-colonel, having been wounded, mentioned in despatches and awarded the DSO. According to the Australian official history of the First World War:

> The South African campaigns taught him the importance of attention to detail, the value of initiative, and the importance of personal conduct and efficiency; he returned to Australia with a record of good service, and a reputation for personal bravery, ability, and capacity for command.

Holmes commanded the land forces in the expedition to capture German New Guinea in 1914. After commanding his brigade in France in 1916 he took command of the 4th Division but was killed in action in July 1917. Following discussions with Gellibrand, Bean wrote in his diary:

> Bridges was not a leader but a commander; White has never had the chance to be a leader. He is easily our best soldier, but a staff officer and scholar, not a commander yet. Holmes is the first Australian commander. He had the power of command which Hobbs and Monash have not ... He was able to keep his brigade up to it at Pozières in a way no other man could have done.

The 6th and 7th Brigades at Gallipoli were commanded by men who were too old for war service, even though one had Boer War experience. Before long they were replaced. Neither replacement had served in South Africa; but one was a British officer (Gwynn) with operational service elsewhere, and the other (Paton) had recently served in German New Guinea.

**Light Horse**

It is difficult to generalise about the value of infantry command experience in the Boer War. Nonetheless, it seems that it was useful in the early stages of the First World War, but soon lost its utility as officers tried to come to grips with the demands of a new war. By contrast, however, the experience of mounted rifle or cavalry operations was to prove invaluable in the First World War. In South Africa, Australian mounted troops gained a reputation for competence and effectiveness and at various stages provided large proportions of the mounted troops available to the British commanders. As LF Field concluded, by May 1900 the Australians 'were for the first time in a position to make an impact as a national force'. But no Australian commanded at higher than regimental level, and generally commanded at a lower level. Despite the numbers of Australians deployed, the standard British histories of the Boer War barely mention them except perhaps to describe the Wilmansrust debacle or the execution of Handcock and Morant.

Mention has already been made of Chauvel and Ryrie. Chauvel spent a year in South Africa as a major with the Queensland Mounted Infantry. He was adjutant for a while, commanded a squadron, and later commanded a force known as Chauvel's Mounted Infantry. As his biographer noted, he had learned "the art of handling a mixed command and [the experience] had taught him much about discipline and the problems of horsemanship in a harsh country. He had come through the tests of battle and of independent command with his reputation
In 1902 he returned to South Africa as commanding officer of the 7th Battalion of the Australian Commonwealth Horse but did not see action. His gift for careful administration, observed in South Africa, came to the fore when he commanded the Anzac Mounted Division in Sinai in 1916.

When Chauvel was promoted to command the Anzac Mounted Corps, Edward Chaytor who had served in the Boer War succeeded him. Major-General William Hodgson who commanded the Imperial (later Australian) Mounted Division was a British regular officer. The five Australian light horse brigades that served in these two divisions between 1916 and 1918 had eight commanders. Of these, six had served in the Boer War. They had had extensive experience and were some of the great characters of the AIF. Granville Ryrie, who commanded his brigade (with some breaks) from 1914 to 1919, had commanded a squadron of the force that relieved the defenders of Eland's River. 'Fighting Charlie' Cox led the first colonial volunteers to reach South Africa and returned there in 1901 as commander of a regiment of New South Wales Mounted Rifles that distinguished itself in operations alongside British regulars. He commanded the 1st Light Horse Brigade from 1916 to 1918. 'Galloping Jack' Royston, who commanded the 2nd Light Horse Brigade at the battle of Romani and later the 3rd Light Horse, was a South African who had spent much of the South African War in command of Australians. The two commanders who had not served in South Africa, Grant and Macarthur-Onslow, received their commands in the latter part of the war and had gained experience in Sinai and Palestine.

**Artillery**

Much of the mounted rifle experience of the Boer War could be transplanted to the war in Palestine in 1916-18 and indeed might have contributed directly to the success of the British mounted operations in that campaign. The same could not be said about the experience of the artillery. In South Africa the British Army employed 84 batteries of Royal Horse Artillery, Royal Field Artillery, Royal Garrison Artillery and other colonial artillery units, 50 independent artillery sections (Pom-poms and Galloping Maxims) and four militia garrison artillery companies, and at the high point of October 1900 a total of 15,000 gunners were serving there. Against this record, the Australian artillery contributed just one battery, consisting of five officers and 174 other ranks, with a further one officer and 43 other ranks joining later as reinforcements. With its six 15-pounder BL field guns, the unit took part in no major battles and was usually split into two-gun sections. However, the commitment was important. The battery was the only permanent Australian army unit and the only Australian field battery sent to South Africa, and its members gained experience that was to prove valuable as the Australian permanent army built on the small nucleus of permanent gunners in the post-federation period.

The First World War was an artillery war that saw the development of artillery techniques to a very high level. There were only glimpses of these developments in the Boer War. Guns were often fired in the direct rather than the indirect fashion and artillery was not employed in the massed role. Australian officers learned about the handling of men in operations but gained little in the knowledge of artillery techniques. It is not surprising then that the early and senior commands of the Australian artillery contained fewer Boer War veterans than the light horse or infantry units. Colonel Talbot Hobbs, the artillery commander of the 1st Division, had not served in South Africa. Of his three brigade commanders, two were Boer War veterans. Sydney Christian was a regular officer who had commanded a field artillery section in South Africa. George Johnson, a militia officer, had received considerable experience when serving with British units in South Africa. He returned to South Africa as commanding officer of the 4th Battalion of the Australian Commonwealth Horse but it did not see action. Charles Rosenthal, commander of the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade, had not gone to South Africa. The commander of the divisional ammunition column was a Boer War veteran.

As the First World War progressed the AIF had 13 officers who commanded artillery units with the rank of brigadier-general. These included the artillery commanders of the five infantry divisions and the commanders of the corps and heavy artillery. Of these 13 officers, four were British regulars and one was a New Zealand regular officer. Of the remaining eight, three
were Australian regular officers, Coxen, Phillips and Christian. Only Christian served in the Boer War. Of the five Australian militia artillery commanders, Hobbs, Johnston, Grimwade, Rosenthal and Bessell-Browne, only Johnston and Bessell-Browne served in South Africa. Bessell-Browne began as a private in the Western Australian Mounted Infantry, but was commissioned in the field. He returned to South Africa as adjutant and then second-in-command of the 5th Western Australian contingent and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. He was an outstanding battery commander at Gallipoli. Significantly, Hobbs and Rosenthal, who commanded infantry divisions, and Walter Coxen, the leading Australian gunner at the end of the war, had not gone to South Africa.

**Medical Services**

The Australian Army Medical Corps, which developed to a very great extent during the First World War, owes its origin to the New South Wales Army Medical Corps which served in South Africa. The commander of the Corps in South Africa was Colonel William Williams, whom a British war correspondent described as 'the first man I have met who seems to be a master of Army medical work in the field'. In the decade following the Boer War the British Army Medical Corps made a concerted effort to learn the lessons of that war. These lessons were taken up by the Australian Army Medical Corps that was established after Federation with Williams as surgeon general.

Williams, elderly, overweight and in poor health, became director of medical services of the AIF until superseded by Neville Howse in November 1915. Howse had served under Williams in the Boer War where he won the first Victoria Cross to be awarded to an Australian. Howse too had seen the problems of medical administration in South Africa and was determined to improve the administration of the AIF's medical services. He was promoted to major-general in 1917 in recognition of the remarkable work that he had done with the development of a separate and efficient Australian Army Medical Corps. Other senior AIF medical officers, such as William Eames and Thomas Fiaschi, also served in South Africa.

**Conclusion**

The mere observation that certain senior officers of the AIF served in South Africa does not necessarily prove that they were influenced by that experience, let alone indicate the extent of that influence. However, unless each individual expressed his thoughts on paper it is now probably impossible to prove the case either way. In some cases, however, we do have evidence. Birdwood attributed his appointment to command the AIF directly to his Boer War experience. We know that Gellibrand tried to learn from his short period of active service. There seems no doubt that the success of the Australian Light Horse in Palestine can be attributed to the experience of its commanders in South Africa. It seems more than coincidence that two of the finest leaders at Gallipoli were the Boer War veterans, Glasgow and Elliott.

War is not just about techniques and tactics. As Sir Basil Liddell Hart put it, 'Human nature ... changes but slowly, if at all and human nature under stress of danger, not at all'. The Boer War showed the value of training, discipline, leadership and administration to anyone who was willing to learn. An appreciation of these timeless military qualities was invaluable in the newly raised AIF. It is likely, then, that the experience of the Boer War had a greater effect on the commanders of the First AIF, particularly in the early stages of the First World War, than has been generally recognised.
**Generals of the AIF or generals with direct command of Australians**

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Total: 20 generals of whom 15 served in the Boer War

**Brigadiers of the AIF or those with direct involvement with Australian (including those promoted to major-general in the First World War)**

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Total: 76 brigadiers of whom 33 fought in the Boer War.
Endnotes

4. Ibid.
10. Quoted in ibid.
11. Sinclair-MacLagan has been included as an Australian although he was a British officer as he was accepted as an Australian and was on the AIF promotion list. Gellibrand is included as a regular because he spent most of his working life before the First World War as a British regular officer.
12. The figure includes officers who were later promoted to major-general. It also includes surgeon-generals as brigadier-generals.
16. Ibid, 159.
17. Ibid, 160.
28. Bean Diary, 18 July 1917, 82/36, Australian War Memorial.
29. Brigadier-Generals Burston and Spencer-Browne were both 59 years of age in 1915. Spencer-Browne had served in the Boer War. Linton, the initial commander of the 8th Brigade, who drowned in the sinking of the Southland, was 53. He had not served in the Boer War.
THE BOER WAR:
ARMY, NATION AND EMPIRE

'A WANTON DEED OF BLOOD AND RAPINE':
OPPOSITION TO AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE BOER WAR
Bobbie Oliver

The title of this paper is taken from a cartoon that appeared in the Bulletin in 1899. It depicted Australia as a distraught woman, weeping over the fact that one of her first acts as a federated nation was to take part in a bloody war. The caption of the picture reminded readers that, although the public enthusiastically supported the Boer War and 16,000 Australians volunteered to serve in South Africa, there were some dissenters. This paper concerns the dissenters. It commences with a brief historical background to anti-war protest in colonial Australia; then discusses the various issues which dissenters against the South African (or Boer) War addressed and, last, examines the question of who the dissenters were and what impact they had in the community.

Background to Anti-War Protest in Australia

During the nineteenth century, fear of attack by a hostile power was a recurrent theme in colonial Australian newspapers. According to historian and one-time diplomat, R Hyslop, during the 1800s there were almost 200 'war scares'. France, Germany, Russia, the United States of America, China, Holland, Japan and Spain were all regarded as possible invaders. In the last decade of the century, however, evidence suggests that Japan was perhaps the most feared of the supposedly hostile nations.¹

Colonial governments promoted a number of possible deterrents to foreign invasion. Some raised part-time volunteer regiments. Colonial parliaments discussed whether they should acquire their own warships rather than relying on British naval power. But most significant for Australia's future history—and the most hotly debated—were the attempts to extend Australian power and influence by sending a contingent of troops to an overseas conflict.²

A tradition of protest against involvement in other nations' wars had begun with the Reverend John Dunmore Lang who argued, in a series of public lectures in Sydney in 1850, that the Royal Navy and the British Empire did not protect Australia. Indeed, they were a danger, because Australia's allegiance to Britain made Imperial enemies Australia's enemies, too.³ Dunmore Lang objected specifically to the colony of New South Wales supporting Britain's involvement in the Crimean War in 1854. Those who adopted and developed Dunmore Lang's arguments or who took a pacifist stance were a small minority, who were often regarded as voices crying in the wilderness as the Australian colonies adopted the practice of sending armed forces to defend other countries. Nevertheless, the debate began—and continues over 100 years later—as to whether troops were sent as a matter of political expediency or from misplaced devotion to Empire.

The Sudan Contingent was the first state-organised expeditionary force to depart Australian shores. It was sent to help British forces avenge the death of General Gordon at Khartoum in February 1885.⁴ The Sudan campaign's savagery made it unpopular both in England and Australia. Sir Henry Parkes, past Premier of New South Wales, was one of the few who protested strongly against sending troops. He declared that there was no national crisis. A colonial contribution, he argued, would result in the national ethos being damaged by the creation of a 'spurious spirit of military ardour'.⁵ Protest meetings in Sydney throughout March 1885 drew large crowds. The significance in this paper of the opposition to the Sudan campaign is that the protesters of 1885 have been described as 'forerunners' of the Anti-War League which was formed during the South African War.⁶ The Sudan campaign is significant, too, in that it set a precedent for sending colonial—and later, Australian—troops overseas.
When, on 12 October 1899, Britain declared war on the Transvaal over the electoral franchise for British subjects in that state, the Australian colonies were initially reluctant to become involved. Yet, soon, all of the Australian colonial governments yielded to pressure from the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, ultimately sending over 16,000 soldiers to South Africa to fight the Boer settlers.

**The Basis of Anti-War Arguments**

Even before war had been declared, there was some opposition, either to the war itself or to colonial involvement. The matter of sending an Australian contingent in the event of war was discussed in the Western Australian Parliament on 5 October. Premier Forrest and most of those who spoke supported 'cooperat[ing] with the other colonies of Australia in offering to dispatch a military force to the Transvaal'. But the Member for North-East Coolgardie, Frederick Vosper, demurred. Vosper argued that, before making such a commitment, Parliament should acquaint itself with the facts because 'we ... know nothing about the justice or injustice of the [pending] war'. Forrest told Vosper that, to argue in such a way was the same as saying that Western Australia did not belong to the Empire'. Vosper replied that, while he was in full sympathy with the expression of loyalty in the resolution, he was not in sympathy with the 'idea of Western Australia, or any portion of Australia, joining in a war-like policy against a small people, concerning whose grievances we know nothing'. Charles Moran, the Member for East Coolgardie, expressed similar reservations about Britain going to war with so 'unworthy a foe'.

At least four distinct anti-war arguments emerged over the following months and years. First, there was the point of view that Britain was fighting to secure control of the Rand gold mines and to acquire territories that would provide a land link between the British colonies in Central and Southern Africa, whereas the Boers were fighting to preserve their independence. While many who expressed this view did not object to war per se, they regarded this war as unjust and unChristian. Consequently, holders of this view believed that the British could not regard their cause as just because it was driven by greed. George Arnold Wood, Professor of History at Sydney University, was one of the few individuals to voice an opinion early in the war. His opposition to the war will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

A second group of dissidents argued that Australia should refrain from taking part on pragmatic grounds. They believed that Australia would be left unprotected if the few trained military and naval forces were fighting overseas. Australian forces also went to fight in the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900, thus stretching military resources even more thinly. Apart from the security risk, some opponents argued that participation in the South African War would deplete the nation of urgently needed manpower and retard economic development. For the first time since European settlement, emigration exceeded immigration. Furthermore, some soldiers were taking their discharge in South Africa and not returning to Australia after their 12 months’ service. This view was expressed by AB Piddington, who later became a prominent jurist. Piddington wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney, that 'siding with England in a quarrel that was none of Australia's making' was indefensible; and that if Australian blood was to be spilt it should be 'spilt like that of the Boers, in defence of freedom and fireside'.

A third group voiced their dissent later in the war after reading stories of human rights abuses. In 1902, the Australian public began to learn of the 'methods of barbarism' used by irregular units, such as the Bushveldt Carbineers, which included farm burning and keeping the defeated population—including women and children—in concentration camps where the death toll from disease and neglect was enormous. Added to this was public indignation over the court-martial and execution of Lieutenants Harry Morant and Peter Handcock for shooting Boer prisoners. The major opposition in this period came from the Australian Anti-War League, which was formed in Sydney in December 1901, with Professor Wood as President, but individuals such as feminist reformer, Rose Scott, also deplored the establishment of concentration camps where 'Boer women, children and elders were incarcerated, as a strategy to secure the surrender of the Boer army'.

2
The fourth and final body of opposition identified here came from the Australian labour movement, and was based in a deep suspicion of capitalists, increased by the outcome of the 1890s strikes and the depression. Griffiths, in the NSW Parliament, and Higgins, in Victoria, both argued that the mining companies' indignation over the Boer treatment of African labourers was hardly philanthropic. Was it not just a ploy to force white diggers off the fields and enable them to employ cheaper African labour? In this argument, the main villains were not the British, but Jewish entrepreneurs who were supposedly the power behind the British mining companies such as De Beers and British South African Chartered Companies.  

Who Were the Dissenters?

CN Connolly claimed, in a 1978 paper, that 'those responsible for the persecution of the so-called "pro Boers" were usually middle class' and, conversely, that there was 'no record of employees in NSW objecting to having to work with "pro Boers"'. In the early stages of the war, however, dissent was confined to a few, middle class individuals writing letters to the newspapers. Chief among these was Professor Wood.

George Arnold Wood came from an English Liberal tradition, and was educated at Oxford, prior to taking up the first Chair of Modern History at Sydney University in 1891 when he was 26 years old. In 1899, he married and spent most of the year touring England with his new wife. They returned to Australia as the matter of sending troops to the Transvaal was being debated in the New South Wales Parliament. Wood wrote to the *Daily Telegraph*, claiming that opposition to the war was widespread in England. His recent travels had placed him in a good position to judge public opinion in Britain. He argued that the Australian public were victims of biased reporting because virtually all news came from one source—*The Times*. Wood was quite unprepared for the response. He found his colleague at Sydney University, Mungo McCallum, to be 'a bitter, unrelenting and clever opponent'. After a short, sharp exchange of letters with McCallum, via the *Daily Telegraph*, Wood fell silent and remained so for most of the rest of the war.

A position similar to Wood's was held by the Reverend Charles Strong, founder of the Australian Church in Melbourne in the late 1880s. Like Wood, Strong regarded the British Empire as 'a force for good, as a means of holding and spreading such values as liberty, justice, and humanity'. But he felt that Australia, as a new country, should avoid getting involved in European wars. He also had particularly forceful views on the involvement of Christians in war. Strong believed that war was incompatible with Christianity. He quoted the words of the Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, 'They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks', as well as Christ's statement, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God'. Every real Christian, he believed, must deplore war and be prepared to work actively against it. Strong was appalled that members of the Christian clergy should not only sanction war but actively promote it. He accused some clergy of acting as 'recruiting sergeants' and of 'prostituting themselves'. He pointed out that the clergy had 'enormous power to effect a change in people's thinking', and therefore, that the church as a whole should be 'one gigantic peace movement'.

Another middle class intellectual who opposed the war was Henry Bourne Higgins, the Irish-born son of a Methodist Minister, who had received a Liberal education at Scotch College, Melbourne, and at Sydney University, before entering the Victorian Parliament in 1894. When the Victorian Parliament voted late in 1899 to send a contingent to the South African War, Higgins was shocked that people could 'go into war with a light heart and without inquiring closely into the justice of it'. Like Vosper in Western Australia, he 'objected that Imperial sentiment was being exploited to excuse the colony from making its own assessment'. Campaigning in his seat of Geelong in 1900, Higgins was asked why he had opposed involvement in the war. He replied: 'Because I regarded the war as unnecessary and unjust'. Members of the audience began waving Union Jacks and the meeting broke up in disorder. Higgins lost his State seat but was elected to the Federal seat of North Melbourne by a predominantly working class constituency in 1901.
Higgins’ experience supports Connolly’s previously-mentioned assertion that, in general, the working class did not persecute or resent anti-war protesters. Yet, within the Labour movement itself, there was only limited opposition to the war. The Australian Labor Party (ALP) was divided over whether to support Australian involvement in the Boer War. Anderson Dawson, leader of the world’s first Labor Government—which governed in Queensland for five days from 1 to 5 December 1899—objected to ‘sending a mob of swash bucklers to South Africa to show off their uniforms.’ 17 EA Roberts, Member for the South Australian seat of Gladstone, initially sneered at “featherbed” soldiers who would involve themselves in such an unworthy enterprise but later changed his opinion to the extent that he enlisted and performed two tours of duty in South Africa. 18 The fact that the Boer War is not mentioned in Jim Moss’ history of the South Australian Labour Movement suggests that it was not a major issue in that State. 19

WA Holman was probably the most prominent ALP Member who opposed the war. Holman’s position on the war was similar to that of Higgins. In January 1900, he was asked to lecture in Hobart on the subject of ‘The Labour Movement and Militarism’. Holman contended that militarism was ‘always used by us capitalistic controllers to check the rising tide of socialism and democracy’. When he illustrated his argument with references to the situation in the Transvaal, a group of sailors who were present began to hiss and boo. Joined by some ‘larrikins’ looking for a fight, the sailors rushed the platform and threw Holman to the floor. The police prevented him being thrown off the platform, but Holman was attacked again and struck from behind as he returned to his hotel. No arrests were made. 20

Despite threats to his physical safety, Holman continued to speak about his opposition to the war. In his biography of Holman, HV Evatt painted a graphic portrait of Holman talking to the miners at Grenfell on the war issue one night in April 1900:

All the men on the field, nearly 400, attended; and the chairman and Holman both spoke in almost complete darkness while a strong, cold wind kept the rushlights smoking ... [According to an observer] ‘There was only one interjection. In answer to some grave reference to English policy, “You couldn’t say that at Hobart” was projected from the edge of the crowd like a missile ... [to which Holman—who was generally not good at repartee—responded:] “Thank God. I can say it here”. It looks little enough on paper, but in the darkness in those wild surroundings, and before the audience, it was most telling. Interruptions ceased then, and Holman pursued his theme pitilessly to the end. I have never seen an Australian meeting devoted wholly to foreign policy before.” 21

But Holman did not win everyone over. The following month, some of his opponents celebrated the relief of Mafeking by burning Holman’s effigy, labelled ‘Traitor’. Holman expressed his disgust in the pages of the local newspaper, the Grenfell Vedette, which he owned:

The skunks, to whose bright genius Grenfell owes the insulting exhibition, considerably went and hid themselves and are even now unknown to fame. If the gentlemen (?) who prepared the effigy thought they could thereby harm the member for the district, the overwhelming disapprobation which their action has evoked must have quickly undeceived them. 22

Perhaps the action was more popular than Holman perceived, for, in the so-called ‘khaki election’ of 1901, his opponents used his anti-war stance against him and (in a two candidate contest) he scraped home by a mere 86 votes. 23

No Federal Labor politician adopted an anti-war profile similar to Holman’s. The Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP) seemed more concerned with preventing the employment of ‘native’ labour in the gold mines of the Rand than in criticising the war. 24
While the ALP had both opponents and proponents of the war among its ranks, the Left of the Labour movement was strongly critical of Australia's involvement. The Victorian radical Labour journal, the *Tocsin*, had criticised Britain even before the war began, on the basis that 'the Mother Country' appeared to be 'departing from her traditional policy towards weaker and dependent peoples'. The *Tocsin* accused the British Government of acting at the behest of 'the Stock Exchange people in England and Africa, of greedy diamond speculators, gold bosses, and a Chartered Company which, by its own admissions of piracy, has placed itself outside the pale of civilisation'.

The *Tocsin* reminded its readers that the Labour Party in Johannesburg supported Kruger and 'dreaded' Rhodes, and that:

> this is not a war of Britain against Boer, but of capitalists against Kruger's anti-Capitalistic government; and that the defeat of Kruger means the irruption [sic] of Rhodes and all his works and all his poms, of free competition and all its horrors, of the sweater and all its paradoxes of monopoly and ring and trust and combine into the hitherto comparatively uninfested Transvaal.

> You hear talk of avenging Majuba Hill, by which the Boers got their present Constitution. Before acceding to that argument, do not forget that Victorians, too, have had a Majuba Hill, which they call Eureka Stockade. What if Jingoes talked of wiping out the memory of that Eureka by which you got your Constitution? Would you be impressed by the sanity of their reasoning?

As with the ALP, the response to the war varied among trade unions. Through the pages of the Sydney-based *Australian Worker*, the Australian Workers' Union was mildly critical of Australia's involvement. William Lane, however, believed that the war would assist in levelling class differences—as did Henry Lawson. The *Westralian Worker*, which was not controlled by the AWU until after the First World War, was generally silent on the war, except for a few comments about its cost, the numbers of soldiers and civilians killed, and the editor remarking that he was personally against it. In April 1902, however, the paper commented on the execution of Morant and Handcock. The *Worker* referred to the two men as 'murderers and ruffians' and stated that Lord Kitchener had 'no choice but to dispatch them'.

The other main source of criticism came from the *Bulletin* itself, often via the satirical pens of artists such as Livingstone Hopkins (Hop), Alf Vincent and Norman Lindsay. The *Bulletin*'s editor, AG Stephens, was sufficiently opposed to the war to join the Anti-War League.

**Anti-War Organisations**

The middle class Liberals and members of the Labour movement found common ground in Melbourne and Sydney in the only two anti-war leagues formed during the South African War. The lesser known of these two organisations, the Peace and Humanity Society (PHS), was formed in Melbourne by a group of academics and clergy in May 1900. It was Australia's first peace society. Apart from the Rev Dr Charles Strong, mentioned previously, other prominent PHS members included Professor John Laurence Rentoul of Ormonde College, University of Melbourne. According to historians Saunders and Sumy, Rentoul was nicknamed 'Fighting Larry' because of his 'energetic manner'.

The Anti-War League formed in NSW only in December 1901, and was a reaction to particularly disturbing accounts of starvation and deaths among the Boer prisoners in concentration camps. Professor Wood was President, and Ada Holman (WA Holman's wife) was Secretary. Members included Holman and AG Stephens, editor of the *Bulletin*. The membership comprised about one-third women—unusual at that time. The AWL drafted and circulated a petition to the British House of Commons, seeking peace terms including 'a complete amnesty', compensation, and a guarantee of immediate self-government to the former Boer States. The petition stirred up a storm of rage and indignation. As AWL President, Wood became the main target. Yielding to some extent to public pressure to
dismiss him from his Chair, the University Senate passed a resolution, on 10 February 1902, censuring Wood for his public opposition to the war. On the same day, Wood despatched an article to the *Manchester Guardian*, on Australian opinion about the war. It was a balanced discussion, but Wood made the mistake of signing it as 'Professor of History', rather than as President of the Anti-War League. When confused accounts of the article's contents reached the University, his opponents called for his dismissal. It was fortunate for Wood that the Barton Government was dependent upon Labor members to get its legislation passed on the floor of the House. Wood's Labor friends intervened, making it clear that they would vote against the University estimates if Wood were expelled. Wood's expulsion was postponed and finally removed from the Senate's agenda.29

**Some Outcomes of Opposition**

Ironically, the terms of peace agreed in South Africa shortly afterwards were not far removed from those suggested by the AWL. But this was little comfort to Wood. His position was saved, but his spirit was broken. Throughout the dark days of the First World War, he remained silent, never again entering into controversy about the justice or otherwise of going to war. Holman, on the other hand, adopted the belief that conscription of men for overseas service was necessary and consequently was expelled from his own Party.

The official inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia took place in Sydney on 1 January 1901, more than a year before the South African War ended. Section 69 of the Federal Constitution granted the Commonwealth control of the former colonial military forces. A Defence Act, establishing a national military force, was an urgent necessity. Australians knew that they did not have sufficient men or resources with which to defend themselves if attacked by a powerful nation. They were divided over the best means of achieving security—whether to offer troops to assist the Empire in its wars in the hope of receiving reciprocal aid, or to adopt an isolationist stance in order to avoid the notice of aggressive foreign powers. The solution that the Federal Government devised was a curious one, which was to be branded by its most eloquent opponent—the Quaker John Hills—as 'child conscription—our country's shame'.

From the hesitant beginnings of the Peace and Humanity Society and the Anti-War League, developed much stronger anti-war and anti-conscription organisations, such as the Australian Freedom League, founded by Quakers in South Australia to end the system of boy conscription for compulsory military training; the campaigns which defeated the conscription referenda of 1916 and 1917; the peace societies of the 1930s and 1940s, and ultimately the mass demonstrations of the Vietnam War era.

Throughout the devastating wars of the twentieth century, with their attendant loss of civil liberties such as freedom of speech and freedom of movement, the flame of opposition has often been weak although it has never been snuffed out. But the vision that sustained those peace movements is yet to be realised—or of a world where war as response to international disagreements is not only preventable but unthinkable.
Endnotes

2. Hyslop had previously served as Deputy Secretary-General of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation, a position which may well have both reflected and influenced his attitude to Australia’s preoccupation with the ‘yellow peril’.
7. WA Parliamentary Debates, vol XV, 3 October to 16 December 1899, 1557-59.
10. Ibid, 2.
14. Wood’s letters appeared in the Daily Telegraph on 11 and 22 November 1899, and 10 and 25 December 1901; McCallum’s on 15 and 24 November 1899, 18 December 1901 and 2 January 1902. See also Penny, ‘The Australian Debate on the Boer War’, 527; 533-34.
21. Ibid, 93.
22. Cited in ibid, 94.
27. Westralian Worker, 11 April 1902.
On page five of the *Brisbane Courier* on 20 December 1899, Rudyard Kipling's new poem, 'The Absent-Minded Beggar', was published. Simultaneously across the Australian colonies, other newspapers printed the poem which was to become a huge hit for Kipling and one of the theme songs of the Boer War. It was set to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame). Despite the fact that the verse was often described as 'admirable in sentiment, but deplorable in poetry', the poem was recited and sung across the British Empire. By all accounts, the poem raised a substantial amount of money for the various patriotic funds. For example, in January 1900 the singing of 'The Absent-Minded Beggar' at a concert in Broken Hill brought in £14.2

When you've shouted 'Rule Britannia'—when you've sung 'God Save the Queen'— When you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth— Will you kindly drop a shilling in my little tambourine For a gentleman in khaki ordered South? He's an absent-minded beggar, and his weaknesses are great— But we and Paul must take him as we find him— He is out on active service, wiping something off a slate— And he's left a lot o' little things behind him!

Duke's son—cook's son—son of a hundred kings— (Fifty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay!) Each of 'em doing his country's work (and who's to look after their things?) Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay! pay! pay!

There are girls he married secret, asking no permission to, For he knew he wouldn't get it if he did There is gas and coals and vittles, and the house-rent falling due, And it's more than rather likely there's a kid. There are girls he walked with casual, they'll be sorry now he's gone, For an absent-minded beggar they will find him, But it ain't the time for sermons with the winter coming on— We must help the girl that Tommy's left behind him!

Cook's son—Duke's son—son of a belted Earl— Son of a Lambeth publican—it's all the same to-day! Each of 'em doing his country's work (and who's to look after the girl?) Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay! pay! pay!

There are families by thousands, far too proud to beg or speak— And they'll put their sticks and bedding up the spout, And they'll live of half o' nothing paid 'em punctual once a week, 'Cause the man that earned the wage is ordered out. He's an absent-minded beggar, but he heard his country call, And his regiment didn't need to send to find him: He chucked his job and joined it—so the job before us all Is to help the home that Tommy's left behind him!
Duke's job—cook's job—gardener, baronet, groom—
Mews or palace or paper-shop—there's some one gone away!
Each of 'em doing his country's work (and what have you got to spare?)
Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay! pay! pay!

Let us manage so as later we can look him in the face,
And tell him—what he'd very much prefer—
That, while he saved the Empire his employer saved his place,
And his mates (that's you and me) looked out for her.
He's an absent-minded beggar, and he may forget it all,
But we do not want his kiddies to remind him
That we sent 'em to the workhouse while their daddy hammered Paul,
So we'll help the homes our Tommy's left behind him!

(Fifty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay!)
Each of 'em doing his country's work (and what have you got to spare?)
Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay! pay! pay!

Five months later, on 21 May 1900, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a series of articles which heralded the relief of Mafeking with headlines screaming: 'Unparalleled Rejoicings in England—Tumultuous Scenes in London—A Moral and not a Military Triumph—Rejoicings throughout the British Empire'. (Mafeking turned into a series of huge public celebrations across the Australian colonies despite the fact that a few hundred Queenslanders were the only Australians anywhere near the action.) The adjacent column listed the colony's roll of honour with 28 deaths and nearly 100 casualties from a possible 2672 men currently in South Africa. Next to these news items was a column entitled 'The Patriotic Fund' in which the Treasurers of the fund, Messrs J Russell French (Managing Director of the Bank of New South Wales) and TA Dibbs (Managing Director of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney), advised that there was currently £41,766-4-7 in the account. If £100 in 1900 is approximately $16,000 in 1999, then that figure equates to over $6,500,000 by today's standards—not a bad effort from a New South Wales population of just over 1,300,000. The news item then went on to list the proceedings of various fundraising efforts including £10 collected from employees of the Koorawatha to Grenfell railway; £3-16-5 from the AMB (Absent-Minded Beggars) Jubilee Singers; the proceeds of a bazaar held by the girls of the Nowra Patriotic League which raised over £28; and the school concert in Grenfell where almost £20 was raised for the patriotic fund.

The Kipling poem, 'Absent-Minded Beggars', for all its verbosity and purple poetry, and the random extract from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, are very useful examples illustrating the major point addressed in this paper. Patriotic funds were very popular with a broad section of the colonial population, and they played a very important role in mobilising the population at large in support of the war effort or more importantly, the soldiers who went to war and their dependents, their wives and children. Additionally, by examining the patriotic fund movement, one can possibly gain further insights into how the home front and general population reacted to the war, and how this British war was perceived by ordinary Australians at the turn of the century.

It is unfortunate that much of the literature on the Boer War, and Australia at war generally, especially that which focuses on repatriation themes, has either totally omitted the role and presence of the patriotic funds or given them cursory note. The result of this neglect has been to largely misunderstand the functions, importance, and influence of patriotic funds during periods of war. Both Boer War historians LM Field and CN Connolly have argued, albeit briefly, that there was little overall public support for the patriotic funds in terms of monies raised during the Boer War. Field continued that 'the very modest support for the Patriotic Funds' revealed a general 'lack of depth in support for the war'. Field, however, appears to contradict himself when he later states that £100,000 had been donated to the Imperial Patriotic Fund by 30 March 1900. (This equates to an impressive $16 million in today's terms.) As Joan Neal has revealed in her BA Honours thesis on Charters Towers in Queensland during the Boer War, general community support for the patriotic funds in that particular rural district was very strong, especially in the ongoing financial contributions bequeathed to the fund.
Connolly, who focused on New South Wales in his revisionist study of 'the new imperialism' argument of the Boer War, stated that much of the early work by Penny and Haydon is flawed. He argued that they focused predominantly on middle class sources which ignored and/or stifled any general opposition which existed to the war. The essence of Connolly's argument was that the rampant new imperialism was 'primarily a middle class doctrine' espoused by those of English or Scottish descent. He further supported this contention by stating that in regards to New South Wales, newspaper support, which was substantial, was due to the fact that the four Sydney metropolitan dailies were run by conservative, wealthy businessmen; that patriotic rallies and patriotic funds were organised and supported by middle class groups such as the Australasian Natives' Association and local councils; and that giving to the patriotic funds was generally disappointing and not widely supported. As evidence, Connolly cited one figure of donations to the Patriotic Fund and compares it with that subscribed to the Sudan War 15 years earlier.

Barry Bridges discusses the New South Wales Patriotic Fund in his PhD thesis and is particularly critical of its apparent reluctance to actually pay out to needy veterans and their families. By June 1901, only £12,440 had been paid out with almost £40,000 still in hand, with the trustees arguing that the fund was to 'assist' not 'support' clients. This was an ongoing and contentious issue for patriotic funds not only during the Boer War but particularly later in the First World War when the demands on the patriotic funds was arguably greater.

There is little doubt that there was a greater level of general public support for the war in October 1899 than there was by May 1902. In October 1899, the general public response to the patriotic funds was very good but as the war progressed and went into the guerrilla phase, with all the horrors of interning Boer women and children, with the burning and looting of their farms, the patriotic fund movement became quieter. This is demonstrated by the disappearance of articles and news stories on the funds which were significant at the beginning of the war. By the time the Anti-War League was formed in New South Wales in December 1901, there was a substantial mood swing in public opinion and the increasing silence from the patriotic funds is further evidence of this.

But there was plenty of money subscribed to the various patriotic funds; demand was not overwhelming; and other events such as Federation and ongoing tragedies such as the Port Kembla mine disaster of 1902 drew people's attention away from the increasingly distant war in South Africa. It is also important to remember that when the Boer War commenced the Australian colonies were emerging from the grips of one of the worst economic depressions yet experienced and a new century beckoned. There was also a resurrection of organised sport in the late 1890s. The colonists had defeated the English in cricket in 1897/98 and 1899; and rugby union, Australian rules football and even baseball were reaching new heights of popularity. Australians had plenty of organised sport. There were, therefore, many distractions for ordinary folk.

Background to the Australian Patriotic Funds of the Boer War

The modern patriotic fund, inaugurated in times of war for the welfare of soldiers and their dependents, originated in the Crimean War of 1854-56. Although the suffering in the Crimea was no worse than that experienced by soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars, the general public at 'home' was made aware of the intolerable conditions created by war, principally through the newspapers of the period. The Crimean War was one of the first of the 'modern wars' in which the British general public was kept well informed of the bloody battles, and the incompetent leadership and administration of the British Army was exposed. The rising numbers of middle class men entering the army, the emergence of Florence Nightingale as a force for change in the primary care of the sick and wounded, the subsequent formation of the Red Cross, and the continued and increasing critical presence of the press, all contributed to the changing attitudes of the public towards its armed forces, and the potential victims of war—the dependents of soldiers.
During the Crimean War, a fund had been established in New South Wales for the dependents of British soldiers fighting in that war, with the proceeds—over £60,000—sent to Britain. The colonial patriotic fund was modelled on the British funds which often had long, unwieldy names such as the 'Royal Commission for the Patriotic Fund'; the 'Central Association in Aid of the Wives and Families of Soldiers ordered on Foreign Service'; and the 'Association for the Relief of Widows, Orphans, Wives and Families of Seamen and Marines'.

Another patriotic fund was inaugurated during the Sudan War in 1885 with great public acclaim. Within days of the announcement that a contingent was to be sent to the Sudan, the New South Wales Patriotic Fund was established to assist the wives and children of those men embarking with the contingent. Newspapers of the day, as they would later occur during the Boer War and the First World War, became central to the success or otherwise of the fund. Lists of subscribers were published regularly in the newspapers, and images, such as the 'Little Boy from Manly', were created as a symbol for the patriotic funds.

The New South Wales Patriotic Fund which raised over £40,000 was oversubscribed. There were so few widows, orphans, other dependents or members of the contingent themselves in need of financial assistance that over 85 per cent of contributors received their money back.

Despite this apparent over-zealousness of the New South Wales public to embrace their patriotic fund during the Sudan War, the concept of public giving and philanthropic largesse towards soldiers and their dependents during times of war became part of the rich mosaic of the voluntary principle of Victorian colonial society. Money was regularly donated to a variety of causes, from Hospital Saturdays (to fund local hospitals); to mining disasters. Funds for catastrophes overseas were also widely subscribed, such as the Indian Famine Fund which occurred during the period of the Boer War in 1900. There were only nascent expectations that the state would provide government pensions and assistance for the sick, poor and disadvantaged. In terms of the concepts of deserving and undeserving used by organisations such as the Charitable Organisation Society (COS), there could be no more deserving members of society than either the soldier or his dependents. It was the duty of all members of society, both rich and poor, to ‘pay, pay, pay’ for the sacrifices made by soldiers, as was amply demonstrated in Kipling’s colourful poetry.

Colonial Patriotic Funds

When Britain declared war on the Boers in October 1899, patriotic funds, with varying titles and of differing sizes, were quickly established across Australia. Each colony had its primary patriotic fund which was supplemented by additional smaller, more individual, funds. The large funds were generally established at local government level, and administered from the town hall or council chambers. Branches were established across the colonies, in suburbs and country towns, run by committees that largely consisted of local council members, leading community businessmen, and particularly at the central level, politicians. These local committees reported to the executive committee of the central fund run out of the town hall, located in the capital of the colony, and generally sent all monies raised to the central fund. Not surprisingly, therefore, these organisations were highly patriarchal. Some women were involved in the organisation of patriotic funds such as Janet Lady Clarke’s Victorian Contingent Fund. This fund was established specifically to assist widows and families of Victorian soldiers who might be killed in the war, as opposed to the War Relief Fund which sent monies directly to London. Generally, however, women took a supportive role in organisational and administration matters while carrying out much of the actual fundraising.

The management of the patriotic funds was entirely the responsibility of the executive committee which had full power to dispose of the monies, and to frame or alter bylaws relating to the ways in which the monies were both invested and allocated. The committees also had total control over not only how the monies were allocated but how much was given for different applications. There were no guidelines to follow and no government regulations to adhere to. (Indeed, this situation continued until the Department of Repatriation was formed in 1917.) This, of course, gave enormous power to the committee administering the fund. The executive committee of the New South Wales Patriotic Fund, for example, met fortnightly to
discuss the various applications for relief which were steadily increasing from mid-1900. Although exact details are not given, the general amount of money allocated to claimants was reported regularly in newspapers such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*. For example, at a meeting in September 1900, £655 was granted, with some 30 cases waiting on military and medical reports.\(^{24}\) The committees of the patriotic funds also allocated money to soldier’s dependents if a reasonable need could be demonstrated. The Charters Towers Patriotic Fund decided in February 1900 that in three cases the weekly payment of one pound per week would be made to the wives of local soldiers, with weekly allowances to be allocated to a further two families with dependent children.\(^ {25}\)

It was the interpretation of the question of ‘relief’ and whether the funds were to assist returned veterans who were unable to find work in the longer term which were to be such contentious issues in the latter stages and aftermath of the war. All Australian soldiers, who spent 12 months at the war, were eligible for Imperial pensions; and most colonies took out death policies of £250. However, the concern for most returning soldiers was unemployment which was also a considerable political problem.\(^ {26}\)

Although it is difficult to gain a complete picture of the number of patriotic funds established during the Boer War, the major colonial funds were as follows.\(^ {27}\) The South African War Patriotic Fund of Queensland is perhaps one of the more well known and better researched patriotic funds from the Boer War. The main reason for this fund being more well-known than the others is largely due to the survival and access of its records which are lodged in the Queensland State Archives.\(^ {28}\) In South Australia and Western Australia, Transvaal Patriotic Funds were formed; and in Victoria, there was the Victorian Contingent Fund, the General War Relief Fund, and the Empire's Patriotic Fund (South African War), run by the Lord Mayor of Melbourne.

A feature of these colonial patriotic funds was the willingness for many to send, if not all, then considerable amounts of their monies directly to British patriotic fund organisations. Most of the monies raised in Tasmania, for example, was sent directly to the Mansion House Fund in London. This was similar to monies raised by the Transvaal Patriotic Fund in South Australia which was also modelled on the London Mansion House Fund. Despite the fact that this fund was established to assist any widows, orphans and dependents of men from the South Australian Contingents, or to help those who were wounded or disabled from war service, it was considered appropriate to send monies to help all soldiers of the Queen in South Africa and their dependents, not just the South Australians. Most of the funds raised in South Australia were sent directly to London.\(^ {29}\) The South Australian fund was eventually disbanded in 1917, with a balance of £3283 and with only one known ongoing case. The remaining money was then donated to the State War Council for use in the First World War.\(^ {30}\)

The Victorian Empire’s Patriotic Fund (South African War) raised almost £65,000 from its beginnings on 9 January 1900. By 8 November 1918, all monies had been disbursed and the fund was officially disbanded. In 1900, £40,000 had been sent to the Empire Patriotic Commission in London with the proviso that the money be spread equally between the four subdivisions of the fund. These areas were: sick and wounded soldiers; widows and orphans; disabled soldiers and sailors; and wives and children of soldiers and sailors while their husbands were absent.\(^ {31}\) The remainder of the monies raised in Victoria (over £25,000) was allocated as grants to Victorian soldiers and their dependents from 1900 to 1918.\(^ {32}\)

In terms of the smaller patriotic funds established during the Boer War in Australia, the public donated money to the Shilling Fund, also based in London which involved a minimum donation of one shilling for the relief of widows and children of Imperial and Colonial troops. In Western Australia, for example, the Fire Brigade Fund raised money specifically for the 'maimed and wounded' of the Western Australian contingent,\(^ {33}\) and there was also a Goldfields War Fund which had raised £1115 by March 1900.\(^ {34}\) Professional organisations and businesses also formed funds such as the School Teachers’ Patriotic Fund, established in February 1900 in New South Wales. Colonial newspapers which were accused, perhaps rightly, of simply ‘cashing in’ on the patriotic spending spree, established their own funds, such as the *Courier* Patriotic Fund established to assist Queensland troops in South Africa.\(^ {35}\)
At the end of the war, and after all the requirements of veterans and dependents had been met, some communities allocated unexpended monies from the local fund towards the erection of a war memorial or some other commemorative public structure. This was another common feature of local community-based patriotic funds which occurred later after the First and Second World Wars. Boer War memorials took many forms with the most common being obelisks and statues. However, drinking fountains, rotundas and bandstands were also popular. In Charters Towers, for example, a beautiful wrought iron and lace Memorial Kiosk was erected in Lissner Park and opened in late 1910, under a joint arrangement with the local council. The Kiosk was to be open every day from 10 am to 10 pm, selling refreshments and ‘boiling water to the public at one penny per gallon’. As was common with most local memorials, it also listed the names of the local volunteers who enlisted to fight in the war.

The New South Wales Patriotic Fund

The New South Wales Patriotic Fund was formed in late October 1899 after a meeting was held in the vestibule of the Sydney Town Hall presided over by Lord Mayor, Sir Matthew Harris. Representatives at the meeting included politicians such as the Premier of New South Wales, WJ Lyne; the Colonial Secretary and Minister for Defence, John See; future Prime Minister Edmund Barton; and leading Sydney businessmen, such as newspaper proprietor Sir James Fairfax; the Chairman of the Sydney Stock Exchange, Mr EL Davis; General Manager of the Bank of New South Wales, Mr J Russell French; General Manager of the Commercial Banking Company, Mr TA Dibbs; and Mr Richard Teece (Australian Mutual Provident Society). An executive committee was formed with the Mayor, Mr J Russel French, Sir James Fairfax, Messrs R Teece, TA Dibbs, JH Storey, EW O'Sullivan, MLA, JS Brunton, and JC Ludowici, and Alderman T Jessep, MLA. Later the Governor of New South Wales, His Excellency Earl Beauchamp, was invited to become a patron of the fund, with the Chief Justice, Sir Frederick Darley, Vice-Patron. The prime objects of the patriotic fund were:

a) To afford relief in cases of distress to widows, children, and aged parents of, or others dependent on members of the military or naval forces of New South Wales, who shall, while on active service, have lost their lives, or shall have been seriously injured in the performance of their duty.

b) To relieve members of such forces who shall have been wounded or otherwise temporarily or permanently incapacitated in such service.

Three days later an enormous public meeting was held in the Town Hall to inaugurate the New South Wales Patriotic Fund. Accompanied by troops and a bevy of state and local politicians, the general public was treated to a spectacle which included the singing of the national anthem, loyal cheers for the troops and the Queen, and a collection of stirring speeches. The Chief Justice, Sir Frederick Darley, whipped up the crowd by saying that the creation and, more importantly public support, of the patriotic fund was for the ‘people's direct representatives’, the ‘soldiers of the Queen’.

It was, therefore, at once the duty and privilege of the people to contribute to the fund. It was not a question of charity. (Cheers). It was the positive duty of the people to mitigate the sufferings caused by the absence of the people's representatives in the war.

Branches of the New South Wales Patriotic Fund were subsequently established across the colony largely using the extensive network of local government boroughs. Lord Mayors were sent circulars informing them of the aims and functions of the Patriotic Fund and were encouraged to call public meetings and form local committees. These local branches were to raise money through a variety of fundraising opportunities such as concerts, street stalls, and other entertainments with all monies, and sometimes goods in kind, being sent directly to the central committee at the Sydney Town Hall. Across the colony, from Quirindi, to Bowral, Maitland and Lismore, and throughout the suburbs of Sydney, local communities heeded the call to form local branches.
The 'ladies of Sydney' were caught up in patriotic fund fervour arguing for the establishment of a Ladies' Patriotic League to enable all the women of the colony to 'do their part' for those 'soldiers of the Empire' and their loved ones who may suffer in their absence. Branches of the League were established through the network of colonial Lady Mayoresses. Standard fundraising techniques, such as the idea of a Patriotic Saturday, modelled on the lines of Hospital Saturday which raised funds for local hospitals, were implemented in different suburbs and towns across the colony. The first Patriotic Saturday was held in Sydney on 9 December 1899.

In all, the New South Wales Patriotic Fund raised approximately £52,000 or $8,320,000 in today's terms. By August 1914, there was a balance of £24,450 in the fund. Although it was still supporting a few widows from the Boer War, the fund was amalgamated, through the National Relief Fund Act of 1914, with the Bulli Colliery Disaster Fund, Public Disaster Relief Fund, the Education Department Relief Fund, and the Dreadnought Fund.

The Bushmen's Contingent Fund

The other major fund operating in New South Wales during the Boer War was the Bushmen's Contingent Fund which was inaugurated in late 1899. This was a very different type of fund to the New South Wales Patriotic Fund. The main aim of the Bushmen's Fund was to raise money to fully pay and equip a Bushmen's Contingent to go off to fight in South Africa. In New South Wales, the committee sought to raise £30,000 and 500 horses. Significant amounts of money were donated in order to purchase relevant materials and goods. Indeed, at the outset, six subscribers donated a total of £16,000. These subscribers included leading businessmen and philanthropists of the day—Mr WR Hall: £5000; Mr S McCaughey, MLC: £5000; Mr S Hordern: £3000; Miss Eadith Walker, Yaralla: £1000; John Fairfax and Sons: £1000, and Mr PH Osborne: £1000. But there were also donations in kind which included over £4000 worth of horses, saddles, and other comforts such as blankets and bandages.

In recognition of the imminent creation of the Commonwealth of Australia, it was decided to make the contingent a federal one, with 500 men originating from New South Wales and the remaining 600 from the other states of Australia. On 28 February 1900, the Bushmen's Contingent sailed from Sydney for South Africa. Later, some colonial governments such as Western Australia stepped in and took over the organisation and funding of the contingents when public funding stalled. The New South Wales committee, however, raised the required amount but had to buy almost half the horses. Field regards this as direct evidence that the public generally did not support the war effort wholeheartedly.

However, I believe that Field has missed the point about the functions and purposes of patriotic endeavour during the Boer War. Essentially, there are significant differences between the New South Wales Patriotic Fund and the Bushmen's Fund, and the two funds really should not be considered together. First, the aims of the New South Wales Patriotic Fund were to offer amelioration to the soldiers of the crown and their dependents if required. With minimum state welfare provisions, the prevailing view at the time was that it was the right and duty of ordinary citizens to contribute financially to those less well off. Philanthropic giving to a wide variety of causes was readily understood and commonplace. Secondly, the Bushmen's Fund was essentially to fund a 'private' army to travel and fight in the Boer War. It was generally accepted that the raising of an army was a state responsibility and many would have rather not contributed to what amounted to a citizen's army. This could account for the supposed lack of support for the Bushmen's Contingents in colonies other than New South Wales.

There is clear evidence from the newspapers of the day and other sources that the New South Wales Patriotic Fund, in the first half of the war, was actively supported by a broad cross-section of the colonial population. In a regular column, 'The Patriotic Fund' in the Sydney Morning Herald, lists of donations were published daily. These lists represent both large and small donations from across the social spectrum. For example on 12 May 1900, to pick a day at random, monies were received from various Patriotic Fund branches; the Pymble Progress Committee; the children from the Superior Public School, Kiama; the Mortlake Workman's Institute; the Bulli and Woonona Ladies' Committee; a number of mines including the South Bulli Mine and the Woonona Mine; and the Bulli Brick and Tile Works.
The following two examples further illustrate this important point. On 15 January 1900, at Her Majesty’s Theatre after a matinee performance of *Little Red Riding Hood*, JC Williamson’s company, including all performers, staff and orchestra (totalling 245 people) agreed to donate their weekly salaries between the Patriotic Fund and the Bushmen’s Contingent. Over £67 was donated to both funds. Theatres and music halls became very important sites for wartime fundraising, either through the proceeds of particular performances being donated to the cause, or when entertainers sang patriotic songs—especially Kipling’s ‘Absent-Minded Beggar’—and money was thrown onto the stage or collected by individuals working through the audiences.

Another innovative method of fundraising, which reveals the ad hoc, individualistic nature of much of the fundraising in the Boer War, was established by Sydney newsagent, Mr J Shortel, who devised a scheme called the Newsboys’ Penny Patriotic Fund. The idea was that newsboys sold penny coupons (20,000 had been printed) to passing customers. A prize was to be awarded to the twelve news boys who sold the most coupons.

The face of the coupon shows a newsboy asking for a subscription from a gentleman, who by the genial expression of his countenance and the suggestive position of his hand near his pocket, evidently intends to purchase a coupon. At the foot of the coupon is Mr Shortel’s signature as secretary for the news boys. On the back of every coupon is the stamp of the New South Wales Patriotic Fund.

The patriotic funds issue also caused controversy amongst labour ranks. Public dissension broke out at the Victorian Trades Hall Council in December 1899 when the president, Mr Charles Harris, brought under notice the Victorian Contingent Fund, initiated by Lady Janet Clarke. This fund was set up specifically to assist widows and families of Victorian soldiers who might be killed in the war, as opposed to the War Relief Fund which sent monies directly to London. Some labour officials felt that despite the deplorable actions of the British Government regarding the war, it was the ‘duty of the community to subscribe to the fund being raised to assist the families’ of the ‘misguided’ men who had enlisted. Although ‘all workers must regard war as disastrous to their interests, in the present instance humanitarian considerations must outweigh all others’, argued another. The motion was subsequently supported by a narrow majority. Although labour newspapers such as *The Worker* clearly revealed their opposition to the ‘capitalist’ war, as with other newspapers, there was considerable war coverage in the first year, but this shifted to a single column, and then by January 1901, *The Worker* had no regular war column at all.

**Conclusions**

From the period of the Boer War, through to Federation and the first decade of the twentieth century, the ideas of a nascent Australian nationalism and its imperial connections to the British Empire grew stronger. As Gavin Souter stated, 'The Empire was a protective shield and a context within which the new Commonwealth could assert itself on more equal terms in the larger world.' The inauguration of Empire Day in 1905, on the late Queen Victoria’s birthday, 24 May, for example, heralded our new national day.

Earlier, Douglas Cole argued that in British settler societies, such as Australia, the position of nationalism and patriotism—inherrently European terms—was different. British imperialism was the 'significant complication'. Cole suggested that nationalism was a consciousness of being 'ethnically differentiated', and patriotism was a loyalty to a political state and geographical area. The result in Australia was the development of the 'independent Australian-Briton' with a patriotism based on Australia as part of the political entity of the British empire, that is a loyalty to Britain and Empire. As Cole argued:

Soon after 1900, the gap between the imperial-minded and the nationalist Australian narrowed, with no contradiction being seen between nationalism and imperialism. In this strange and rapid metamorphosis, imperial patriotism became an extension of Australian nationalism.
Compared with the 1880s and early 1890s when Australian patriotism could be seen in opposition to British imperialism especially through journals such as the *Bulletin*, these differences had narrowed considerably by the period of the Boer War. This early emerging Australian nationalism with its strong links to imperial patriotism is clearly evident in the patriotic funds movement in colonial Australia during the Boer War.

Patriotic funds was a British term used in Australia to provide public subscriptions for those in need during the various conflicts, and was first used in Australia during the Crimean War. The word ‘patriotic’ easily embraced imperial and well as Australian patriotism, that is loyalty to both the empire and Australia. The term was used until after the Second World War, especially by the Department of Repatriation, under whose jurisdiction the funds lay. Additionally, patriotic funds are part of the voluntary principle which includes civic duty, community action, care and concern for others through altruism and philanthropy and the concepts of self-help, reciprocity and mutual aid.

Public support for the patriotic funds during the Boer War was a complex reaction which was shaped by events and changed as the war progressed. The motivation for giving and active support, not only to the 'Queen's soldiers' and their families and dependents, involved the general philanthropic desires of altruism and helping those less fortunate—distinct Victorian ideals. Moreover, there was a belief that as Australian-Britons, it was just and fair that the British Empire be supported in this manner, irrespective of the actual political ramifications of the conflict. The fact that this active support waned as the war dragged on probably says more about the war itself than anything else.

In many ways, the Boer War was a trial run for the uncontrollable forces of world war which were to be unleashed a decade later. As a result of the Boer War, armies and their systems were improved, as were the methods of fighting and the development and use of military hardware. The delivery of hospital and first aid services (to counter the appalling losses to disease) were enhanced through the reformation of the army medical services and the reconstitution of the British Red Cross. Yet in 1914, the situation of patriotic funds and the question of the care of dependents of soldiers and repatriation still largely fell to the voluntary sector. It was not until the scale of the social, medical, and psychological problems resulting from the war became so great that the patriotic funds could no longer cope, that the state took the welfare of its citizens (or rather certain citizens in the form of soldiers and their dependents) out of the primary domain of private philanthropy and assumed control.

But that is another story.
Endnotes

I would like to acknowledge the help of my research assistant, Amanda Andrews, and my colleague, Dr Bruce Mitchell, for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. So wrote Lord Newton in his autobiography. See Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), 205. Indeed Kipling, who suffered extensively from bad health, wrote the song and deliberately used his name as a selling point to 'do his bit' for the cause and raise as much money as possible for the dependents of the soldiers. Kipling stated that the poem had raised over £250,000: ibid.


3. Ibid., 21 May 1900, 7. The item goes on to list the precise numbers to date. They included 479 men from the 1st Contingent; 876 from the 2nd Contingent; 525 Australian Bushmen; 42 Lancers; and 750 Imperial Bushmen. Casualties were 9 killed in action, 19 died from disease (mainly enteric fever) and other causes; 45 wounded; and 25 captured or missing.

4. Ibid.

5. The official histories are examples of this, the exception being Ernest Scott’s chapter on the First World War patriotic funds in *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Australia during the War* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1936). Other books on homefront studies have also devoted little space to the role and functions of patriotic funds. Examples include M McKernan and M Browne (eds), *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and Allen & Unwin, 1988); Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Gender and War* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War. Australians Return* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996). Michael McKernan has been almost alone in his studies on aspects of the homefront which included patriotic endeavours in *The Australian People and the Great War* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1980) and *All In! Australia during the Second World War* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1983) republished as *All In! Fighting the War at Home* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995).

6. There has been little research carried out on patriotic funds in other countries to date. However, this is slowly changing. Simon Fowler is currently undertaking a PhD on charities in Britain during the First World War. See Simon Fowler, 'War Charity Begins at Home', *History Today* 49: 9 (September 1999), 17-23. In his recent book on Canada and the Boer War, Carman Miller has included a chapter on the homefront which addresses patriotic funds.


11. Connolly, 'Class, Birthplace, Loyalty', 211.


15. For an examination of the role of sport in Australian history, see Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport in History* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979).

16. There is no definitive study on patriotic funds in Australia. The role of patriotic funds to 1914 is, however, outlined in Clem Lloyd and Jacqui Rees, *The Last Shilling: A History of Repatriation in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 5-17. See also Oppenheimer, 'Volunteers in Action'.

17. Due to the end of the newspaper stamp duty in 1855, circulations of newspapers increased dramatically. For example, the circulation of *The Times* during the Crimean War was over 40,000 copies a day, compared with approximately 5000 during the Napoleonic Wars. See Corelli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army*, 1509-1970 (London: Allen Lane, 1970), 285.


19. 'Crimean War—Loyal Addresses and Contributions to the Patriotic Fund from Australian Colonies', A5954/1 1195/4, Australian Archives (AA), Canberra.

20. Eight year old Ernest Laurence sent a letter to the Acting Premier of New South Wales, William Bede Dalley, which was subsequently published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 7 March 1885, about
pledging money to the Patriotic Fund. The 'Little Boy from Manly' became a cartoon figure in the Bulletin from 4 April 1885, and was thereafter immortalised as a symbol of Australia, both before and after Federation. There is some conjecture that the entire episode was contrived by Ernest Laurence's father, solicitor Charles Laurence, who knew Dalley who himself lived near Manly. See KS Inglis, The Rehearsal: Australians at War in the Sudan, 1885 (Melbourne: Rigby, 1985), 63-71.


22. The Age, 20 December 1899, 7; and 22 December 1889, 5.

23. For a discussion of how patriotic funds administered amelioration during the First World War, see Oppenheimer, 'Volunteers in Action', esp chapter 2, 65-118.


25. Queensland Patriotic Fund Register of Relief given to men who served in South Africa and Dependents, 26 February 1900, as cited in Neal, 'Charters Towers and the Boer War', 69.


27. This list has been compiled using archival material, newspaper reports and secondary sources. There is some material concerning the operations of patriotic funds in New South Wales in the Colonial Secretary files at the New South Wales State Archives.


29. The Advertiser, 5 December 1889, 6.


31. Sydney Morning Herald, 2 February 1900, 6.

32. In total, £24,319-3-7 was given as relief to soldiers with the balance of £79-19-11 allocated to priming, cheques, etc, and £303 on clerical assistance from February 1900 to June 1904. See extract from The Argus, 16 January 1919, in South African War Casualties Relief Fund, A2421 T1 G749, AA, Canberra.

33. The Western Mail, 13 January 1900, 18.

34. Ibid, 17 March 1900, 19.

35. The Brisbane Courier, 21 December 1899, 5. In a letter to the Editor of The Worker, the correspondent accused the major daily newspapers of hypocrisy, arguing that their 'patriotism lies in the fact that by the speculation of a few hundred they will receive in return thousands from the fools who abound in our midst by the pennies spent in the purchase of their papers, which leads to the goldmine of advts in their columns': The Worker, 11 November 1899, 5.

36. For the seminal work on war memorials, see Ken Inglis, Sacred Places; War Memorials in the Australian Landscape (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press and Melbourne University Press, 1998), esp chapter 2, 'Soldiers of the Queen', for the Boer War, 39-74.

37. After the First World War the focus was particularly on building formal structures such as stone or marble memorials. After the Second World War, there was a push for more utilitarian structures such as community swimming pools and parks. For a discussion of the winding up of patriotic funds after the Second World War, see Oppenheimer, 'Volunteers in Action', chapter 9, 371-78.

38. Neal, 'Charters Towers and the Boer War', 74-75.


40. Ibid, 7 November 1899, 7.

41. Ibid, 9 July 1903, 8.

42. Ibid, 3 November 1899, 6.

43. Ibid, 8 November 1899, 7.

44. Ibid, 16 November 1899, 5.

45. Ibid, 29 November 1899, 7.

46. 'South African War Casualties Relief Fund', A2421/T1 G749, AA, Canberra.

47. Sydney Morning Herald, 30 August 1915. The Public Disaster Relief Fund, supplemented by the Miners' Accident Relief Fund, was set up for widows and orphans of the 1902 Mount Kembla disaster, the later Wyalong disaster, and for any future general disasters. The Mount Kembla mining disaster was, in 1902, Australia's worst to date, with 96 men killed. See Stuart Piggin and Henry Lee, The Mount Kembla Disaster (Sydney: Oxford University Press, 1992).

48. The Australian Bushmen's Contingent—Souvenir (Sydney: Batson & Co. nd, ca, 1900).

49. Field, The Forgotten War, 131.

50. Ibid, 132.

51. Sydney Morning Herald, 12 May 1900, 10.

52. Ibid, 1 February 1900, 8.

53. Ibid, 8.

54. The Age, 20 December 1899, 7, and 22 December 1889, 5.

55. Ibid, 23 December 1899, 7.


59. Ibid, 163.
60. I discovered a large cache of files during research for my PhD thesis, especially a large series of files lodged as part of the Department of Repatriation (now Department of Veterans' Affairs) which proved to be the administration and policy files of the patriotic funds from the First World War to the early 1950s: A2421/1. AA, Canberra.
On the way to federation, Australian federalists boasted that their nation was to be born in peace; when federation was achieved federalists were delighted that their nation was born in war. That is the change I want to trace. I plan to do it by looking at the poetry of federation. Federation and poetry! Was Australian federation ever poetic?

Many people think of federation as an unexciting, prosaic business. Some historians think of federation as not much more than a business agreement. But to those who worked for it, federation was a sacred cause. Hence poetry was the most appropriate medium to express its rationale and purposes. It was poetry's role to deal with what was noble, profound and elevating. There are innumerable federation poems by hundreds of different hands. The nation was born in a festival of poetry. Historians have noticed the poems, but have not known quite what to do with them. Most of them are valueless as poetry. One leading scholar, introducing his bibliography of federation sources, declared 'It seemed kinder to spare us all any inventory of the poems, "poems" and verse'. He thus removed from consideration the best guide to the ideas and ideals which inspired the movement. It is in the poetry that we can trace the effect of the Boer War on federation.

The poets were confident that God or destiny intended Australia to be a nation. The evidence was in the first place physical. They forgot Tasmania (which was inconsiderate since it was always keen about federation) and saw the nation-to-be as a single geographical unit, a whole continent with only natural boundaries. This was a special benediction. Other nations had man-made frontiers; Australia's were the sea. It was a land set apart from the rest of the world. A common word for the sea in this role was 'girdle' and in its verbal form 'girdled' or 'girdling' or 'girt'. 'Advance Australia Fair', written by Peter McCormick in 1878 and now the national anthem, uses 'girt' and assumes the implications of the sea boundary do not have to be spelled out, recording merely 'our home is girt by sea'.

The social uniformity within the continent also marked out Australia for nationhood. The people were of one blood or stock or race; they spoke the same language; they shared a glorious heritage (Britain's), the most celebrated part of which was political freedom which had been extended in Australia to all men so that the country was the freest on earth. This unity was also put down to God or destiny, overlooking the British Government, their undoubted instrument, which had claimed the whole continent and determined the composition of its population.

The best federation poem was written very early (1877) by James Brunton Stephens, a headmaster at a Brisbane state school. He had taught in the bush, which he hated, and got his transfer to Brisbane with the approval of Samuel Griffith, then Minister of Education.

'The Dominion of Australia: A Forecast' begins 'She is not yet' and asks 'How long "not yet"?' The poem develops an elaborate comparison between the silent force carrying Australia to its destiny and the underground rivers which some experts assumed must run under the parched lands of the outback and which one day might be released to make the desert bloom. This is the final verse:

So flows beneath our good and ill
A viewless stream of Common Will,
A gathering force, a present might,
That from its silent depths of gloom
At Wisdom's voice shall leap to light
And hide our barren feuds in bloom,
Till, all our sundering lines with love o'ergrown,
Our bounds shall be the girdling seas alone.

When Sir Henry Parkes opened his campaign for federation in his famous speech at Tenterfield in 1889, he quoted from this poem. He did well to quote from Stephens' poetry rather than his own. At the time he launched his campaign he was revising the proofs of his next book of poems, *Fragmentary Thoughts*. In Brisbane a few days before his Tenterfield speech, he had refused to disclose his federal plans to the Courier's reporter but had been very willing to discuss poetry. He passed the proofs of his poems to the journalist for his opinion. He declared Stephens to be the best poet in Australia, a compliment Stephens returned in his review of *Fragmentary Thoughts* which contrived to be favourable without pronouncing definitely on the quality of the poems.

In his new collection Parkes rehearsed a standard theme in 'The Flag' and made peace one of the benefits of Australia's apartness:

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God girdled our majestic isle
With seas far-reaching east and west,
That man might live beneath this smile
In peace and freedom ever blest.
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He was a much better phrase-maker in his speeches.

According to the poets, the prospects for the new nation were unrivalled. Australia had no ancient feuds, no privileged caste, no bar to anyone making money from its abundant resources; a land of freedom and opportunity. Always imagined as female, Australia was young, pure, virginal. The themes are present in 'Advance Australia Fair', though again rather minimally. Australians are young and free; the land is rich in opportunities—golden soil—which are open to those ready to work: wealth for toil.

There was a constant insistence that no blood had been spilt in this land. This is a puzzle to us who are now so conscious of the violence done to the Aborigines. In part the claim could be made because the slaughter was simply being forgotten, though the forgetfulness was more complete in the early twentieth century than in the nineteenth. It was possible to know well enough what had happened on the frontier and still see Australia as pure. In *Fragmentary Thoughts* Parkes wrote of the Australian flag:

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It bears no stain of blood and tears
Its glory is its purity.
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In the same volume is a poem that gives a chilling account of the murder of an Aboriginal boy by settlers on the Hawkesbury in 1794. He was tied hand and foot, dragged through a fire until his back was horribly burnt and then thrown into the river and shot.

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Loud talk ye of savages
As they were beasts of prey!—
But men of English birth have done
More savage things than they.
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The two thoughts remain unconnected. It was easy not to make the connection when Aborigines were not seen as part of the future nation since they were dying out and in any case unworthy of its citizenship. Also, when they spoke of no blood spilt, the poets had in mind the European experience of warfare ravaging the land that was being constantly renewed.
The best poem on Australia as a new world free from all the ills of the old was written by John Farrell. He was a brewer turned journalist and poet. In the late 1880s he was editor and chief contributor for a radical Sydney newspaper which supported land nationalisation along the lines of Henry George's single tax. Parkes admired his writing, though he did not support his politics, and helped him to a job as editor of the Daily Telegraph. Griffith corresponded with Farrell over his own plans for radical social reform, a phase in his career which soon passed.

We have no records of a by-gone shame,
No red-writ histories of woe to weep;
God set our land in summer seas asleep
Till His fair morning for her waking came.

He hid her where the rage of Old World wars
Might never break upon her virgin rest:
He sent His softest winds to fan her breast,
And canopied her night with low-hung stars.

He wrought her perfect, in a happy clime,
And held her worthiest, and bade her wait
Serene on her lone couch inviolate
The heightened manhood of a later time ...

The sexual theme was never more explicit. The men worthy to take Australia, this virgin on her couch, were the 'manful pioneers', who only leave Europe when freedom has dawned there.

They found a gracious amplitude of soil,
Unsown with memories, like poison weeds,
Of far-forefathers wrongs and vengeful deeds,
Where was no crown, save that of earnest toil.

They reared a sunnier England, where the pain
Of bitter yesterdays might not arise:
They said—The past is past, and all its cries
Of time-long hatred are beyond the main ...

'And, with fair peace's white, pure flag unfurled,
Our children shall, upon this new-won shore—
Warned by all sorrows that have gone before—
Build up the glory of a grand New World.

These poets are now almost entirely forgotten. The poets of the turn of the century who are remembered, honoured and read are Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson. They have helped to define the Australian nation. The nationalism of the federation poets was a civic nationalism, concerned with the state and the principles and values it should protect and advance; its symbol was female, a young virginal goddess in the classical tradition. The nationalism that grew from Paterson's verse was social and masculine, concerned to honour the bushmen of the outback and their values.

Paterson and Lawson were new-comers in the 1890s. The critics, while acknowledging the appeal of their work, regarded it as light, ephemeral verse. Paterson's poems had sold in the thousands, but would anyone keep the book on their shelves? He lacked the nobility, the profundity and moral elevation thought proper to poetry. Brunton Stephens, who had himself fled from the 'horse-horse-horse' talk in the bush, was generous about Paterson's achievement, but could not believe that poems about racecourses and backblocks life would endure. Of course no-one in the 1890s ever imagined that a whole nation could come to treasure a Paterson poem about a Snowy River horseman and a Paterson song about a sheep-stealing swagman. One of the faults of Russel Ward's classic study, The Australian Legend, 'is the claim that in the 1890s, the same decade in which Paterson and Lawson first became well known, the bushman was established as a national hero-figure. It took longer than that.
At the end of the decade the Australian bushman received a great boost from the official recognition afforded by the Boer War. After Black Week, the War Office called for more Australian troops, not for show, but to help win the war. It wanted Australian horsemen who had already shown they were a match for the mounted Boer farmers. Special contingents of bushmen were raised—squatters’ sons, shearsers, stockmen, boundary riders—who had not been trained as soldiers, but who could ride, shoot and look after themselves. A bushman serving Queen and country was by that act a national figure.

Russel Ward does not mention the Boer War. It would spoil his characterisation of the bush legend as radical to discuss the role of bushmen in an imperial war or to have an imperial war boost their reputation.

By the time of the inauguration of the Commonwealth there were bushman veterans back in Australia. The Duke of York who opened the first parliament issued them with their medals. But the iconography of the federation celebrations was still female. Bushmen appeared in the federation parade in Sydney as part of the trade union contingent. They rode behind a figure representing Australia who was, as tradition dictated, a young woman dressed in pure white.

Paterson was commissioned by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as its war correspondent in South Africa. This was the first time his writings appeared in that highly respectable paper. All his poems had appeared in the raffish, radical *Bulletin*. His despatches brought good news of the Australian troops. They fought well, though they were not as well disciplined as the English, and were superb as scouts and scavengers. When the Bushmen contingents arrived English commanders competed to get hold of them.

In South Africa Paterson met Kipling for the first time. He was a great admirer of Kipling, whose elevation of the common man as the one who did the real work of empire gave Paterson a warrant for writing of the ordinary bushman. Paterson's work, however, is free of the social condescension which still marked Kipling's.

Kipling's verdict on Australian troops was similar to Paterson's. In 'The Parting of the Columns' he wrote of the colonial troops generally:

> You had no special call to come, and so you doubled out,  
> And learned us how to camp and cook an' steal a horse and scout.

He described Australians through the eyes of an Indian in a short story, 'A Sahib's War':

> They said on all occasions, 'No fea-ah', which in our tongue means *Durro Mut* (Do not be afraid), so we called them the *Durro Muts*. Dark, tall men, most excellent horsemen, hot and angry, waging war as war, and drinking tea as a sandhill drinks water. Thieves? A little, Sahib. Sikandar Khan swore to me—and he comes from a horse-stealing clan for ten generations—he swore a Pathan was a babe beside a *Durro Mut* in regard to horse-lifting. The *Durro Muts* cannot walk on their feet at all. They are like hens on the high road. Therefore they must have horses.

One of Paterson's war poems has a distinctly Kiplingesque theme. It describes General French's column as it marched to the relief of Kimberley:

> His column was five thousand strong—all mounted men and guns;  
> There met beneath the world-wide flag, the world-wide Empire's sons;  
> They came to prove to all the earth that kinship conquers space,  
> And those who fight the British Isles must fight the British race!  
> From far New Zealand's flax and fern, from cold Canadian snows,  
> From Queensland plains, where hot as fire the summer sunshine glows;  
> And in the front the Lancers rode that New South Wales had sent:  
> With easy stride across the plain their long lean Walers went.  
> Unknown, untried, those squadrons were, but proudly out they drew
Beside the English regiments that fought at Waterloo.
From every coast, from every clime, they met in proud array
To go with French to Kimberley to drive the Boers away

This was a long way from 'The Man from Snowy River' which had appeared only five years before. It was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The *Bulletin* would not have wanted it.

The Boer War had a profound effect on Australia's attitude to empire and its understanding of its own union. Australians generally welcomed the new British interest in empire. They were flattered by the attention shown to their troops and premiers during the Jubilee of 1897. The premiers were however wary of Joseph Chamberlain's plans to create new institutions to bind the empire together. But two years later Chamberlain's use of the Boer War to bind the empire together was a complete success in Australia. The war gave empire unity a powerful new emotional charge. Once Britain was committed, the predominant feeling was that the colonies had to support Britain, no matter what the rights and wrongs of the war. Dependent on the empire, they wanted it strong and, anxious for approval, they were delighted to serve. To have their troops fighting alongside British troops, to have them praised by British authorities, was immensely satisfying to a colonial people. It gave them the self respect which the federalists had promised would follow the formation of a new nation. In one sense federation had become less necessary just as it was to be established.

Uniting British people and strengthening the empire had always been one of the appeals of federation; by the time of its consummation, it was central to its rationale. Its other meaning as a step towards full independence had receded. Parkes' slogan coined in 1891 had been open to the future: One People, One Destiny. By 1901 it had been added to and closed:¹²

One Queen, One People, One Destiny
or
One People, One Destiny, One Flag
or
One People, One Empire, One Destiny.

The Boer War featured in nearly all the poems written to honour the inauguration of the Commonwealth. Australian troops by their valour and sacrifice had shown that Australia was worthy to be a nation. The war appeared in a very distinctive way in the poem Kipling wrote to honour the new Commonwealth. Its title was 'The Young Queen'. It was published first in the *London Times* where he placed poems about grand themes and great occasions, looking for no payment, acting the part of the unofficial poet laureate. When copies of *The Times* reached Western Australia the poem was telegraphed to the east and run prominently in the daily papers. The work was completely different from the local poems which were heavy with piety and abstract nouns. This was a simple ballad with two characters: the Old Queen and the Young Queen, Britannia and Australia. What was arresting in this conception was that Australia was not Britannia's daughter, but her equal. She is a queen too. When she arrives in the Old Queen's court requesting to be crowned, the Old Queen at first refuses:

How can I crown thee further? I know whose standard flies
Where the clean surge takes the Leeuwin or the coral barriers rise
Blood of our foes on thy bridle, and speech of our friends in thy mouth—
How can I crown thee further, O Queen of the Sovereign South?

The Old Queen relents because the Young Queen urgently requests to be crowned at her hands.

Kipling's second innovation was the creation of a new female image of Australia, no longer a virginal girl, but a young warrior sexually attractive in a different way. This is how the Young Queen is described in the first verse:
Her hand was still on her sword-hilt, the spur was still on her heel,
She had not cast her harness of grey, war-dinted steel;
High on her red-splashed charger, beautiful, bold, and brownded,
Bright-eyed out of the battle, the Young Queen rode to be crowned.

This became a popular and highly acceptable image. Representations of the Young Queen decorated the Exchange in Sydney on 1 January 1901 and Parliament House in Melbourne in May. The image and the first verse of the poem were on the official invitations to the opening of the federal parliament.

The readiness with which blood and sacrifice were embraced reveals that patriots had not fully persuaded themselves of the sufficiency of the themes of peace and purity with which perforce they had previously to work. Those themes married well with the belief in progress and Australia as a new dispensation, but there was no escaping that other nations defined themselves by battles and heroic death. Australia could now be one of them, but the test which placed her in this rank had been performed not in the defence of the nation but in the service of empire.

The Bulletin, opposed to the war, produced a female image of Australia very different from Kipling's. This is from 'Red-Handed' by 'R':

We had a dream—it seems but yesterday—
That dream is dashed—to direst darkness hurled,
For where our Commonwealth, a virgin lay,
A Wanton fronts the world.

Think what we lost—the forward March of Man,
The ranks of Progress positioned us a place,
Not last, not last, but foremost in the van
With sun illumined face.

Were there no wrongs, no bitter deeds of night
About our Land to keep our hands atoil,
That we must rob poor farmers of their right,
And filch their hard-won soil?

The Young Queen had an easy victory over the Wanton. And as for the virgin, she faded away.

All this was as it was meant to be, according to Brunton Stephens, the doyen of the poets of union. His 1877 poem began 'She is not yet' and it asked 'How long "not yet"?' In his 1901 'Fulfilment' the answer was plain: Australia had been made to wait for the fiery ordeal of war 'that tries the claim to nationhood'. And in 1877 he had misread her destiny which was more than her own union:

O People of the onward will,
Unit of Union greater still
Than that today hath made you great,
Your true Fulfilment waiteth there,
Embraced within the larger fate
Of Empire ye are born to share.
Endnotes

This paper forms part of a larger study on federation which will be published, with fuller references, as *The Sentimental Nation* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000).

1. The poems are scattered through newspapers, periodicals and sheet music; collections are found in 'Federation Songs', an exercise book of newspaper cuttings, created by J Plummer, ML QA 821.08/35; Literature on Federation, National Library MS 5911, Australasian Federation League of Victoria, Songs of Union, Melbourne 1899, held in Deakin Papers 1540/11/172,178, for a listing of songs see Georgina M Binns, 'Patriotic and nationalistic song in Australia to 1919: a study of the popular sheet music genre', unpub Master of Music thesis, University of Melbourne, 1988.
4. 22 October 1889.
7. The poem is called 'NO' and was published in *How He Died* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1887). There is a memoir of Farrell by Bertram Stevens in *My Sundowner and other poems* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1904).
9. Ibid, 582-86.
12. *Mercury*, 2 January 1901 (street decorations Sydney), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May 1898 (design of federal badge); *Leader*, 22 December 1900 (cover).
Australian federation and the South African War constitute an important conjuncture. In the months preceding the war the Federal Enabling Bill had been passed in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania and was thought to be on the verge of being sent to Britain for parliamentary consideration. It was, however, as separate colonies that Australia sent troops. Still the contingents were despatched with a degree of efficiency and integrated into the British war effort fairly smoothly. This was partly because a federal defence scheme had been long advocated both in Britain and Australia. ‘Federal defence’ had various meanings. At one end of the spectrum it could mean pragmatic arrangements for military harmonisation between different colonial governments, although that had its own assumptions built in regarding, for example, possible threats and who should contribute to resistance against them. At the other end it involved a joint military or naval scheme between the colonies themselves and Britain and that might be a prelude to Australian or even imperial federation. A case of the latter, broader, meaning of federal defence is provided by the British Colonial Defence Committee which looked forward in January 1900 to federation which would ‘remove many of the difficulties in the way of a scheme involving the co-operation of all the colonies of Australia (which had) furnished, without previous agreement, over 2500 men for South Africa and were preparing to considerably add to their contingent’.

It is important therefore first to define and examine the notion of federal defence, which was not federation but could shape it and second to suggest the ways in which the war might have been convenient or inconvenient for federal defence.

The establishment of federal defence as a British goal goes back at least 20 years before federation. A recognition of the size of Australia and the poor communications pointed to the need for co-operation between the colonies at the time of the 1870s war scare, although at that time there were substantial obstacles, such as a lack of inter-colonial railways. The defence of ports and coaling stations, a prime requirement, would have to rely on small, permanent local batteries without the prospect of reinforcement. In Britain, the Royal Commission, chaired by Lord Carnarvon 1879-82, although offering that crucial advantage of bridging the usually insuperable War Office-Admiralty gap, had to recognise the impact of the Gladstone Government formed in 1880. Carnarvon wrote: ‘They dislike anything or person which may oblige them to spend money on military objects and they contend that such an enquiry as ours should be carried on by departments of government rather than by outsiders’. The reports therefore emphasised the efficiency of defence co-operation and federation among the colonies, arguing that it would make Australia self-defending and a model for other colonies since Australia offered the prospect of financial contributions to Imperial naval expenditure as prosperity grew. Further, the reports sketched out the elements of federal defence, and flesh was put on it by the work of Sir Peter Scratchley, defence adviser to some colonial governments in the early 1880s while he participated in commissions and enquiries. In New South Wales he chaired a sub-committee of colonial commandants of the 1881 Commission under Sir James Martin, Chief Justice of New South Wales. Scratchley wanted to see each colony assign a number of permanent artillery to a federal force. That did not form part of the final report but in New South Wales and in other colonies reports a proposal for an Inspecting Officer to help provide uniformity and resolve disputes in the forces in peace time did appear; for Scratchley such an officer would command in war.

The federal defence scheme which was being urged for Australia had various components: the regulatory and legal framework; weapons of war; officers and men; area of service; and, the ultimate control of the forces. Proposals were modified over time, of course; nor could the military or naval personnel, even when briefed in Britain or Australia by core protagonists of the idea, be relied upon to argue the same case. A familiar example was the definition of the
likely threats to be met by Australia. Military men might envisage Russian or French invasion with troops carried by the invading naval force while a Royal Naval Commodore, like Wilson, might dismiss this as 'storming the moon'. Still, there were large areas of agreement among the ‘defence community’ on possible federal or co-operative steps which should be taken.

There was concern to develop a shared framework in law and regulations. Scratchley urged this at the Defence Inquiry Commissions in New South Wales, Queensland and subsequently Victoria. He recognised that the smaller colonies, such as South Australia and Queensland, could not easily entertain the idea of a permanent Artillery Force, although he did stress the importance of paid Volunteers. For Victoria and New South Wales, however, the 1880s saw a gradual shift towards what was termed a partially-paid militia alongside the Volunteers, with the prospect of greater discipline and less rapid turnover of the members of the forces. The permanent force came under regulations which were a simplified version of the British original.

The limitations of colonial legislation in the case of serving with British troops abroad became obvious in 1885 when Dalley, acting as New South Wales premier while Stuart was convalescent in New Zealand, offered troops for the Anglo-Sudan War. Stuart termed the offer 'more plucky than prudent', and added, 'Doubtful if Act contemplates service outside the Colony, if not discipline cannot be enforced'. This was overcome after a style by men removing themselves from the New South Wales forces and volunteering for the British Army. Although serving alongside British troops, the Australians were not subject fully to British discipline—as demonstrated by the establishment of separate courts martial and an absence of corporal punishment.

As a result the War Office pressed then and after for such contingents to be placed under the British Army Act and the Queen's Regulations and to serve under a British Commander. This proposal was tabled, although not for discussion, at the Colonial Conference in London in 1887. It was scarcely the right time for the British Government to have the matter discussed. Anti-imperialism was a rallying call in eastern Australia and there was deep suspicion of British plots. Still, the War Office drew up a dormant Order in Council to extend the provisions of the Army Act to the colonies in the event of the outbreak of hostilities, since it was a legal necessity that troops be raised under a British officer. That in turn meant British command, but it was thought in London that a surge of feeling in war would make this acceptable in Australia.

Uniformity of the armaments, a second aspect of the proposed federal defence scheme, was a consideration which quickly became important. There were proposals, which did not succeed, for a federal cordite factory and for standardisation of rifles, but the most significant was for the naval forces for Australia. Federal defence was never a purely military project. Those who were involved in the matter, beyond some members of the military forces, took both defence forces into account and generally regarded the navy as the first line and they focussed on port defence. More than that, the debates surrounding the eventual formation of the Australasian naval defence agreement, 1884-91, provided analogies and precedents for military measures which might be read, by some observers, as further stages in a process of imperial defence federation. Sir Henry Loch, who was to shift, as Governor, from Melbourne to Cape Town in 1889, attempted during the 1880s to discourage an Admiralty proposal which might have led to a strengthening of local navies, which he feared as a source of separation of the colonies from Britain, and to substitute instead a scheme by which each Australasian government would pay a subsidy towards a squadron on the station. Loch attempted to further the notion of financial support for the Royal Navy by convening a conference of premiers, governors and Tryon, the naval commander-in-chief. He explained to Stuart, recently the New South Wales Premier, that the conference would, he hoped, discuss:

the naval defence of Australasia and the commerce in these seas in the event of war. I should also like to see a common union with respect to the military defence of these colonies based upon some understanding which would give the colonial forces a direct interest in the Imperial Army that would be proportionately beneficial to us here and to the Mother Country.
It must be recalled that this was almost simultaneously occurring with the formation of the Australasian Federal Council and that made the negotiation of such conferences more difficult since New South Wales had refused to join the Council. Loch's conference proposal failed but Tryon met the politicians and in 1887 the Naval Defence agreement was concluded between colonial and British representatives at the Colonial Conference in London. The Australian hostility to it and to the messages of imperialism which it carried are extremely plain in the historical record. Still, Loch returned in 1888 to his federal defence suggestions; the naval agreement was only a prelude, he wrote, to ‘a union of Imperial forces for the preservation of the freedom and the protection of the commercial and other interests of the empire ...’. The next step should be the amalgamation of the several Australian military forces. It would enlarge the area of promotion for officers and, in war at least, allow the movement of troops from one colony to another. A Commanding Officer would be needed and the forces could be used if Russia threatened North India and the Suez Canal was blocked.

In an associated confidential despatch to the Colonial Office of the same date Loch suggested that a further colonial conference should be held in Australia, a Second Act to the London Colonial Conference. Herbert, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, suggested that the agenda include the issue of Chinese Immigration to Australia, as a draw-card; but the answering Colonial Office despatch did not refer openly to the ‘military question referred to in your despatch’, although it was plain that the visit of an Inspecting Officer, possibly Wolseley, as a springboard to defence federation was part of the plan.

This, third aspect of federal defence, the exchange of personnel between British and Australian forces, was important as giving reality to the grand schemes formulated chiefly, but not only, by the British. The idea was of a British Inspecting Officer who would in peace report on each of the Australasian forces and nudge them towards an assimilation of practice—frequently towards the British Army model—where that seemed desirable. In war, the same officer might well command the troops. This had been promoted by the Carnarvon Commission and foreshadowed by Jervois and Scratchley as colonial government advisers in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Analogous naval inspections were undertaken by the Royal Navy commander on the station. The proposal for an Inspecting Officer jointly serving the Australasian colonies was discussed at the 1887 Colonial Conference in London. Griffith, the Queensland Premier, supported the idea at the conference and, behind the scenes, Dr JM.Creed, a New South Wales parliamentarian anxious about defence preparedness, had written placing the idea before Lord Carnarvon and others in Britain. A decision was not reached although a conference participant wrote: ‘I gather that the feeling was in favour of some officer of standing and reputation coming out to organize a general system and then of periodical inspections’. There followed the familiar prolonged negotiations. Victoria wanted Wolseley. In New South Wales Parkes fought a vigorous rearguard action, inviting his own inspecting officer, Major-General H Schaw, who came from New Zealand. Schaw's report did not keenly advocate the inspecting officer scheme or federal defence.

Parkes had to react to such British military propositions as this despite his reluctance to spend money on defence. Moreover, he was wary of federation, since the other colonies were seemingly attempting to trap him into the Federal Council. A fundamental point was Sydney's position as the naval base for the Royal Navy in Australian waters; it was an arrangement which provided security and commercial advantage for New South Wales, making Australian federal defence seem superfluous as well as costly and yet it required some show of concern lest the Admiral think of establishing a base elsewhere. Finally in 1889 the British Government agreed to pay for the visit of Major-General J Bevan Edwards from China, an offer difficult to refuse.

Eastern Australia was now linked by railway, a Federal Council with four colonies as members existed, however weakly, and Edwards felt able to recommend an Australian Fortress Corps with detachments of permanent forces from each colony to make about 1000 men in all. It could be enlarged in war and resist an enemy landing; it could defend King George's Sound and Thursday Island as two important coaling stations. Overall in reports on each colony and Australia generally, he advocated an integration of the colony's forces because each colony still had its own legislation, pay and commitments. He took the emphasis off fortifications and placed it firmly on federal defence. Sir Henry Norman, Queensland Governor and soldier, warned:
If the federating of troops is too much stressed I am sure difficulties will arise and those who are opposed to votes for troops will find their hands strengthened. I have no doubt that federation will come in time but it is a question surrounded with political difficulties and there is much that can be done to improve defence without raising controversial questions at present.  

Schaw, reporting to Parkes two years earlier, had addressed the problem of maintaining well instructed, up-to-date and vigorous officers in a small, largely volunteer, force. ‘Two solutions appear to be possible’, he said. One was a federation of forces but he said little of that. The second was the employment of British officers on contract and they could act as instructors as well for the Volunteer officers. This was, in modified form, a return to the British Conservative policy, which the first Gladstone Government had modified around 1870, of keeping a British military presence in the colonies. British officers on contract to the colonies could bring problems, as Parkes knew. Colonel Roberts, Commander New South Wales Artillery, complained to Parkes about a British officer, Bingham, who was receiving orders about which Roberts knew nothing. Parkes recognised the political dimensions of the issue. When the Colonial Office proposed to give military and naval chiefs precedence over governors, he wrote that it would tend to shake Australian feeling which enters so largely into the bond of union ... (The) Admiral commanding Her Majesty's ships ... however widely respected, will always be looked upon as the servant of the Imperial Government with no interest in our affairs and no ties binding him even for a time to our fortunes.  

The fortunes and roles of British officers serving with Australian forces as military commandants, a practice introduced over the decade from the early 1880s, has been already well discussed by Stephen Clarke.  

The last Australasian colony to appoint a British commandant was New South Wales. Major-General ETH Hutton picked up in 1893 where Edwards had left off and gave greater prominence to federal defence, elaborating it, taking it into the area of political difficulties of which Sir Henry Norman, the Queensland Governor, had warned. Parkes, aware that Edwards’ report might be used to push New South Wales into the Federal Council secured his own military advice from Major-General Strange who had arrived from Canada to promote the Maxim gun. He and Lady Parkes obligingly fired it. Strange supplied a memorandum asserting that there could be no federal army without a federal government and the Federal Council was inadequate for that purpose. He did not think Edwards’ Federal Military College would work: ‘The first necessity of military training is discipline. The most general characteristic of university life all over the world is insubordination’. Nor did he think that an enlargement of the infantry was necessary. He commented that in Canada the artillery had been given rifles and had put down riots—a useful reminder that ‘aid to the civil power’, although concealed, was never far from military planning as became obvious in the strikes of the early 1890s. Strange was not supportive of the idea that the federal Australian force should be used to fight abroad. He thought that it would be unpopular in New South Wales, the British pay would be too low and the War Office would wish to use its own troops rather than those of the colonies who could best be used in developing their own territory. There were two last issues regarding federal defence raised here by Strange and Edwards— who was to control federal defence and was it to provide troops for Britain abroad? They had been implicit, sometimes explicit, during the 1880s but were more sharply defined in the 1890s. First, as to control, Parkes in 1889 at Tenterfield famously adopted defence as a powerful argument for federation: federal forces would have to be controlled by a federal government. Alternative control structures, lines of responsibility, were pushed to the sides of federal debate. Still, they remained present. The Australasian Federal Council retained a frail existence during the 1890s but its use for defence purposes was limited. Take for example the attempt to garrison King George's Sound. Queensland could garrison Thursday Island because its defence legislation allowed movement of its troops outside the colonial borders; South Australia's, like that of the other colonies, did not. An Act of the Federal Council was needed to enable South Australian troops to serve in Western Australia. Such an Act had
then to be brought into effect by enabling Acts of the constituent colonies, but it applied only to that specific case, although Sargood, the Victorian Defence Minister, suggested to the Federal Council in 1893 a federal regiment of permanent artillery that could help garrison the coaling stations.\(^{20}\)

Another possibility of federal control was lurking in the British proposal for an Inspecting Officer and the possible adoption of the British Army Act. In the event of war the Inspecting Officer might become the Commander and use the legal framework of the Army Act so that the British government would, advising Queen Victoria to whom all troops swore personal allegiance, be in control. In addition, in Britain the military believed that ‘once the decision for war was made, the military were considered supreme and completely in charge ... The commanding officer was thus personally responsible for ensuring every aspect of the army’s requirements for a particular region’\(^{21}\). It is interesting that Bevan Edwards hoped to secure the Tasmanian governorship in the expectation that he would be on the spot to take command if the need arose. Or to consider a further example of the persistence of the schemes for direct British wartime control: Mordike cites the amendment proposed by British authorities to the 1897 draft Australian Federation Bill, section 68, which ‘would have given the British parliament a constitutional basis to command Australian forces’\(^{22}\).

In 1893 when Hutton arrived as New South Wales first British Commandant on contract, the Federal Council remained in existence, as did the possibility of British control of the forces in some surge of opinion in a war. Parkes’ federal initiative which had helped produce the 1891 Convention had run into the sand. Hutton still gave great impetus to what he termed federal defence by securing a meeting in 1894 of Australian commandants under Major-General Tulloch of Victoria. It produced a detailed federal defence plan and developed the points which Edwards had suggested but proposed a Council of Australian Federal Defence which would be set up at short notice in war. It would appoint a Military Head who, together with the Naval Commander-in-Chief on the station, would be responsible for the protection of Australia. The commandants further developed that plan in 1896 enlarging the area, to which the proposed federal forces could be sent, to cover the South Pacific. That was not new in the sense that the colonies had contemplated action against European powers in, say, the New Hebrides in the 1880s and British war planning, such as it was, contemplated such action; Major-General Tulloch had undertaken a secret mission to report on Noumea in 1893.\(^{23}\) The federal defence plan could not contemplate action for Australian troops beyond this area because it would provoke domestic opposition. There was a constraint on another side so far as the Colonial Office was concerned: at the instigation of Sir Henry Norman, the Queensland Governor, they refused permission to Hutton to publish the 1894 plan and the scheme enunciated for an Australian Defence Council was blocked as well, partly because British authorities rejected the possibility of war being conducted by a Council, but mainly because the Commander-in-Chief on the station, Bridge, refused to contemplate sharing the disposition of vessels with ‘non-naval’ personnel. Still, with Chamberlain’s encouragement, the Colonial Defence Committee memorandum in July 1896 was circulated to the colonies embodying the federal defence features which have been sketched. British control of the forces was implicit although not mentioned, especially since the CDC spoke of the colonies contributing to an expedition abroad. That such an expedition would be in South Africa was contemplated in the aftermath of the Jameson Raid when support for the British government in the Australian major newspapers had been strong and South Australia offered troops.\(^{24}\) It was all too sensitive in Britain for war with the Afrikaner republics to be openly contemplated, but the Australian federal defence role for mounted infantry fitted neatly the likely southern African situation.

Thus it was that long before even the Jameson Raid the ground had been laid for a system of federal defence assimilating under British commandants to some extent the regulations and practice of the Australian and New Zealand military forces, establishing a legal framework in the event of war, standardising weapons and the machinery of war on the basis of naval as well as military needs and addressing the knotty problems of command, political responsibility and the possible use of Australian and New Zealand troops outside their own borders to aid the empire. One should not be surprised that there was concealment and manipulation involved, especially on the side of the British armed forces and government apparatus. There was a culture of secrecy. Commandants attempted to use the Official Secrets Act for
concealment. There was little attachment to democracy as that was understood in contemporary popular movements and there was long practice at playing off the various governments and people of Australia and New Zealand against one another. None of this is to say that there was any lack of people in Australia to collaborate with these strategies; real, existing imperialism was understood by contemporary Australians not as between the Mother Country and the colony but as involving all the components of the various societies involved: class, ethnic and geographical origin—especially that of the Aboriginal people—gender, age, religion and so on.

These tensions were not lessened in the last three years before the outbreak of the South African War. The nearness of federation heightened them. For example, under the encouragement of Lord Brassey, the Victorian Governor, a scheme was promoted for the exchange of troops between Britain and Australia to better secure standardisation. It failed for a number of reasons. There was War Office reluctance to contemplate exchange of colonial units of substantial size under Australian control, since they wished to ensure that Australian troops were under British command. There was the example of the New South Wales Lancers unit which was accepted for training with British Cavalry in 1899, but they were private volunteers. Again, the perennial difficulty of the low British pay rates was an obstacle. Australians and New Zealanders at the war were resentful of the calls of 'five-bob-a-day colonials'.

In the later 1890s the British Government was face to face with the early prospect of the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia but it left them uneasy. It raised issues about the federal defence project that had long been advanced. Federation itself might consolidate or help fragment the Empire. The war, in prospect, might produce a surge of imperial support or trigger further evidence of republican and separatist feeling. In what sense if any would the war be a convenient conflict?

Reflecting on the war long afterwards, Tom Vincent of the New Zealand sixth contingent, raised the issue: 'I tell you one thing I could never find out. What was the war over? You tell me that. I don't know now what that Boer war was over'. The tone of his comment suggests scepticism concerning the contemporary explanations; certainly the answers offered by historians are now very different. The war gave an impetus to nationalisms and the complex identity politics which fed them. Certain masculinities were defined; in the Afrikaner or Boer case focussed on the Commando; in the Australian case they emerged from the gender conflicts of the 1890s and perhaps the richly ironic male talk of the birth of the nation and the shedding of blood. Again, the conflict was cast as a white man's affair, partly because the British record regarding Africans in the Southern African colonies and Rhodesia did not bear examination, hence the emphasis placed on the Uitlanders’ franchise issue. When New South Wales troops went to the Sudan in 1885, a British Tommy remarked: 'Blimey, these walers are white'. In this case, whiteness may have been a particular commendation for the 1899 federal defence exercise. How much better to have Anglo-Celtic Australians acting as 'white Gurkhas' than Indian troops.

Contemporaries thought of colonial nationalisms being fused in the crucible of war, new nations within the Empire, as Kipling called them. Although this begs many of the questions of modern debate concerning nation-wide communities and identities it was consistent with a contemporary British notion of an Empire of federations, clusters of colonies exerting sway in their region both through shared defence and through British investment and trade being made more secure. In this way the Empire would include 'white federations' each exerting influence in its own geographical area, for example, New Zealand and Australia in the South Pacific. Andrew Porter's *The Origins of the South African War* concludes that 'the maintenance of British supremacy together with the ultimate intention of promoting federation (were) the local objects on British endeavours in South Africa'. The Australian participation in the South African War could serve these same goals, but a good deal hinged on the nature of the federation. The process had been marked by ambiguity, in British eyes. The Federal Council, firmly under the Crown, had not succeeded; the Federal Convention of 1891 had met in the shadow of a clear rejection of imperial federation and affirmation of republicanism, along with bitter strikes. The new initiative at the 1893 Corowa Conference with its place for
popular involvement, sealed by legislation in each colony and concluded with referenda ran the risk of producing a constitution which might, if it were rejected or substantially amended by the British Parliament, cause a rupture; but if accepted, as passed in Australia, might have features which would not protect the continuity of British supremacy. British ministers were reluctant therefore to say that they would pass the bill as produced in Australia. If it were possible to introduce elements which would make separation impossible it could be a useful safeguard. Federal defence offered that possibility because Australian armed forces would be integrated with the British forces and under, ultimately, British command. That would indeed be federation under the Crown.

The federal defence scheme over time had placed in key positions British officers responsible to the War Office for their fortunes. Part of their task was to formulate in peace structures for war. Federal planning was essential to that. Regulations, assimilable to those of the British forces could be issued by the commandants, political control was not part of their powers, but pre-federal structures had set up a dynamic. New South Wales was able to play in the 1890s, as they had at the time of the Sudan War, the role of collaborator. Reid’s readiness to back Hutton’s schemes on occasion was not some personal flaw in his nationalist fibre but arose from the case that could be made against federation, the security that had to be provided for the naval base—federal defence would spread the cost of that—and the desire to get the best possible deal for his colony. There was no prospect in peacetime of the defence forces being placed under British direct control. Even the existing constitutional responsibility of the governors did not extend to command in war. Parkes at the 1891 Convention had claimed without dissent that defence must be of a federal character and ‘under one command by a federal officer answerable to the national government of Australasia’.

But would not war produce a different situation? Contemporary observers frequently thought so and this was the last, best hope of the federal defence enthusiasts in the CDC and at the War Office and also the observers elsewhere. The idea of war as a catalyst for some form of federal defence can be found in The Last Great Naval War, a work written under a pseudonym by GS Clarke, the secretary of the Colonial Defence Committee, and in comments of Goschen, First Lord of the Admiralty, Alfred Deakin and George Reid. The readiness to participate, signalled long before, was heightened by the war talk. As in the Sudan War the War Office was somewhat reluctant to accept large numbers of colonial troops at first and the federal force sketched out in the Hutton plans was still eyed with some caution by the War Office. Indeed, the proximity of federation made that superfluous. The troops came under British command and the New South Wales Government made repeated requests for British officers instead of the less experienced local officers. With the early defeats, the number of Australians increased, the majority, in the New South Wales’ case, being men who had served in the colonial forces before. The standard training they had received helped them fit in well with the British forces with whom they served.

The ground for Australian war participation had been prepared for more than twenty years. It probably made easier the passage in Britain of the bill establishing the Commonwealth, although that did not prevent the amendment of the section dealing with Appeals to the Privy Council.

When the Commonwealth was inaugurated the New South Wales Government had taken considerable care to ensure a substantial military presence from Britain and the Empire. The Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun had been brought from Albany in a Royal Navy warship. There were good local reasons for this. Still the occasion had an imperial military flavour: military, although the Australian governments liked to think that the war was virtually over, and imperial, since, despite repeated New South Wales Government requests, British authorities would not countenance a military or naval presence from the United States or Germany.
3. Royal Commission on Defence, 1881, Defence Papers, 829 ff esp Question 353, 4/7054A, Archives Office of New South Wales (hereinafter AONSW); Scratchley was attempting to fulfill a similar position in a military promotion dispute: see letters exchanged between Parkes and Loftus, 5, 6 and 7 February, 1881, Parkes Papers, A891, Mitchell Library (hereinafter ML).
6. Stuart to Dalley, 13 February 1885, Col Sec 4/856, AONSW.
7. For the draft Order in Council, War Office to Colonial Office, 1 April 1892, CO 323/389; for the legal necessity of raising troops under a British officer, see Great Britain, *Parl Paps* 1904, XL, questions 8253-54.
8. Loch to Stuart, private, 27 December 1885, Stuart Papers, MSS 1279/16, ML.
10. Loch to CO, 6 January 1888, CO 881/8; Loch to CO, confidential, 6 January 1888, CO 309/132, Public Record Office, Kew (hereinafter PRO).
11. Creed to Beresford, 31 May 1887, and Beresford to Creed, 12 July 1887, Carnarvon Papers, Add Mss BL.
12. War Office to CO, 16 November 1887; minute by Lord Onslow, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, CO 201/607, PRO.
13. Defences of New South Wales, confidential, 1887, Col Sec 1/2679, 1887 Minutes, AONSW.
16. Roberts to Parkes, confidential, 21 February 1888, Parkes Papers A927, ML.
17. Parkes on Circular Despatch from Colonial Office, 26 February 1889, Col Sec Despatches, Main Series, 1889, Minutes 1/5961, M4981/B, AONSW.
19. FB Strange, confidential, Memorandum as requested by Sir Henry Parkes, 29 October 1889, Parkes Papers, A907, ML.
25. Beauchamp to CO, 1 November 1900, CO 201/629, PRO.
30. Mark McKenna, *The Captive Republic. A History of Republicanism in Australia 1788-1996* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 9, presents evidence of the republicanism of the years before federation and the way in which it became muted in the late 1890s, but many observers, especially in Britain where information on Australia was not always up to date, retained fears of federation leading to separation. See Trainer, *British Imperialism and British Nationalism*, 155,159. At the same time it is important to recognise that, although not the focus of this paper, defence as part of federation did not necessarily involve acquiescence in British or Australian plans for federal defence and could involve quite other goals, such as a federal republic. See Trainor, *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism*, 186.
32. A sample of the New South Wales contingents (excluding Imperial Bushmen, Chaplains and Nurses) can be secured from the Nominal Roll reported in June 1900. These were the forces which saw the most active part of the conflict. Only 3 percent are listed as 'specially enrolled' the remaining 6 percent.
serving at the time of enlistment; it is probable that a high proportion of the specially enrolled had previous military training (Beauchamp to CO, 8 June 1900, enclosure, CO 201/627).

33. Beauchamp to CO, 17 November 1900, CO201/629, same to same, 15 November 1900 and preceding correspondence concerning United States presence at the inauguration of the Commonwealth. Australian governments proposed to British authorities that 25 October 1900 be set at Victory in South Africa Day, a proposal rejected by the British Government.