

THE BOER WAR 1899-1902

It was in 1899, with the outbreak of hostilities known as the Second Boer War, that Canadian soldiers became involved in South Africa. The conflict resulted from the competing interests of the British, anxious to maintain their empire, and the Boers, descendants of the early Dutch immigrants, who saw their land and way of life being threatened.

"...the modern Boer-the most formidable antagonist... hard-bitten farmers with their ancient theology and their inconveniently modern rifles." —Arthur Conan-Doyle

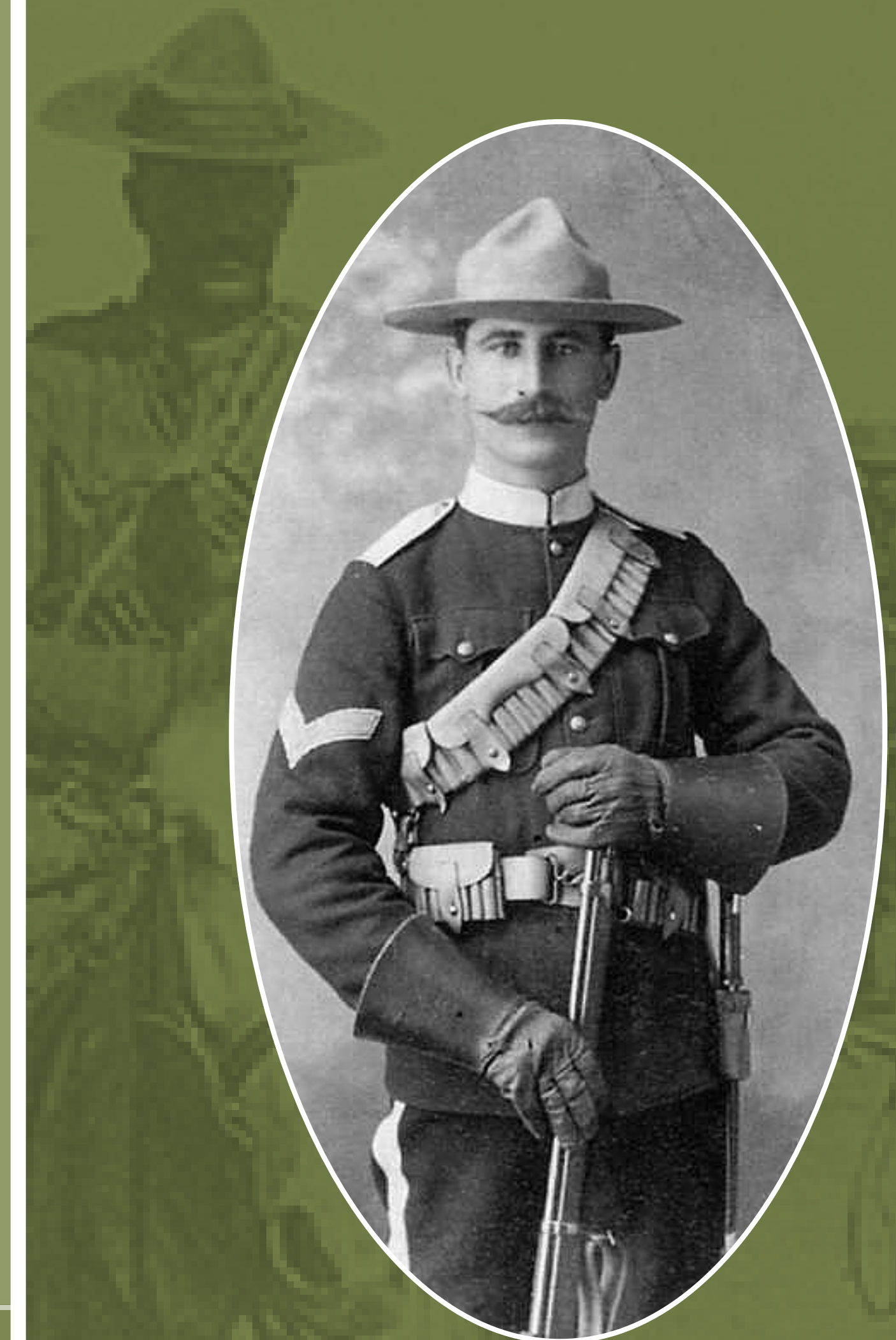
While Britain did not call upon the Canadian military to join the British troops, many Canadians urged their reluctant Government to send support. These pro-British Canadians were ultimately successful, and Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier was convinced to send a Volunteer Battalion. During the next three years over 7,000 Canadian volunteers, including 12 women nurses, left to support the British effort. *This was Canada's first official dispatch of troops to an overseas war.*

Volunteers from Cobourg were among those who went, including members of the Cobourg Heavy Battery accompanied by cannons, mortars, and other heavy fixed guns.

The Town of Cobourg was proud of its contribution of home-grown volunteers. It is recorded that Mayor Huycke, with the blessing of the Town Council, presented five guineas (\$25.00), that being a considerable sum at the time, to four of them:

Sergeant Bolster, Thomas Turpin, Gordon Cockburn and Edmond Bull.

In addition, each received a copy of Rudyard Kipling's *Poems*, and the Rev. Mr. Shaver presented each with a copy of his book *Happy, or the Holy Spirit in the Heart*.



While it is not known which Cobourg Volunteers participated in which battles, it is known that Canadian troops were involved in the following:

1900

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---|
| Feb 18-27 | Paardeburg | the first major Canadian action and the first significant British Victory of the war. |
| April 25 | Israel's Poort | the Royal Canadians are firmly established as a veteran battalion. |
| May 10 | Zand River | the Royal Canadians, although being out numbered more than 10 to one, hold fast. |
| May 17 | The Relief of Mafeking | despite being out numbered and outranged Canadian gunners drive the Boers off the road to Mafeking. |
| May 28-29 | Doornkop | the only time in the war Canada's first and second contingents fight together. |
| May 30 | Faber's Put | the Canadians play an essential role in supporting the British troops, even though this battle is lost. |
| June 22 | Honing Spruit | Canadians prevent the Boers from attacking the station from an unexpected direction. |
| Nov 7 | Leliefontein | a number of decorations including Victoria Crosses are awarded to Canadian troops. |

1902

| | | |
|----------|---------------------|---|
| March 31 | Hart's River | in another British defeat, the Canadian suffer 13 killed, 40 wounded. |
|----------|---------------------|---|

The last two years of the war were chiefly characterized by guerilla warfare on the part of the Boers and merciless attrition on the part of the British.

"We move from valley to valley, lifting cattle and sheep, burning and looting, and turning out women and children to weep in despair beside the ruin of their once beautiful homesteads."

— quoted by Lloyd George from a letter by a British officer

The Boers surrendered in May, 1902 and the war ended with the Treaty of Vereeniging signed on May 31. The treaty ended the existence of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State as independent Boer republics and placed them within the British Empire.

The involvement of Canadians in this South African war was limited, but as with any war, there are those who gave their lives for the cause. Of the 225 who fell, four residents of the United Counties of Durham and Northumberland are memorialized on a plaque placed in Victoria Hall.

Capt. W. P. K. Milligan
Sergt. E. Evatt
Sergt. W. E. Holnbeck
Pte. C. N. Evans

