



Above: The departure of the Australian Contingent for the Sudan by Arthur Collingridge.

AWM ART16593

Below: Landing of the Australian [New South Wales] contingent at Suakin: a lithograph by Beckmann Brothers, London.

AWM ART14435.



THE PRE FIRST WORLD WAR CONFLICTS

SUDAN - NEW SOUTH WALES CONTINGENT – MARCH TO JUNE 1885.

In the early 1880s the British-backed Egyptian regime in the Sudan was threatened by an indigenous rebellion under the leadership of Muhammed Ahmed, known as the Mahdi.

In 1883 the Egyptian government, with British acquiescence, sent an army south to crush the revolt. Instead of destroying the Mahdi's forces, the Egyptians were soundly defeated, leaving their government with the problem of extricating the survivors.

The difficulties of evacuating their forces in the face of a hostile enemy quickly became apparent, and the British were persuaded to send General Charles Gordon, already a figure of heroic proportions in England, to consider the means by which the Egyptian troops could be safely withdrawn.

Disregarding his instructions, Gordon sought instead to delay the evacuation and defeat the Mahdi; like the Egyptians, Gordon failed and found himself besieged in Khartoum.

The popular general's predicament stirred public opinion in England, leading to demands for an expeditionary force to be dispatched to his rescue.

The relief force was sent from Cairo in September 1884, but it was still fighting its way up the Nile when Gordon was killed in late January the following year.

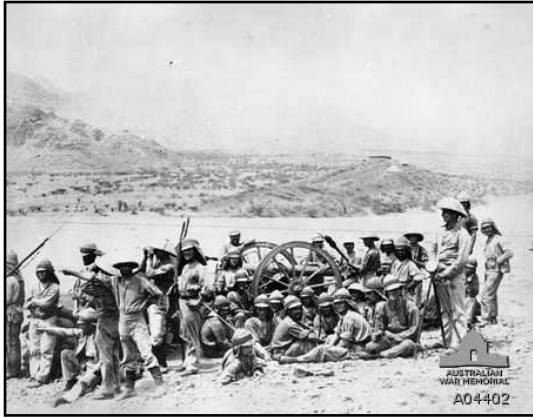
Gordon's exploits were well known throughout the British Empire, and when the telegraph brought word of his death to New South Wales in February 1885 it was met with recriminations against the Liberal government led by William Gladstone for having failed to act in time.

With news of Gordon's death and the Canadian government's offer of troops for the Sudan, the NSW government cabled London with its own offer.

To make its proposal more attractive, it offered to meet the contingent's expenses; London accepted but stipulated that the contingent would be under British command.

Similar offers from the other Australian colonies were declined. The British government's acceptance of the contingent was received with enthusiasm by the NSW government and members of the armed forces; it was seen as a historic occasion, marking the first time that soldiers in the pay of a self-governing Australian colony were to fight in an imperial war.

The contingent, an infantry battalion of 522 men and 24 officers and an artillery battery of 212 men, was ready to sail on 3 March 1885. It left Sydney amid much public fanfare, generated in part by the holiday declared to farewell the troops; the send-off was described as the most festive occasion in the colony's history.



Above: Sudan 1885, troops of the NSW Contingent in the desert.
AWM A04402

Below: Sydney, NSW, 1885: Infantrymen of the NSW Contingent to the Sudan, after their return to Australia wearing the khaki uniform issued for active service.
AMW A05526



Support was not, however, universal, and many viewed the proceedings with indifference or even hostility.

The nationalist Bulletin ridiculed the contingent both before and after its return. Meetings intended to launch a patriotic fund and endorse the government's action were poorly attended in many working-class suburbs, and many of those who turned up voted against the fund. In some country centres there was a significant anti-war response, while miners in rural districts were said to be in "fierce opposition".

The NSW contingent anchored at Suakin, Sudan's Red Sea port, on 29 March 1885 and was attached to a Brigade composed of Scots, Grenadiers and Coldstream Guards. Shortly after their arrival they marched as part of a large "square" formation – on this occasion made up of 10,000 men – for Tamai, a village some 30 kilometres inland.

Although the march was marked only by minor skirmishing, the men saw something of the reality of war as they halted among the dead from a battle which had taken place eleven days before.

Further minor skirmishing took place on the next day's march, but the Australians, now at the rear of the square, sustained only three casualties, none fatal. The infantry reached Tamai, burned whatever huts were standing and returned to Suakin.

After Tamai, the greater part of the NSW contingent worked on the railway line which was being laid across the desert towards the inland town of Berber on the Nile, half-way between Suakin and

Khartoum. Far from the excitement they had imagined, the Australians suffered mostly from the enforced idleness of guard duties. When a camel corps was raised, fifty men volunteered immediately. On 6 May they rode on a reconnaissance to Takdul, 28 kilometres from Suakin, again hoping for an encounter with the Sudanese, but the only action that day involved two newspaper correspondents who had accompanied the patrol before leaving the cameleers to file their stories in Suakin. They soon found themselves surrounded by enemy forces, and one was wounded as they fled. The camel corps made only one more sortie – on 15 May, to bury the bodies of men killed in fighting the previous March.

The artillery saw even less action than the infantry. They were posted to Handoub where, having no enemy close enough to engage, they drilled for a month. On 15 May they rejoined the camp at Suakin.

Not having participated in any battles, Australian casualties were few: those who died fell to disease rather than enemy action.

By May 1885 the British government had decided to abandon the campaign and left only a garrison in Suakin. The Australian contingent sailed for home on 17 May 1885. The contingent arrived in Sydney on 19 June. They were expecting to land at Port Jackson and were surprised to disembark at the quarantine station on North Head near Manly as a precaution against disease. One man died of typhoid there before the contingent was released.

Below: NSW First Infantry Regiment Other Ranks white covered helmet was part of the uniform worn by members of the NSW Contingent to the Sudan.

AWM REL/18862.003



Five days after their arrival in Sydney the contingent, dressed in their khaki uniforms, marched through the city to a reception at Victoria Barracks where they stood in pouring rain as a number of public figures, including the Governor, Lord Loftus, the Premier, and the commandant of the contingent, Colonel Richardson, gave speeches.

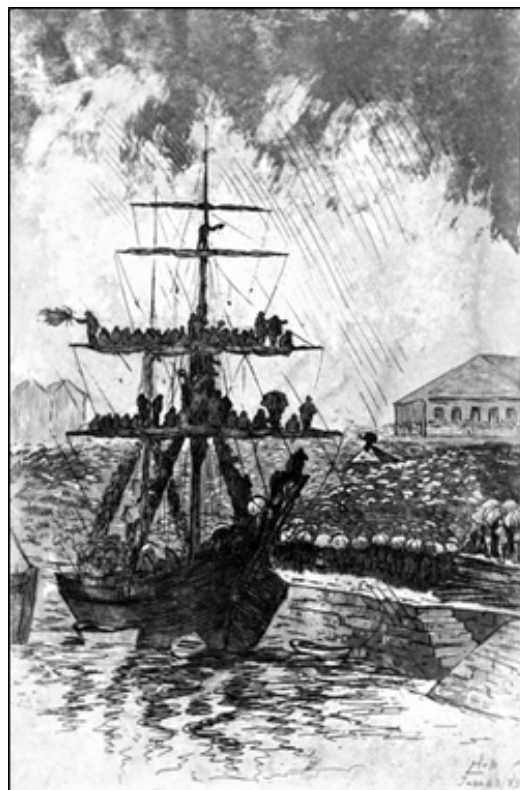
It was generally agreed at the time that, no matter how small the military significance of the Australian contribution to the adventure, it marked an important stage in the development of colonial self-

confidence and was proof of the enduring link with Britain.

Towards the end of the century the uniform was changed to khaki, although the scarlet uniform was retained for ceremonial purposes.

For its service in the Sudan the New South Wales Contingent was awarded the Honorary Distinction of Suakin 1885.

This Battle Honour is emblazoned on all the Regimental Colours of the current Battalions of the Royal New South Wales Regiment.



Left: Return of the New South Wales Contingent from the Sudan June 23 1885 – by Livingston Hopkins. AWM ART 5001

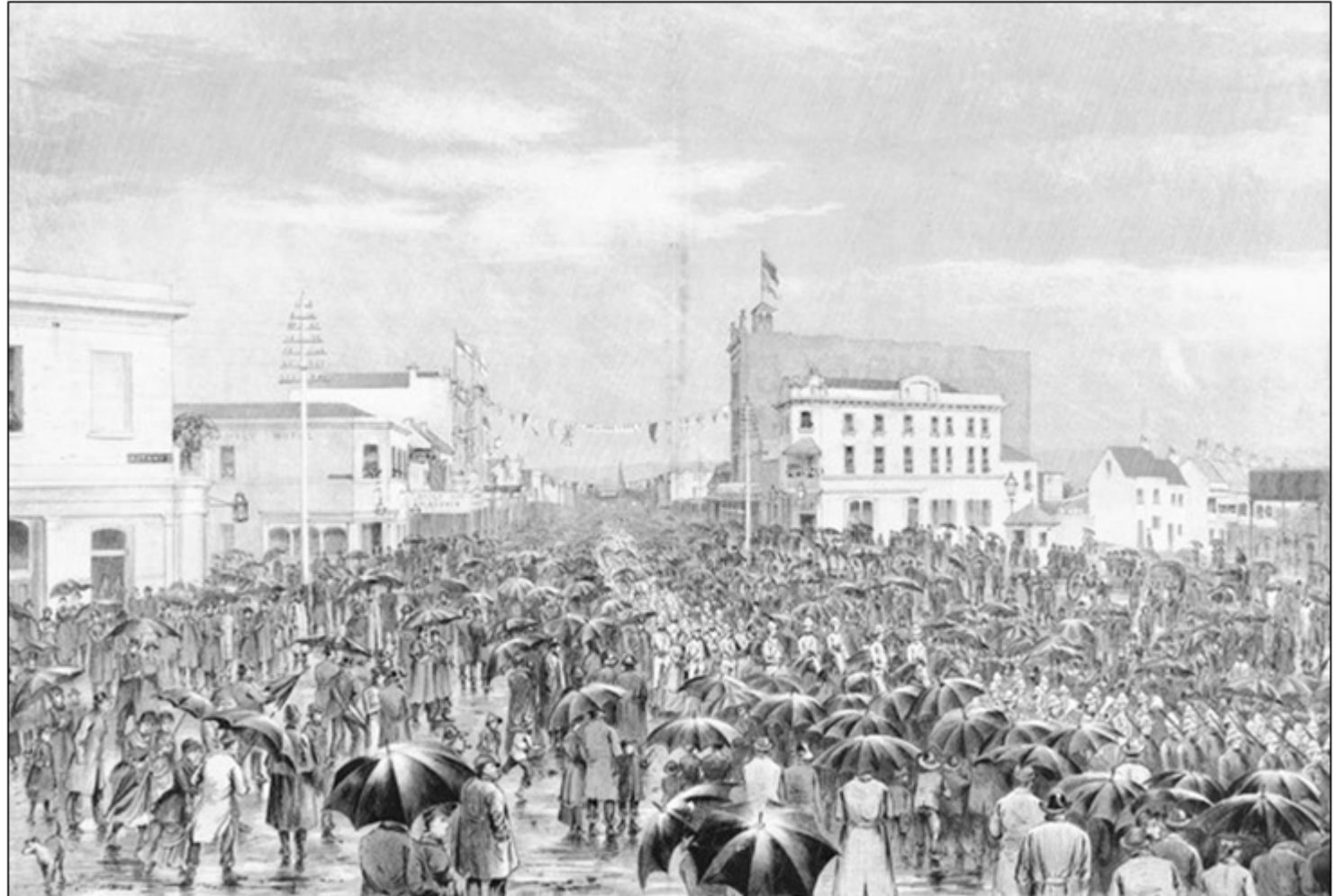
Depicts the troop ship of the New South Wales Contingent, which had been involved in the War in Sudan returning to a wharf crowded with people to welcome them home but the enthusiasm was damped somewhat due to heavy rainfall which continued during the NSW Sudan Contingent's march through Sydney and a Parade held at Victoria Barracks.

Right: The return of the Soudan contingent. Scene in Oxford Street.

AWM ART 94384

By an Unkown Artist the print, a chromolithograph on paper, was commissioned by the *Illustrated Sydney News* as part of a special colour supplement to mark the return of the NSW Contingent from the Sudan on 23 June 1885.

The scene is of Oxford Street, looking west. Hundreds of people turned out to welcome the troops home despite the cold, wet weather. The troops were reportedly still wearing their light cotton Khaki uniforms and were completely drenched marching along Circular Quay, up to Pitt Street, by Hunter, George, Park, College, and Oxford Streets. A planned review at Moore Park was cancelled and instead the men were marched directly to Victoria Barracks, Paddington to a Parade where military and civic leaders gave welcome home speeches.





The geography of the region:

The South African Republic or Transvaal – green.

Orange Free State – orange.

British Cape Colony – blue.

Natal – red.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR – 1899-1902

The second conflict in which members of The First Regiment Infantry participate was during the South African War when it contributed 12 Officers and 91 Other Ranks to the contingents which participated in the South African War

The South African War often referred to as the Boer War or the Second Boer War was fought from 11 October 1899 until 31 May 1902 between the

Origins and background to the South African War

The origins of the war resulted from more than a century of conflict between the Boers and the British Empire, to determine which white nation would control and benefit most from the very lucrative Witwatersrand gold mines – the British or the Dutch.

During the Napoleonic Wars, a British military expedition landed in the Cape Colony and defeated the defending Dutch forces at the Battle of Blaauwberg in 1806.

After the war, the British formally acquired the colony in 1814, and encouraged immigration by British settlers who were largely at odds with the Dutch settlers.

Many Boers who were dissatisfied with aspects of the British administration, in particular with Britain's abolition of slavery on 1 December 1834, elected to migrate away from British rule in what became known as the Great Trek.

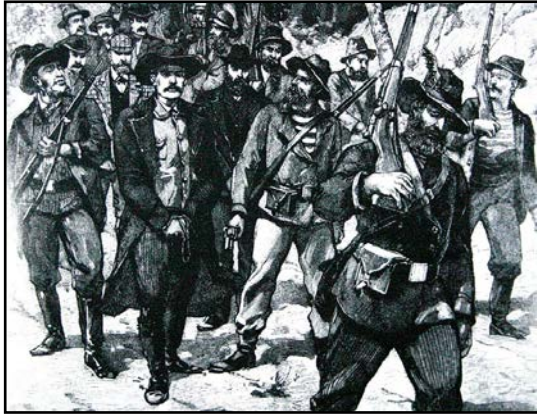
British Empire and the Afrikaans-speaking Dutch settlers of two independent Boer republics, the South African Republic (Transvaal Republic) and the Orange Free State.

It ended with a British victory and the annexation of both republics by the British Empire; both would eventually be incorporated into the Union of South Africa, a dominion of the British Empire, in 1910.

The Boer trekkers initially followed the eastern coast towards Natal and then, after Britain annexed Natal in 1843, journeyed northwards towards the interior. There they established two independent Boer republics. The South African Republic in 1852 which was also known as the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State in 1854. The British recognised the two Boer republics in 1852 and 1854 respectively, but the British annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 led to the First Boer War in 1880–81.

After the British suffered defeats, particularly at the Battle of Majuba Hill in 1881, the independence of the two republics was restored subject to certain conditions, however, relations remained uneasy.

In 1866 Erasmus Jacobs discovered diamonds at Kimberley, prompting a diamond rush and a massive influx of foreigners to the borders of the Orange Free State.



Above: Arrest of Leander Starr Jamieson after the raid.

Petit Parisien 1896

Below: Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger, leader of the South African Republic.



Then in 1886, an Australian discovered gold in the Witwatersrand area of the South African Republic. Gold made the Transvaal the richest and potentially the most powerful nation in southern Africa. However, the country had neither the manpower nor the industrial base to develop the resource on its own.

As a result, the Transvaal reluctantly acquiesced to the immigration of “uitlanders” (foreigners), mainly

The Jameson Raid and the resultant escalation and political maneuverings

British expansionist ideas, notably propagated by Cecil Rhodes, as well as disputes over uitlander political and economic rights resulted in the failed Jameson Raid of 1895. Dr. Leander Starr Jameson, who led the raid, intended to encourage an uprising of the uitlanders in Johannesburg.

However, the uitlanders did not take up arms in support, and Transvaal government forces surrounded the column and captured Jameson's men before they could reach Johannesburg.

As tensions escalated, political maneuverings and negotiations attempted to reach a compromise on the rights of the uitlanders within the South African Republic, control of the gold mining industry, and the British desire to incorporate the Transvaal and the Orange Free State into a federation under British control.

Given the British origins of the majority of uitlanders and the ongoing influx of new uitlanders into Johannesburg, the Boers recognised that granting full voting rights to the uitlanders would

from Britain, who came to the Boer region in search of fortune and employment.

This resulted in the number of uitlanders in the Transvaal gradually exceeding that of the number of Boers, and precipitated confrontations which as time passed became increasingly more acrimonious, bitter and violent between the early Boer settlers and the newer, non-Boer arrivals.

eventually result in the loss of Boer control in the South African Republic.

In June 1899 negotiations between the Boers and the British in Bloemfontein failed. In September 1899 the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, demanded full voting-rights and representation for the uitlanders residing in the Transvaal.

However, Paul Kruger, the President of the South African Republic, issued an ultimatum on 9 October 1899, giving the British government 48 hours to withdraw all their troops from the borders of both the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, failing which the Transvaal, allied to the Orange Free State, would declare war on the British government.

The British government rejected the South African Republic's ultimatum, resulting in the South African Republic and Orange Free State declaring war on Britain.



Above: Members of the NSW Contingent line up in front of a musketry shed.

AWM P06330.001

Below: New South Wales at Vet River

AWM ART19674

One of a series of illustrations reproduced in a book by Frank Wilkinson, *Australia at the front: A colonial view of the Boer War*, it depicts NSW troops advancing on Boer positions on the Vet River.



The three phases of the South African War 1898-1902

The war had three distinct phases.

Phase 1. The Boers mounted pre-emptive strikes into British-held territory in Natal and the Cape Colony, besieging the British garrisons of Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley. The Boers then won a series of tactical victories at Colenso, Magersfontein and Spionkop against the British attempts to relieve the sieges all of which were failures.

Phase 2. After the introduction of greatly increased British troop numbers under the command of Lord Roberts, the British launched a major offensive in 1900 to relieve the sieges, this time achieving success. After Natal and the Cape Colony were secure, the British were able to invade the Transvaal, and the republic's capital, Pretoria, was ultimately captured in June 1900.

Phase 3. In the third and final phase, beginning in March 1900, the Boers launched a protracted and hard-fought guerrilla war against the British forces, lasting a further two years, during which the Boers raided targets such as British troop columns, telegraph sites, railways and storage depots. In an effort to cut off supplies to the raiders, the British, now under the leadership of Lord Kitchener, responded with a scorched earth policy of

destroying Boer farms and moving civilians into concentration camps.

While some parts of the British government and British press expected the campaign to be over within months, the protracted war gradually became less popular, especially after revelations about the conditions in the concentration camps, where 26,000 women and children died of disease and malnutrition.

The Boer forces finally surrendered on Saturday, 31 May 1902, with 54 of the 60 delegates from the Transvaal and Orange Free State voting to accept the terms of the peace treaty. This was known as the Treaty of Vereeniging, and under its provisions, the two republics were absorbed into the British Empire, with the promise of self-government in the future. This promise was fulfilled with the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

The war had a lasting effect on the region and on British domestic politics. For Britain, the Second Boer War was the longest, the most expensive (£200 million), and the bloodiest conflict between 1815 and 1914. It lasted three months longer and resulted in higher British casualties than the Crimean War which lasted from 1853 to 1856.

Australian participation in the South African War – 1899 to 1902.

From 1899 to 1901 the six separate self-governing colonies in Australia sent their own contingents to serve in the Boer War. Much of the population of

the colonies had originated from what were then the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland) and the



Above: Lieutenant Harry Harbord Morant (9 December 1864 – 27 February 1902) was an Anglo-Australian drover, horseman, poet, soldier and war criminal convicted of murder whose skill with horses earned him the nickname "The Breaker". During service in the Boer War, Morant allegedly was the leader in the summary execution of several Boer prisoners and the killing of a German missionary, Daniel Heese, who had been a witness to the shootings. His actions led to his controversial court-martial and execution for murder.

desire to support Britain during the conflict appealed to many. After the colonies formed the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, the new Government of Australia sent "Commonwealth" contingents to the war. The Boer War was thus the first war in which the Commonwealth of Australia fought.

However it must also be noted that a few Australians fought on the Boer side. Prominent among them was a most famous and colourful character, Colonel Arthur Alfred Lynch, formerly of Ballarat, Victoria, who raised the Second Irish Brigade to fight alongside the Boers.

The Australian climate and geography were far closer to that of South Africa than most other parts of the empire, so Australians adapted quickly to the environment, with troops serving mostly among the army's "mounted rifles."

Enlistment in all official Australian contingents totalled 16,463. Another five to seven thousand Australians served in "irregular" regiments raised in South Africa. Perhaps five hundred Australian irregulars were killed. In total, 20,000 or more Australians served and about 1,000 were killed.

A total of 267 died from disease, 251 were killed in action or died from wounds sustained in battle. A further 43 men were reported missing.

When the war began some Australians, like some Britons, opposed it. As the war dragged on more and more Australians became disenchanted, in part because of the sufferings of Boer civilians reported in the press. In an interesting twist (for Australians), when the British missed capturing President Paul Kruger, as he escaped Pretoria during its fall in June 1900, a *Melbourne Punch*, 21 June 1900, cartoon depicted how the War could be won, using the Kelly Gang.

The convictions and executions of two Australian lieutenants, Breaker Morant and Peter Handcock in 1902, and the imprisonment of a third, George Witton, had little impact on the Australian public at the time despite later legend. The controversial court-martial saw the three convicted of executing Boer prisoners under their authority.

After the war, though, Australians joined an empire-wide campaign that saw Witton released from jail. Much later, some Australians came to see the execution of Morant and Handcock as instances of wrongfully executed Australians, as portrayed in the 1980 Australian film *Breaker Morant*.

The Battle Honour SOUTH AFRICA 1899 - 1902 was awarded to all the Colonial pre Federation and post Federation Australian Contingents that took part in the Boer War between 1899 and 1902. It is emblazoned on the Regimental Colour of all the Battalions of The Royal New South Regiment.

Right: Australians and New Zealanders at Klerksdorp, 24 March 1901

by Charles Hammond

AWM ART19564

The furious moment depicted in this painting occurred during an action near Klerksdorp in the Transvaal, about 160 kilometres south-west of Johannesburg, during Lord Metheun's operations in the district after the fall of Klerksdorp itself, against the forces of Boer General De la Rey.

This art work was inspired by an illustration by British military artist R Caton Woodville, which appeared in *The Illustrated London News*.

