

In this edition—N.Z. VC Winners + A small but effective Unit**The Australian Army Veterinary Corps**

The AAVC was a small but essential component of the Australian Army, particularly during World War 1 when horses were the main stay behind the efficiency required for the management of Army logistics. Because the war was fought with the assistance of horses, mules and, in the desert, camels, it was largely through the efforts of the men of the AAVC that Australian contribution to the Allied war machine in WWI was so effective. Prior to Federation, the Colonial Militias relied on voluntary veterinary assistance from men with veterinary experience, qualified or not. After Federation, a 21 person Veterinary Department was established and attached to the new Commonwealth forces.

Twenty-five veterinarians, (not all of them qualified), served in South Africa between 1899 and 1902. Horses and mules were rushed to the Boer War with little consideration to quality and had few veterinary inspections before departure. On arrival they were not given time to acclimatize but were dispatched immediately to the front. The number of deaths was staggering (around 68% perished). This led to inquiries which examined the shortfalls in the Army Remount Service including veterinary matters. The Boer War awoke the country to the fact that it had become difficult to obtain large numbers of good quality remounts in Australia. Japan had purchased 10,000 good horses and a number of stallions, thereby, putting more pressure on the supply of suitable stock and British Army buyers could pay only 12 to 15 pounds. At the same time Indian buyers were in the Australian market looking for quality horseflesh at 20 to 30 pounds. The delivery of sub-standard remounts affected the way the men thought of and cared for their mounts. Many men absolutely hated the ill-bred, bad tempered beasts they were given to ride and care for. The much vaunted devotion of the Digger to his horse is vastly

overstated. It was not until 1911 that NCOs and soldiers were added to the Corps with the task of looking after the sick horses, remounts and Army transport animals, (mules and draught horses). The Remount Branch funded a depot in all States with the main centre being established at Maribyrnong, Melbourne, which also housed a stud farm.

AWM Photo: H 18770
Farriers shoeing horses at the Maribyrnong Remount Depot

By the outbreak of war in 1914, the AAVC consisted of 5 full time and roughly 30 to 40 militia officers, 5 NCOs and not much in the way of influence or equipment. Mobile Veterinary Service Units (AMVS) were established and attached to the Divisional Units heading to the Middle East. A total of 14,873 horses sailed for Egypt in 1914 to join the artillery, infantry and three brigades of Light Horse that comprised the AIF at that time. Another estimated 23,391 horses went overseas between 1914 and 1918.



Horse lines near Amiens showing bomb protection. AWM Photo: EO2432

There was little work for the Veterinary Corps on Gallipoli as the horses remained in Egypt while the Light Horsemen served as infantry on the peninsula. General Birdwood purchased 950 mules for carrying water and donkeys were also used to carry water and ammunition. Later, in Palestine, camels were used extensively to carry supplies to and from the front.

Then there was the Mounted Camel Corps which also needed the services of the Veterinary Corps, although, the riders and the veterinarians rarely



Camel transports. AWM Photo: BO3577

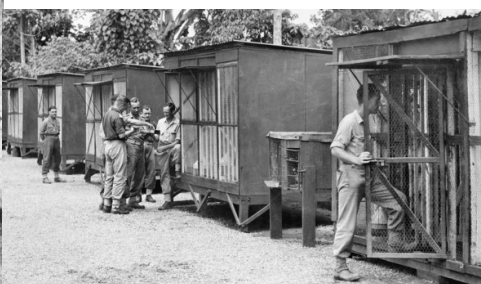
got to understand these animals. Around 4,500 camels were required to move a Division. Camel hospitals were established to handle serious casualties and manage the treatment of camel mange which reached epidemic proportions, however, there was little other sickness among the camels. Horse hospitals and convalescent horse depots were also required to manage the treatment and rehabilitation of sick, wounded and injured animals. There was often friction between veterinary officers and the unit commanders over the mal-treatment of, and lack of care provided to the animals by the men of the regiments. This included the abuse of animals by riders or drivers through unnecessarily overworking them and the trotting of draught horses which was forbidden in France. Once on the Western Front the Veterinary Corps came under pressure as the work load increased due to the rapid increase in the number of units operating on the Somme. The result was that Vet numbers were allocated more sparingly, however, the situation was eased by the added manpower of Sergeant Veterinary Assistants. In addition to overseeing the health and care of the horses and mules, the

AWM Photo: EO23118



Cpl James Coull and his messenger dogs near Villers-Bretonneux

AAVC needed to care for other war animals such as the messenger dogs and the carrier pigeons.



Lofts of the Australian Pigeon company near Lae in New Guinea. AWM Photo: O17485

Due to the destruction of buildings blown up on the Western Front, the AAVC faced a huge problem with horses suffering from “picked up nail” which lamed many. Nail wounds became ulcerated from standing knee deep in the thick mud. Horse and mule casualties became exceedingly high during the period from 1 May 1917 to war’s end in November 1918. In France and Flanders, 51,308 horses and mules were killed and 67,532 were wounded. In April 1917 a state of the art Australian Veterinary Hospital was opened at Calais, France and treated over 25,000 animals during its eighteen months period of operation.

Horse operating theatre at Calais



Awm Photo: EO4439

By the time World War Two arrived the mechanization of transport had made the use of horses practically redundant. With the demise of the Light Horse, the outlook for the AAVC appeared bleak. What had once been considered “the most valuable and useful arm of the entire military, had become, in its last years little more than a military afterthought”. In actual fact, the field force sent overseas by Australia had no place for the Veterinary Corps. The AAVC did, however, provide necessary and valuable support and veterinary supervision to control contagious diseases in the vast expanse of the Northern territory during WWII. The role of the AAVC was prolonged only through the support provided to elements of the Horse Transport Pack Unit in New Guinea. The final sales of Army remounts began in April 1946 and coincided with the closure of Remount Depots and Veterinary Hospitals across Australia. Sadly, by March 1947 the Australian Army Veterinary Corps ceased to exist.

The book “*Forgotten Men, The Australian Army Veterinary Corps 1909—1946*” by Michael Tyquin is cited as the reference source for the information contained in this article.

Why Wear A Poppy *Anon.***POET'S CORNER**

"Please wear a poppy", the lady said,
And held one forth, but I shook my head.
Then I stopped and looked at her soft grey hair
And her face was old and lined with care,
But beneath the scars the years had made
There remained a smile that refused to fade.

A boy came whistling down the street,
Bouncing along on carefree feet.
"Lady", he said, "May I have one?"
When she pinned it on he turned to say
"Why do we wear a poppy to-day?"

The lady smiled in her wistful way
And answered, "This is Remembrance Day
And the poppy there is a symbol for,
The gallant men who died in war;
And because they did, you and I are free,
That's why we wear a poppy, you see.

I had a boy about your size,
With golden hair and big blue eyes,
He loved to play and jump and shout,
Free as a bird he would race about.
As years went by he learned and grew
And became a man, as you will too.

He was fine and strong, with a boyish smile,
But seemed to be with us such a little while,
When war broke out he went away;
I still remember his face that day,
When he smiled at me and said, "Goodbye,
I'll be back soon Mum, so please don't cry"

"But the war went on and he had to stay,
And all I could do was wait and pray.
His letters told of the awful fight
(I see it still in my dreams at night).
With the tanks and guns, and the cruel barbed wire,
And the mines and bullets, the bombs and fire.

Until at last, the war was won,
So that's why we wear a poppy son".
The small boy turned as if to go,
Then said, "Thanks, lady, I'm glad to know,
That sure did sound an awful fight,
But, your son, did he come back alright?

A tear rolled down the faded cheek;
She shook her head, but did not speak,
I slunk away feeling sick with shame,
And if you'd been me you'd have done the same,
For our thanks, in giving, is oft delayed,
Though our freedom was bought—and thousands paid.

And so when you see a poppy worn,
Try to think of burden borne
By those, who gave their very all
When asked to respond to their country's call;
That we, at home, in peace might live,
So, wear a poppy, Remember, and Give!

An answer to McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields."

In Flanders Now *by Edna Jaques*

We have kept faith, ye Flanders dead,
Sleep well beneath the those poppies red
That mark your place.
The torch your dying hands did throw,
We've held it high before the foe,
And answered bitter blow for blow,
In Flanders fields.

And where your heroes' blood was spilled,
The guns are now forever stilled
And silent grown.
There is no moaning of the slain,
There is no cry of tortured pain,
And blood will never flow again,
In Flanders fields.

Forever holy in our sight
Shall be those crosses gleaming white,
That guard your sleep.
Rest you in peace, the task is done,
The fight you left us we have won,
And Peace on Earth has just begun,
In Flanders now.

Tobruk *by Lt. A.G. Austin*

In my cave lives a solitary rat
(A celibate rat I can vouch for that);
He hasn't a mate for miles around
And he lives on what he finds on the ground,
Though the country's such
That that's not much.
I don't like he
And he can't stand me
But we need the roof, so there we be.

In my cave lives a type of flea
(A scurrilous flea believe you me);
And though he's such a tiny thing
His bite is worse than a scorpion's sting.
He lives on rat,
But worse than that
He lives on me,
This scurrilous flea
With all his numerous progeny.

Near my cave lives the octave bird
(The queerest bird you've ever heard);
He sings eight notes as he climbs the scale
Though his topmost note is known to fail.
He's very small
Just like us all.

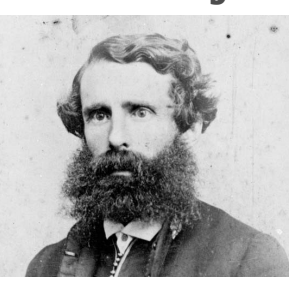
So in we fit though we're cramped a bit -
Old rat, And flea, And bird And me.

These poems have been taken from the book "A Legacy of Poems and Verse" published by the Muswellbrook Legacy.

I thought it appropriate to honour the New Zealand Victoria Cross winners, so I will include a selection for inclusion in the upcoming editions.

There are 23 recipients over a period of 160 years.

Major Charles Heaphy



Major Heaphy, of the Auckland Rifle Volunteers, NZ Militia, was recommended for a VC for after rescuing a soldier under fire at Waiari, near Te Awamutu during an action

on the **11th of February 1864**. Members of the New Zealand colonial forces were supposed to be ineligible for the award, however, Charles Heaphy did receive his award dated, **8th of February 1867**, following a decree by Queen Victoria. Major Heaphy's citation reads "For his gallant conduct at the skirmish on the banks of the Mangapiko River, in New Zealand, on the 11th of February, 1864, in assisting a wounded soldier who had fallen into a hollow among the thickest of the concealed Maories. Whilst doing so, he became the target for a volley at a few feet distant. Five balls pierced his clothes and cap, and he was wounded in three places. Although hurt, he continued to aid the wounded until the end of the day. Major Heaphy was at the time in charge of a party of soldiers of the 40th and 50th Regiments, under the orders of Lieutenant Colonel Sir Henry Marshman Havelock, Bart., C.B., V.V., the Senior Officer on the spot, who had moved rapidly down to the place where the troops were hotly engaged and pressed."

Farrier Sergeant-Major William Hardman

William Hardman was the first New Zealand born recipient of the Victoria Cross. Hardman, a Wellington blacksmith, was serving the 4th NZ Contingent in South Africa when his unit was ambushed by the Boers near Naauwpoort. William rode back to pick up a wounded soldier, helping him to safety under heavy fire. His citation reads, "On the 28th of January 1901, near Naauwpoort, this Non Commissioned Officer was with a section which was extended and hotly engaged

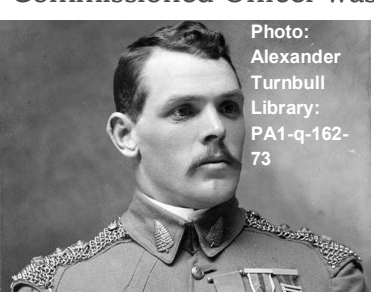


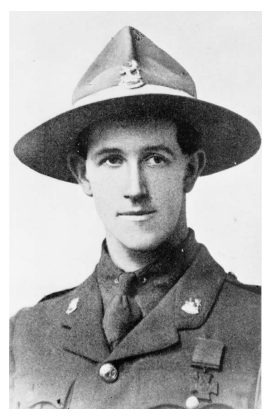
Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library: PA1-q-162-73

with a party of about 20 Boers. Just before the force commenced to retire Trooper McCrae was wounded and his horse killed. Farrier-Major

Hardman at once went under a heavy fire to his assistance, dismounted and placed him on his own horse, and ran along side until he had guided him to a place of safety." William Hardman served as a Captain with the Wellington Mounted Rifles Regiment during WWI and was severely wounded at Gallipoli in 1915.

Corporal Leslie Wilton Andrew

Leslie Andrew was serving with the 2nd Battalion, Wellington Infantry Regiment on the Western Front during WWI and received the VC for his actions on the **31st of July 1917** at La Basseville, near Messines, Belgium. His citation reads, "For most conspicuous bravery when in charge of a small party in an attack on the enemy's position. His objective was a machine gun post which had been located in an isolated building. On leading his men forward he encountered unexpectedly a machine gun post which was holding up the advance of another company; he immediately attacked capturing the machine gun and killing several of the crew. He then continued the attack on the machine post which had been his original objective. He displayed great skill and determination in his disposition, finally capturing the post, killing several of the enemy, and putting the remainder to flight. Cpl. Andrew's conduct throughout was unexampled for cool daring, initiative, and fine leadership, and his magnificent-example was a great



stimulant to his comrades." While his men carried back the captured guns, Corporal Andrew and Private L.R. Richie scouted the area and found another machine gun in a trench. The two men rushed this position, throwing grenades and clearing it before returning to their company.

Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library: 1/2-031680-F

Content for these articles has been sourced from the pages of NZ Victoria Cross winners on the New Zealand Government History website with photos compliments of the Alexander Turnbull Library. More stories in the next "Bugle edition".