



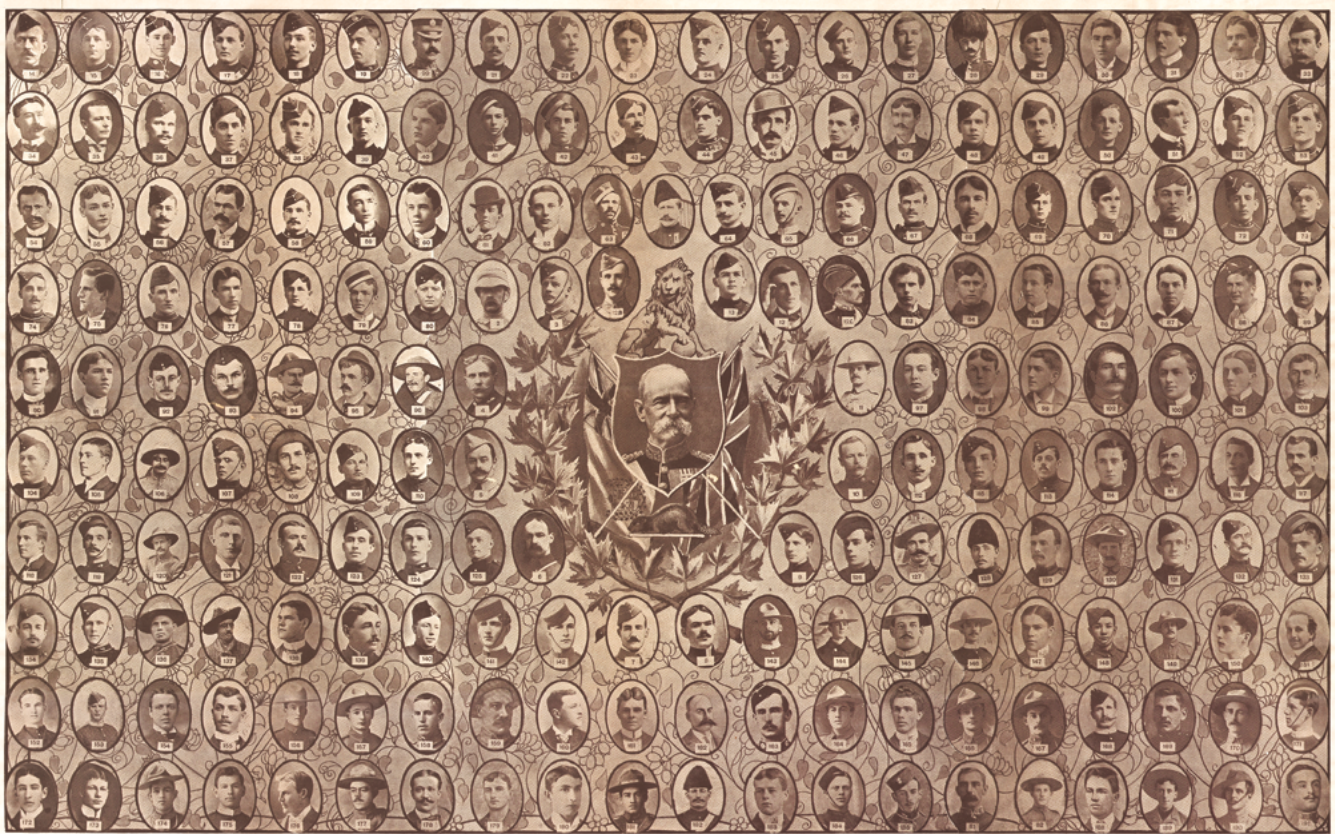
## RESEARCH GUIDES

# Canada in South Africa

Canadian Military Contingents, 1899-1902

The Canadian Scouts, 1900-1902

The South African Constabulary, 1900-1908



**Wartime recruiting poster, *Our Boys In Khaki - Lord Roberts, Commander-In-Chief, And The Heroes Of The Ottawa Valley Who Served In South Africa, 1899-1900***

Ottawa Citizen  
Canadian War Museum  
CWM 19640014-001

# Canada in South Africa

**Canadian Military Contingents, 1899-1902**

**The Canadian Scouts, 1900-1902**

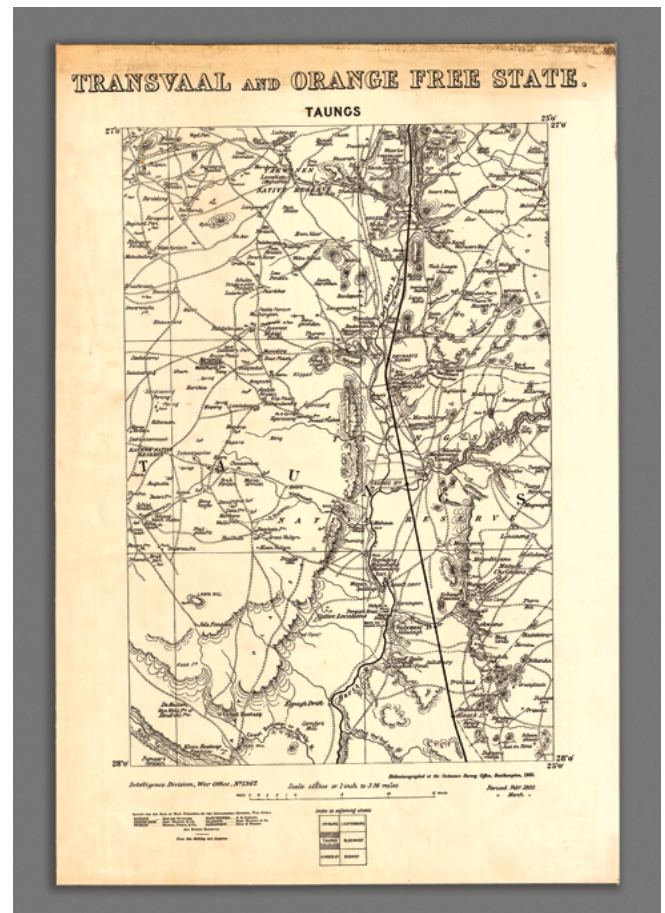
**The South African Constabulary, 1900-1908**

## The Canadian Contribution

By the end of the 19th century, Britain had expanded its territory and influence in South Africa, with the exception of the two Boer republics: the Transvaal Republic (also known as the South African Republic) and Orange Free State. Being of Dutch descent, the Boers rejected British rule, thereby thwarting imperial designs on the southern part of the African continent.

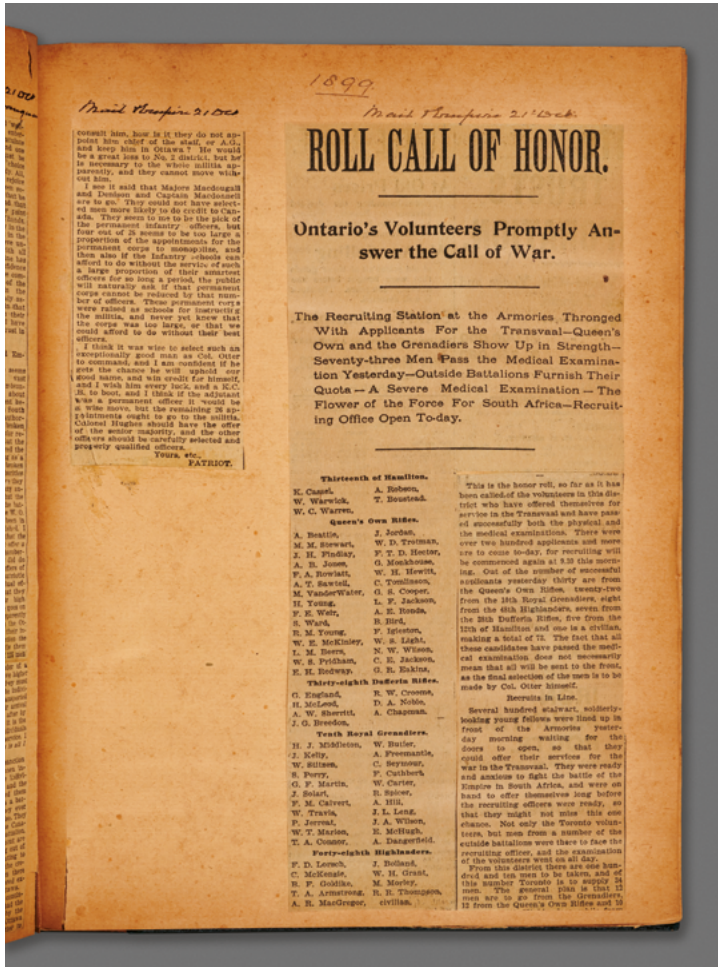
After years of war, strife and escalating tension, Britain declared war on the Boers on October 11, 1899. While the news of war was greeted enthusiastically in parts of English-speaking Canada, Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier was more cautious of alienating Quebec, where support for a British war was not popular. However, imperial enthusiasm carried the day and – on October 14, 1899 – Laurier's government agreed that Canadians could volunteer to serve in South Africa. While Canada assumed all costs for recruiting and paying the volunteers until they reached South Africa, the British government took on all the other costs once they were there, including paying pensions for the families of deceased soldiers or those who were left disabled by war.

South Africa was a distant and exotic corner of the globe in 1899, and it captured the imagination of many Canadians. The South African War was a significant military engagement in that it marked the first time that Canadian volunteers – both soldiers and nurses – served abroad and distinguished themselves alongside their British counterparts, thereby helping to develop a unique Canadian military identity separate from that of the British forces in a sustained campaign.



**Map of Transvaal and Orange Free State prepared by the War Office Intelligence Division**

George Metcalf Archival Collection  
Canadian War Museum  
CWM 19810919-023



**Clipping from General William Dillon Otter's scrapbook collection**

**Recruitment**

General Otter's scrapbooks cover the period of the South African War. They not only show the Canadian enthusiasm but also recount the experience of the Canadian contingent, and many service personnel are named in the clippings.

The scrapbooks are available online, and names can be searched within the PDFs.

George Metcalf Archival Collection  
 Canadian War Museum  
 CWM 19980128-020-010

**“South African War” or “Boer War”?**

When searching for material in our collection, we recommend using the Advanced Search filter “1899-1902 South African War” for the Event field. The South African War has also been called the Boer War, Second Boer War, and Anglo-Boer War by different countries and over time. Searching the keyword “Boer War” will also yield some results. When searching other databases or online, keep these different terms in mind. It is also recommended that you search battle names, e.g., “Driefontein” or “Paardeberg”. Note that Canadians were not involved in the First Boer War of 1880-1881.

# Service

Canada's volunteer force attracted soldiers from the Permanent Force, members of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP), the **militia**, and men with little or no military training. On October 18, 1899, Lieutenant Colonel William D. Otter (1843-1929), a veteran of the Battle of Ridgeway in 1866 and the North-West Resistance in 1885, was placed in command.

Several **units** were raised in Canada, the first of which was the 2nd Special Service Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry, which consisted of about 1,000 men of all ranks, including Permanent Force officers, **militia** members, and volunteers. On October 30, 1899, the Canadians departed Quebec aboard the British passenger and cargo ship, the *SS Sardinian*. The federal government quickly authorized a second contingent – the 1st and 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR). The 1st **CMR** was subsequently renamed the Royal Canadian Dragoons, with two squadrons: "A" Squadron was recruited largely in Toronto and Southern Ontario, while the men of "B" Squadron were mainly from Manitoba and the Maritime provinces. The 2nd **CMR** was then redesignated the 1st **CMR**. It consisted of recruits from the North-West Territories (present-day Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba), including current and former members of the **NWMP**.

In February 1900, the Royal Canadian Field Artillery – which was divided into C, D and E Batteries with about 500 men of all ranks – departed Canada on the *Laurentian* and the *Milwaukee*. Around the same time, Donald Smith, Lord Strathcona (1820-1914), Canada's High Commissioner to Great Britain, offered to raise, equip and transport a cavalry **unit** to South Africa at his own expense. The regiment was recruited in Western Canada in February 1900 and placed under the command of Superintendent Sam Steele (1848-1919) of the **NWMP**. Steele's connection with Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) attracted many veteran mounted policemen.



## Stetson field dress hat worn by Canadian units in South Africa

During the South African War, most Canadian units that served in South Africa wore Stetsons. The hat became firmly identified with the Canadian military presence in South Africa. Ironically, the hat was a product of the American John B. Stetson Company. Stetsons had been worn unofficially by members of the North-West Mounted Police (**NWMP**) since 1895, an increasing number of whom preferred them to the standard-issue white pith helmets. Its adoption for use by Canadian units in South Africa was probably due to the fact that many members of Canada's second contingent were former members of the **NWMP**.

Canadian War Museum  
[CWM 19970017-003](#)

Lord Strathcona's Horse consisted of three squadrons of approximately 28 officers and 512 non-commissioned officers and men. They were assembled in Ottawa by the end of February 1900. On March 17, 1900, they departed Canada on the *Monterey*.

In November 1901, the Canadian Yeomanry – a designation subsequently changed to the 2nd **CMR** – was also authorized for service. The **unit** consisted of six squadrons of some 900 officers and men. While the 2nd **CMR** was being recruited, the 10th Field Hospital (with six officers, 56 other ranks, and 12 nursing sisters) was also organized. These **units** left Canada for South Africa at the end of January 1902 aboard the *Manhattan* and the *Victorian*. They arrived in South Africa in

February 1902 and were the last **units** raised in Canada that saw action in the War, which ended on May 31, 1902.

Further recruiting was authorized in April 1902, and four **units** – designated the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th **CMR** – were mobilized. However, they did not arrive in South Africa before the War ended – a fact that has a direct bearing on the types of records a researcher will find for the men who served in these **units**.



### **Georgina Fane Pope**

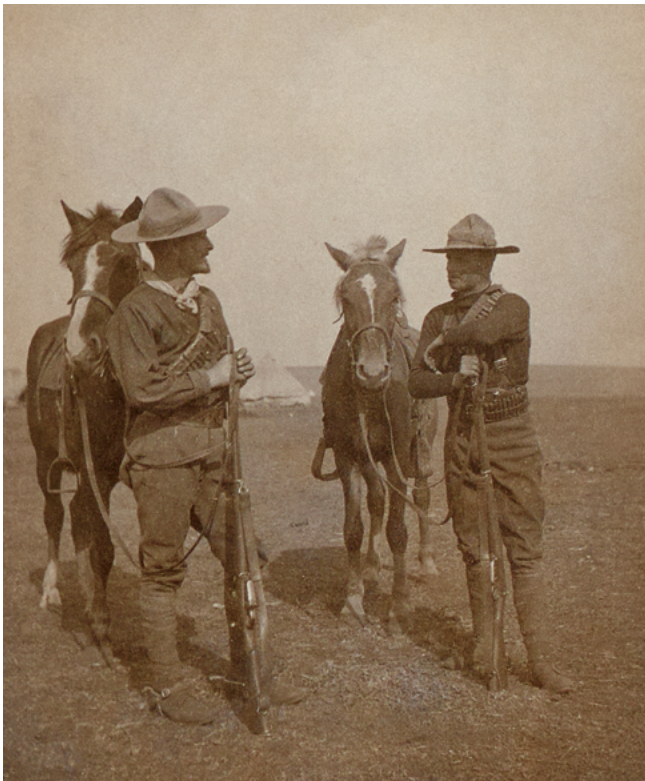
A studio portrait photograph of Cecily Jane Georgina Fane Pope (1862-1938), the first matron of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, photographed by Harry J. Moss (1899-1902). Pope volunteered to go overseas to South Africa with the Canadian contingent. Pope was appointed to the rank of Superintendent Nurse of the First Contingent. She served with the British Army in Cape Town and returned to Canada on December 13, 1900.

George Metcalf Archival Collection  
Canadian War Museum  
[CWM 19830041-182](#)

## Canadian units in South Africa

- The 2nd Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment
- The Royal Canadian Dragoons
- 1st Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles
- Brigade Division, Royal Canadian Field Artillery
- Lord Strathcona's Horse
- 2nd Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles
- 10th Canadian Field Hospital
- 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th Regiments, Canadian Mounted Rifles
- The Canadian Scouts
- The South African Constabulary
- 3rd (Special Service) Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry

More information about the Canadian units and the South African War can be found on the War Museum's [website](#).



### Infantrymen alongside their horses

George Metcalf Archival Collection  
Canadian War Museum  
[CWM 19650036-003](#)

## South African Constabulary

Service with the military contingents is not to be confused with those who went to South Africa as members of the South African Constabulary (**SAC**). As the name suggests, the **SAC** was a police force under British Army control. The **SAC** attracted about 1,500 men from Canada, many of whom were current or former members of the **NWMP**. Unlike the military contingents, the **SAC** continued as an active **unit** in South Africa until 1908, although its numbers had decreased by then, as many members had returned to Canada over the years.

The **SAC** was funded and controlled by the British Army, so its service records are held in the [National Archives of South Africa](#). However, the Library and Archives Canada (**LAC**) database on the South African War, 1899–1902 (see below) may contain information on some **SAC** members.

For a more accessible source of information on the SAC, see Jim Wallace, *No Colours, No Drums: Canadians in the South African Constabulary* (Calgary, AB: Bunker to Bunker Publishing, 2003).

Sir Samuel Steele's archive at the University of Alberta also includes information about the operations of the SAC and its members, particularly officers, which can be found at [The Sir Samuel Steele Collection](#).

## Canadian Scouts, 1900-1902

Canadian in name only, the Scouts were an irregular mounted unit in South Africa organized by the British in late 1900. The Scouts had no official connection with the Canadian military contingent or the SAC, although they became known for their Colt machine gun sections. About one-quarter of its members had Canadian connections, including men who had once served in the military contingents, but it was not "Canadian" in any other sense of the word.

For a history of the Scouts, including a nominal roll, honours and awards, and names of casualties, see Jim Wallace, *Knowing No Fear: The Canadian Scouts in South Africa, 1900-1902* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2008). Additional information on the Canadian Scouts can be found on the South Africa Units section of the [Anglo Boer War website](#).

LAC's [South African War, 1899-1902 - Service Files, Medals and Land Applications](#) is a searchable database, but it is not comprehensive. While there are no service records for the officers or nurses who served in the War, there are references to their medals and land grants (if they applied for one).

In addition to the database, searching for an individual by name in LAC's "[Collection Search](#)" may also yield results. Both during and for many years after the War, veterans and next of kin contacted the Department of Militia and Defence to request replacement medals and duplicate discharge certificates or to inquire about pensions and other matters.

As mentioned above, both active members and former members of the NWMP served in the military contingents, the SAC, and the Canadian Scouts. Mounted police personnel records are available through LAC (R196-158-9, RG 18-G, volumes 3318 to 3465, 4835 to 4860). Some NWMP service files are available through Canadiana Héritage (microfilm reels T-18201 to T-18242).

# Land Grants

Land grants were made available as a form of award for service to veterans of the South African War. In 1901, both Ontario and British Columbia offered land grants. In 1908, the federal government enacted similar legislation to award 320 acres to these veterans.



## A land grant of 161 acres given to nurse Cecily Jane Georgina Fane Pope in Nesbitt, Ontario for her service in the South African War.

George Metcalf Archival Collection  
Canadian War Museum  
[CWM 20020108-004](#)

In April 1901, Ontario enacted its own legislation to provide land grants of 160 acres to veterans of the South African War, their next of kin, and others, including nursing sisters, journalists, and members of the Volunteer Militia who served during the Fenian Raids of 1866. Records at the [Archives of Ontario \(AO\)](#) include applications by South African War volunteers and Fenian Raid veterans (AO, RG 1-99-2, microfilm reel MS 554); land grant files (AO, RG 1-99-4, boxes 1 to 4); miscellaneous correspondence and applications (AO, RG1-99-6, boxes 1 to 4); registers of Fenian and South African volunteer land grants that include the name of the veteran, their rank and unit, and information on the location of the grant, i.e., lot, concession, township, and number of acres (AO, RG 1-99-8, microfilm reels MS8007 to MS8009); and land descriptions, Veteran's Grants (RG 1-53, boxes K129 to K133).

British Columbia followed Ontario's lead and in May 1901, legislation provided South African War veterans with 160 acres of provincial land. Lists of applications can be found in the [British Columbia Archives](#) in series GR-1173 and GR-1396.

In July 1908, the federal government passed the *Volunteer Bounty Act*, which awarded a grant of two adjoining quarter sections of 160 acres of Dominion land in Western Canada (primarily in the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan) to all veterans of the War or \$160 in scrip in lieu of a land grant. The latter could be redeemed by the bearer at face value for any purchase of Dominion land.

All South African War veterans were eligible for the land grants, including those who had served with British forces, the SAC, or with the Canadian units that arrived in South Africa after the War. All applicants were required to complete an application identifying themselves, listing their current address and occupation, and summarizing their service in South Africa, including their unit, service dates, and place of residence when they enlisted.

This information is particularly useful for veterans who have no service record and for those who served in the SAC. Members of the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th CMR – most of whom did not see any action in the War – were also eligible for the land grant. Note that next of kin, including widows, parents and siblings of those who were killed in action, who died during the War, or who died after the War (until 1909), were also eligible for a grant. Records are held at LAC and include the following:

**Land Grant Applications  
(RG 38, volumes 117 to 133, 136)**

The original grant applications – numbered from 1 to 7,370 – are indexed on the “[Soldiers of the South African War, 1899-1902](#)” database. However, digital images of the applications are only available through [Ancestry.ca](#). Note that applications 602 to 1,200 are missing from the collection, but the relevant index books provide some information for these applicants.

**South African War, Land Grant Applications - Indexes (RG 38, volumes 134 and 135)**

The original indexes to the South African War land grant applications consist of several softcover index books labelled, “South Africa Service Land Claims.” The indexes have been digitized but not indexed and are available through [Ancestry.ca](#). They include the application number, applicant’s full name, corps or unit in which they served, rank, and address at the time of application. The indexes may contain information not recorded in a soldier’s service documents.

**Department of the Interior, Volunteer Bounty, Land Certificates and Warrants (R190-64-7, RG 15-D-II-9-h, volumes 1645 to 1646, 3237 to 3238, 3298 to 3299)**

These records consist of land certificate stubs 1 to 7,428, with the name of the applicant, location of the land, date and military warrant number, alphabetical index to grantees or substitutes, and a register of warrants, 1 to 7,370.

# Medals

The Queen's South Africa Medal was authorized in 1900 and awarded to all those who served in South Africa between October 11, 1899 and May 31, 1902. Up to 26 bars or clasps denoting specific battles or campaigns were awarded with the Medal, although Canadian recipients (primarily those who served with the military contingents) were most likely to receive one or more of the following: Cape Colony, Orange Free State, Johannesburg, Belfast, Transvaal, Natal, or Driefontein. An estimated 3,860 medals were issued to Canadians.



**The Queen's South Africa Medal with Transvaal, Orange Free State, and Cape Colony bars, and the King's South Africa Medal with South Africa 1902 and South Africa 1901 bars.**

Canadian War Museum  
CWM 20200071-002

The King's South Africa Medal was awarded to all those who served on or after January 1, 1901 and who completed 18 months of service before June 1, 1902. Two bars were awarded to this medal – South Africa 1901 and South Africa 1902. This Medal was always issued with the Queen's South Africa Medal, never by itself, and Canadians who received the Medal were always granted both bars. You can see many examples of the medals in the [Canadian War Museum's database](#) by searching "[South Africa, medal](#)" and applying the filter "Artifacts."

The original British War Office medal rolls for the Canadian contingents, the SAC, and the Canadian Scouts are available on [Ancestry.ca](#) and may contain additional information on individuals. Search the catalogue for "UK, Military Campaign Medal and Award Rolls, 1793-1949" and follow these steps in the drop-down box: Africa - South Africa, 1899-1902 - Overseas Colonial Contingents - Canada and Canadian Scouts, West India Regiment. The original records are held by the National Archives of the United Kingdom, TNA reference, War Office 100/287.

For gallantry awards, including the Victoria Cross, the Distinguished Service Order, the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and Mentioned in Despatches, LAC's "[Military Medals, Honours and Awards, 1812-1969](#)" database is searchable by name, but the citation cards are available only through [Ancestry.ca](#) by searching "Canada Military Collections - Canada, Military Honours and Awards Citation Cards, 1900-1961."

# Casualties

There were some 290 Canadian deaths – military, SAC and Scouts – from all causes, including enemy action, wounds and illness. It is important to remember that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is not responsible for maintaining graves in South Africa. If you are looking for information on Canadians who died during the War, including the SAC and Canadian Scouts, the [Canadian Virtual War Memorial](#) may include

photographs, newspaper clippings, and other documentation relating to individuals who died or were killed during their service in South Africa. [The South African War Book of Remembrance](#) can also be accessed on the site. Many Canadian cities erected monuments to those who served and never came home, and some list the names of soldiers from the community who were killed.

## Images of the South African War

The Canadian War Museum has digitized all its South African War photo albums and made them available online on the [Search the Collection](#) page. Simply use the search term “South Africa albums” or “South Africa album.”

# Further Reading and Research

The Department of Militia and Defence published two substantial reports on the Canadian contingents' involvement in the War, including information on the recruitment of the various **units**, nominal rolls, **casualties**, lists of those who remained in South Africa, extracts from **unit** war diaries, final reports of Commanding Officers, and more. See the following: *Supplementary Report of the Department of Militia and Defence: Organization, Equipment, Despatch and Service of the Canadian Contingents During the War in South Africa, 1899-1900* (Canada, Sessional Papers, 1901, volume 12, no. 35a) and *Supplementary Report of the Department of Militia and Defence: Organization, Equipment, Despatch and Service of the Canadian Contingents During the War in South Africa, 1899-1902* (Sessional Papers, 1903, volume 13, no. 35a). Sessional Papers can be accessed through the [Internet Archive](#) or [Canadiana Héritage](#).

The Canadian contribution to the South African War and its impact on Canada are described in two books by Carman Miller: *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montréal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) and *Canada's Little War* (Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company, 2003). Also useful are Desmond Morton's *The Canadian General: Sir William Otter* (Toronto, ON: Hakkert, 1974); Brian Reid's *Our Little Army in the Field: The Canadians in South Africa, 1899-1902* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 1996); and Rod Macleod's *Sam Steele: A Biography* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2018) about Sam Steele and the SAC.



**Photograph Album Depicting the South African Constabulary**

Scrapbooks and photo albums were popular and can have valuable information. Some photo albums include captions, which sometimes even name individuals.

George Metcalf Archival Collection  
 Canadian War Museum  
 CWM 20030286-002

Contemporary books should not be overlooked, including the following: L.S. Amery, *The Times History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, 7 volumes (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Company, 1900-1909); S.M. Brown, *With the Royal Canadians* (Toronto, ON: Publishers' Syndicate, 1900); William Sanford Evans, *The Canadian Contingents and Canadian Imperialism: A Story and a Study*

(Toronto, ON: Publishers' Syndicate, 1901); William Hart-McHarq, *From Quebec to Pretoria* (Toronto, ON: William Briggs, 1902); G. Russell Hubly, *G Company, or, Everyday Life of the RCR: Being a descriptive account of typical events in the life of the First Canadian Contingent in South Africa* (Saint John, NB: J. & A. McMillan, 1901); Gaston Labat, *Le Livre d'Or of the Canadian Contingents in South Africa*

(Montréal, QC: 1901); T.G. Marquis, [Canada's Sons on Kopje and Veldt](#) (Toronto, ON: Canada's Sons Publishing Company, 1900); and E.W.B. Morrison, [With the Guns in South Africa](#) (Hamilton, ON: 1901).

In addition to the books listed above, researchers should also be familiar with the following commemorative publications and contemporary histories, which may include nominal rolls; descriptions of **casualties**; lists of names specific to a city, town or geographic area; and, in some cases, biographical information: *Canadians in Khaki: South Africa, 1899-1902* (Montréal, QC: 1900); *Ottawa's Heroes: Portraits and Biographies of the Ottawa Volunteers Killed in South Africa* (Ottawa, ON: 1900);

*Souvenir: Toronto's Contingent of Volunteers for Service in the Anglo-Boer War* (Toronto, ON: 1899); Daniel Johnson and Bryon O'Leary, *The South African War, 1899-1902: New Brunswick Men at War* (Saint John, NB: 2000); Annie E. Mellish, *Our Boys Under Fire, or, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island Volunteers in South Africa* (Charlottetown, PEI: Charlottetown Examiner, 1900); and *Old Boys at War, 1899-1902, 1914-1918, 1939-1945* (Port Hope, ON: Trinity College School, 1945). These books are available through the Canadian War Museum's Military History Research Centre or online through [Canadiana](#).

## Canadian War Museum Resources

The Military History Research Centre (MHRC) at the Canadian War Museum houses the Hartland Molson Library Collection and the George Metcalf Archival Collection, both of which can be searched online through the MHRC catalogues. As mentioned above, **unit** histories are excellent resources that often include honour rolls, biographies, and lists of **casualties**, usually with additional details. They can also provide important information on the

battles, group culture, photographs, and individuals identified. The library also has information about uniforms and equipment. The Museum's archives are predominantly personal in nature and can add an intimate perspective to service. Additionally, the Museum's library holds all the printed references noted in this guide, where visitors can see the original reports along with campaign maps from the time.

# Key Vocabulary

## Casualty

Typically means war dead, wounded, missing or sick. Note that statistics and casualty figures can vary widely depending on the inclusion/exclusion criteria and the accuracy of record-keeping.

## Unit

An encompassing term that refers to any organized group that an individual could be assigned or attached to, including numbered squadrons, training schools, or depots.

## Militia

A “non-standing” military unit whose personnel are civilian soldiers and are not professional soldiers by trade. The Department of Militia and Defence was created in 1869 to be responsible for Canada’s military. Many of the soldiers and the units that existed as militia units at this time became permanent force soldiers and regiments in response to events such as the North-West Resistance and the South African War.

With thanks to guest contributor Glenn Wright, former archivist at LAC.

© Canadian War Museum, 2026.