

# Duo's valour marks war service



Lieutenant Guy Wyllie survived both the Boer War and World War I.

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The story of two Boer War soldiers shows how Tasmanians are to the fore in serving their country, writes GUY BARNETT.

**T**HE 110 year anniversary of the Boer war is the theme of Reserve Forces Day being commemorated in Tasmania today.

The Boer War was the first conflict in which Australian forces were involved on behalf of our nation.

The British had imperial ambitions and the Dutch-Afrikaner settlers, known as Boers, maintained a wary co-existence for much of the 1800s in southern Africa.

But the attraction of newly discovered gold and diamonds led to war in 1899 and the Australian colonies offered troops to support the "mother country", Britain.

By the time war ended in 1902, at least 16,000 Australians had served on behalf of our six colonies and post-January 1, 1901, our nation and many more joined British and South African units.

More than 600 paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Six Australians received the highest award for bravery in wartime, the Victoria Cross, including two Tasmanians, Trooper John Bisdee and Lieutenant Guy Wyllie.

Both these Tasmanians have the distinction of being the first Australian-born soldiers to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

Southern Midlands Mayor Tony Bisdee, a relative of Trooper Bisdee, will present medallions to the many other descendants of those Tasmanians who fought in the Boer war in commemoration of their service at the Reserve Forces Day parade this Sunday.

In all, Tasmania contributed 857 men to serve the British Empire.

Thirty-eight died, about half in battle and the others from disease.

Trooper Bisdee received his VC for action on September 1, 1900.

The citation for his award reads: "Bisdee and other members of the advance scouting party were ambushed by Boers in a rocky defile.

"Six of the party of eight were hit including two officers, Major Brooke and Lieutenant Wyllie.

"Brooke's horse had bolted so Bisdee dismounted, put the officer on his own horse and, despite being seriously wounded, ran alongside, then mounted behind him and withdrew under heavy fire."

Bisdee recovered his health, continued serving in the war, returned to Tasmania and subsequently joined the Australian Light Horse, training at Mona Vale, Ross, before serving again, this time in World War I in Egypt.

Bisdee, who attended the Hutchins School, survived both wars and returned to his farm in Southern Tasmania.

He rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel during World War I and was also mentioned in dispatches three times. He was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire in June 1919. He was discharged from the AIF in May 1920.

Likewise Wyllie, who was born in Hobart, survived both the Boer War and World War I, where he fought in France.

Thirteen of Australia's 98 Victoria Cross winners are from Tasmania.

(Other Australians have been nominated for consideration to receive a posthumous Victoria Cross and they include two Tasmanians, being navy personnel Teddy Sheean and Dick Emms. The Defence Honours Awards & Appeals Tribunal is expected to make a recommendation later this year.)

Recognising the service and sacrifice of these brave men and all who served is important.

Those who serve as reserves in the Australian army, navy or air force should also be recognised

and the special parade and celebration in their honour helps to achieve this.

Tasmania punches way above its weight when it comes to reservists, hosting over 800, or four times as many reservists as the 208 full-time paid defence personnel, whereas nationally there are 78,000 — or three times more — defence personnel than the 25,000 reservists.

Reservists are well trained and educated in their discipline with regular commitments throughout the year at their various barracks such as Anglesea, in Hobart, Paterson, in Launceston, Kokoda, in Devonport, and many other locations around the state.

Anglesea Barracks is celebrating its 200-year anniversary this year.

They also play an important role overseas.

For example, an 80-strong contingent of reservists was deployed to the Solomon Islands for four months, returning to Australia in early April, 2011.

This year the family — and in particular the wife, husband, mother or father of a serving or former reservist — will be acknowledged with special recognition and a unique memorial medallion.

The Reserve Forces Day Parade and celebration is being held at 20 locations around Australia.

A parade was held in Launceston on June 24 and another will be held in Hobart today thanks to the leadership of the Reserve Forces Day Council and its chairman, Denis Bignold.

Guy Barnett is a former Tasmanian Senator and is a member of the RFDC (Tasmania) committee.

Trooper John Bisdee, who rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel during World War I after serving in the Boer War.

