

The Australian Army Veterinary Corps

Before 1897 all veterinary surgeons in the Australian Army had been British. In 1897 the first graduates from the Melbourne Veterinary College joined as volunteers and included EA Kendall, a son of WT Kendall. On 11 October 1899, the South African War commenced. During the war 16,715 men from Australia served. Twenty-five of these were veterinarians, including 15 Melbourne graduates. A total of 16,000 horses were sent; none returned.

After Federation the colonial armies were transferred to the Commonwealth Military Forces. The position of veterinarians in the Army was consolidated within a Veterinary Department. In 1909 the Veterinary Department became the Australian Army Veterinary Corps.

At the commencement of World War 1, mounted units, transport and artillery brigades were quickly enlisted, horses purchased and veterinarians appointed. The first contingent of the Australian Imperial Force, consisting of 20,000 men, 7500 horses and 19 Veterinary Officers, left on 1 November 1914 in 38 ships. On 4 December, the contingent disembarked in Alexandria, Egypt. After the evacuation of Gallipoli, the first five Australian Army Divisions were reorganised and sent to the Western Front in France, while the Light Horse Regiments remained in Egypt and went to fight in the Sinai and Palestine.

125 veterinarians of whom 95 were graduates of either Melbourne or Sydney Veterinary Schools served overseas. During the War, 121,000 horses were exported from Australia and only one returned. Horses were a vital means of transport in the War but were gradually replaced by mechanised units in the post-war army.

The AAVC continued to function in Australian Militia Forces from 1919 through the Second World War until 1946 when it became redundant.

The AAVC was an integral part of the Australian Army from its formation in 1909 until its demise in 1946. The veterinary members served Australia over this time in peace and in wars by providing expertise and a high standard of professionalism. The names of those who served in World War 1 are displayed on the Roll of Honour Boards at Melbourne and Sydney Veterinary Schools.

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