

THE GOLDFIELDS RIFLE ASSOCIATION

by David Birkbeck

The NRA of WA was officially formed on 12 July 1901, but the movement only received publicity on 3 August, when a delegation went to see Sir John Forrest to "outline their requirements". Sir John, Minister for Defence in the new Federal government, had big plans for rifle clubs, however, some time was to elapse before these came to fruition. The most important aspect of the delegation was; it was the first time that most prospective riflemen had heard of the association's existence.



The Final Shots Kalgoorlie King's 1906

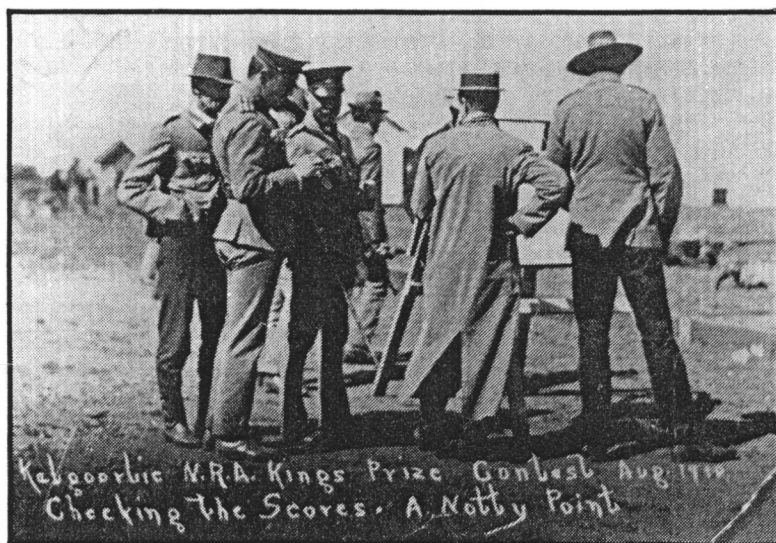
On 7 August 1901, a group of residents in remote South Perth met to form a rifle club, the secretary of the NRA of WA addressed the meeting and also advised them that the association would soon have a seventy target rifle range. The range, of course, was never built, however, the association was able to assist South Perth to acquire land for a range, they did likewise for the Swan Rifle Club which formed at Guildford a few weeks later.

None of this was enough to dispel the doubts that an association had really been formed, and there were more than a few sceptics around when the claim was made that five clubs existed in the metropolitan area, and, that a prize meeting would be held in a few months, on a range four miles from Perth. In October 1901, Frank Wilson MLC, who also happened to be Chairman of the NRA of WA, rose in state parliament and moved that for the good of the state, rifle clubs ought to be encouraged. Everyone concurred and that was that.

In short not a lot was happening, the situation is best summed up by a letter that appeared in the newspaper in November 1901, which read in part; 'Can you or anyone else inform me when rifle clubs are going to commence in Western Australia. Day after day and month after month we are waiting for the above until we tired of looking

in vain over your paper for some advertisement in connection with rifle shooting. The Eastern States papers are full of rifle shooting day after day and rifle shooting is the greatest pastime in the East, but not so here.....Now, who is to blame? Why does not the Acting Commandant get to work and get targets up like they are doing all over the Eastern States? Have not the federal defence force regulations reached here?'

Rifle shooting may not have been making much progress in the coastal areas, but on the goldfields, it was booming. Due in part to the number of riflemen who had come to W.A. for the goldrushes from overseas and the eastern states, as well as, the relative ease with which land could be secured for ranges.



Checking the Scores Kalgoorlie King's 1910

A number of goldfields clubs had written to the NRA of WA paying their affiliation fees and had received what were, in their minds, unsatisfactory or no replies at all.

Taking particular note in this regard were the members of the Menzies Rifle Club. At that time Menzies had already been in existence for several years, and is credited by the 'West Australian' as being the oldest rifle club in Western Australia. Rifle shooting certainly was a popular sport in the town, as demonstrated by the fact that it had two ranges, an eight target

civilian range and a range used exclusively by the volunteers.

In December 1901, Menzies called a meeting of the goldfields clubs for the purpose of forming a rifle association for Western Australia. In their opinion no such association had as yet been properly formed, and as far as the NRA of WA was concerned, they advocated that it be ignored, however, the other clubs present at the meeting, Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie and Brown Hill, all spoke in favour of a Goldfields Rifle Association only, and this was the view that prevailed.

Apart from the clubs who attended the meeting at Menzies, delegates were appointed to the council from the Boulder, Trump, Kookynie, Lawlers and Mulline Rifle Clubs. In addition, Leonora, Morgans and Mertondale were asked to nominate delegates. So, in the space of twelve months Western Australia last cab off the rank amongst the states when it came to forming rifle clubs, finished with two rifle associations, each totally independent of the other.

The first priority of the new associations was to organise a prize meeting, this was duly held at Menzies during Coronation Week 1902, between the 24th and 27th of June, Intending competitors were given half fares on

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continued from previous page

the railway, amongst the riflemen taking advantage of the fares was a team from the Perth Rifle Club. Perth at that time was a fairly new club, having been formed in December 1901, and holding it's first competition on 29 May 1902.

Nevertheless they were experienced marksmen. One member of the team was Richard Greaves, who had been involved in rifle shooting for thirty years, nor, was he a stranger to the goldfields, being the first man to discover gold on the Yilgarn. Another member of the team, Martin Lloyd, was later to make a name for himself in 1903 as the first representative from W.A. at Bisley.

The championship of the Menzies meeting was held over the first two days and comprised the "Kitchener" (seven shots at 200 and 300 yards), the "Menzies" (ten shots at 500 yards), and the "King's" (ten shots at 600 yards). The third day was given over to a "Nursery" match for tyros, fired over 400 yards, and a team shoot. The team shoot was won by Coolgardie from Kalgoorlie, Perth, Leonora and Menzies. Only one match was scheduled for the final day, a ten shot match at 1000 yards.

Winner of the Championship was R.G. Ferguson of the Perth Rifle Club. Apart from being a fine shot, Ferguson was an extremely able administrator who worked tirelessly towards establishing the sport of rifle shooting in this state, so much so that his contemporaries referred to him as "the father of Western Australian shooting". A member of a prominent shooting family (his uncle won the Queen's at Wimbledon, and his father became the first man to win a badge in every state when he visited W.A. for the 1902 King's) Ferguson convened the meeting which formed the Perth Rifle Club and was instrumental in arranging for the civilian clubs to use the government range at Karrakatta which became the headquarters range in the metropolitan area. A few weeks prior to the Menzies prize meeting he was elected secretary of the NRA of WA, and whilst in Menzies he began talks aimed at amalgamating the two associations.

Back in Perth, a meeting was held to discuss the most advantageous basis on which this could be done. According to the agreement worked out, the Goldfields Rifle Association became the NRA Goldfields Branch, and retained its own executive. The federal monetary grant which was given to promote rifle shooting in this state was split between the two associations and the state was divided into two halves. All clubs west

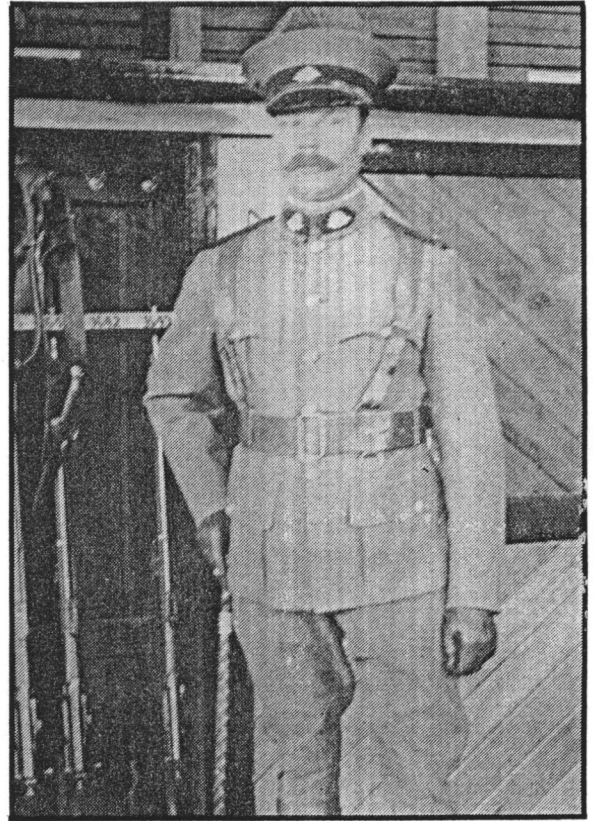
of the 119th meridian were to be controlled by the NRA of WA, and to the east by the NRA Goldfields Branch. Both associations retained the right to hold their own prize meetings, the reason why there were two King's Prize Meeting held in this state each year until 1910.

At the time of the amalgamation, R.G. Ferguson released a list of affiliated clubs, which may be of interest. They were as follows; Metropolitan Police, Coolgardie, Bridgetown, South Perth, Pingelly, Swan (Guildford), Norseman, Beverley, Fremantle, Marble Bar, Perth, Greenbushes, Leonora, Brown Hill, Mornington Mills, Mt Morgans, Boulder and Day Dawn.

This was not the sum total of clubs in W.A. at that time as a comparison with the list of goldfields clubs shows. Several other clubs had already been formed and a number of others were in the process of forming. One example was the Esperance Club which complained that although they had sent their affiliation fees, they had not been included on the list, an oversight that was soon remedied by Ferguson.

Almost immediately after the amalgamation there were problems. It seems that the NRA of WA saw itself as the parent body with the Goldfields Association as a subsidiary organisation. On the other hand the Goldfields Association saw the arrangement a being one between two equals. One result, which caused some bitterness, was that goldfields shooters desiring to enter the Karrakatta King's in 1902 were compelled to pay an extra affiliation fee to the NRA of WA, whereas riflemen from the coast who shot in the Kalgoorlie King's were not required to affiliate with the local association. There was also constant friction over the federal monetary grant. Finally in 1905, the agreement broke down completely and was revoked by the NRA of WA.

Thanks once again to R.G. Ferguson, talks were soon held to resolve the differences between the two associations and in January 1906 a new constitution was adopted. This was



*W.R. Annear Secretary
Goldfields Rifle Association 1906*

written by Ferguson and revised by W.R. Annear, secretary of the Goldfields Association, a pillar of the movement in that area. Annear was destined to be the first Australian officer killed at the Gallipoli landing, and perhaps the first of the 598 members of the W.A.R.A. who died in the Great War.

The 1906 constitution divided the state into the "Coastal" and "Inland" branches of the NRA of WA which thereafter became a single body with one executive council. The council had control over all matters apart from prize meetings. This was not a particularly satisfactory arrangement either, and in 1910 a new constitution was adopted which introduced the present system of district associations, or unions as they were called then. Originally the goldfields were divided into two unions. The Eastern Goldfields with its headquarters at Kalgoorlie and the Northern Goldfields with its headquarters at Leonora. The two were amalgamated in 1915.

When the Goldfields Rifle Association was formed, the idea was that each affiliated club would hold the annual prize meeting in turn, and in 1903, Kalgoorlie extended its range out to twenty targets for the event, thus making it the largest in the state at that time. The expense incurred was too great for clubs to outlay if such facilities were to lie practically idle for five or six years at a time. Consequently the King's remained at

Kalgoorlie. Incidentally, the range in those days was described as being located beyond Lamington Heights on the western side of the Menzies Railway. Later the King's was held at the Commonwealth Range.

From 1910 the King's alternated between Kalgoorlie and Perth, except in 1914 Kalgoorlie missed its turn when the Army recalled all ammunition due to the outbreak of the war, the next King's held there was in 1921. For some reason the goldfields waived their right to hold the 1923 prize meeting, and the final Kalgoorlie King's was held in 1925. A lack of target accommodation was apparently the reason why no more King's were held in Kalgoorlie. The 1925 King's was won by a member of the Fremantle Club, R.J. Halliday, but, he was an old goldfields man, having started his career with Coolgardie and continued later with Kalgoorlie.

Apart from R.J. Halliday, who won a total of five Grand Aggregates, the goldfields certainly produced some fine shots in its early years, many now forgotten. Among them were; W. Tuxford and J.J. Mathieson of the Coolgardie Club, winners of the King's in 1903 and 1908 respectively. A.C. Turrell from the Davyhurst Rifle Club who won the Karrakatta King's in 1906 at the age of 21 years. Jack Halligan of the Menzies Club who went to Bisley in

1910 and won a badge, and W. Crossman from the Boulder Club who won three Grand Aggregates and a King's between 1907 and 1909, and who many thought should have gone to Bisley.

In 1913 Alf Harris, eventual winner of four Grand Aggregates was selected to represent Australia at Bisley, and in 1914 yet another Boulder rifleman was chosen to go, Corporal-Bugler Trenberth the youngest member of an Australian team to that date.

Finally, in a slightly different category, a member of the Kalgoorlie Club at the outbreak of the Great War, was the late Jack McCleery, who at the age of 103, achieved fame as Australia's best known Anzac when he returned to Gallipoli for the seventy fifth anniversary celebrations.



Jack McCleery, ready to visit Anzac Cove, 1990

MINI PRIZE MEETING

Sunday 28th June

Bushmead Rifle Range

8:30am start

Entry \$10

includes Morning/Afternoon Tea

Supply own Ammo

10 x 300 and 500m & 15 x 600m

Lunches Available Good Trophies - Good Fun

***Funds to assist WA Womens Team
air fares to Brisbane***

Contact: Maureen Campbell 454 5904

CUE RIFLE CLUB Annual Prize Meeting 11 & 12 July 1992

\$1400 in Trophies and Prize Money

Saturday - 10 shots at 300, 500 and 600yds,
7 shots at 600yds

Sunday - 10 shots at 500, 600 and 700yds

Entry: \$45 plus ammo

Ammo available at cost
Accommodation at Old Station and on Range
Lunch and dinner supplied to shooters at no cost
Sheep on Spit and BBQ Saturday