

# *Gunner of Renown*



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

## **Lieutenant Colonel Robert William LENEHAN, VD**

**(1865-1921)**

Robert Lenehan was born on 16 August 1865 and was educated at St Ignatius College, Riverview, NSW. He enrolled in 1881, the College's second year, and participated in cricket and debating. He completed his schooling in 1884, went on to study law, and practised as a solicitor. He was married in the College Chapel in 1889.

On 20 October 1890, Lenehan enlisted and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the 1st Infantry Regiment, NSW Volunteer Infantry (partially paid). Four years later, he transferred to the quaintly named Brigade Division Field Artillery and was appointed to 'C' Battery (partially paid). On 31 January 1895, he was promoted captain having passed all examinations for his rank, a course at the Field Artillery School of Instruction, and a course of equitation. On 15 October he was promoted major and battery commander. From 17 January 1900, he served as a captain with the New South Wales Mounted Infantry in South Africa but retained his seniority in the artillery.

Lenehan's active service covered operations in the Orange Free State, Transvaal and the Siege of Elands River Staging Post, which qualified him for the South Africa medal with six clasps. He proved to be an efficient and energetic officer and good leader. In February 1901, he was appointed to command the Bushveldt Carbineers with the rank of major. By now the war had developed into a guerrilla conflict and Lenehan's Carbineers, were part of a mobile force formed to counter them. His unit comprised about 350 men, mainly colonial troops attracted by the higher rate of pay.

When the Carbineers moved north of Pietersburg District (Spelonken) in April 1901 one of Lenehan's officers was Veterinary Officer Lieutenant P. Handcock. It was here that Lenehan had many troubles to contend with, later to include the actions of Lieutenant H. H. 'Breaker' Morant. 'Higher authority' intervened and, in short, after a court martial Lenehan was reprimanded, placed under close arrest, and deported from South Africa. Nonetheless, his unit had done a tough job well, bringing the North Transvaal under control within a few months.

Lenehan arrived in Australia on 25 March 1902 and the General Officer Commanding Australian Forces, Major General Sir Edward Hutton, refused to have him transferred from the NSW Military List to the Active Australian Military Forces List but he was placed on the Retired List. Lenehan fought this decision and in July 1904 he was reinstated on the Active List as a major, retaining his seniority.

He was appointed to command 1st (Militia) Battery, Australian Field Artillery, in 1907. On 1 January 1913, Lenehan was made commander of 4th Field Artillery Brigade for five years. By then, he had been awarded the Volunteer Decoration for long commissioned service.

It is unknown whether Lenehan volunteered for overseas service, but he was on full time duty and commanding a military camp at Menangle, NSW, in 1916, whilst still nominally CO of his brigade. He retired from the army on 31 December 1917, and died on 20 May 1921.

Sources: L. P. Hindmarsh, *Lieutenant Colonel R. W. Lenehan, VD, and the Bushveldt Carbineers, Cannonball*, Journal of the RAA Historical Society/Company, No. 30, July 1997, pp. 17-24.