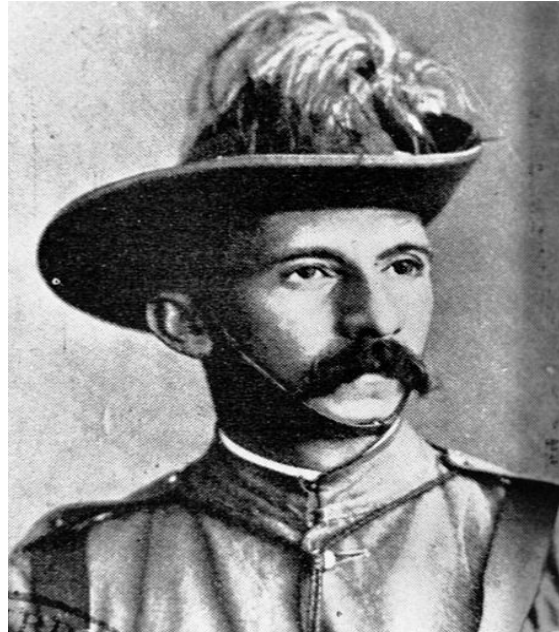




Lieutenant John HIGSON

[1864 – 1902]



4th Queensland Imperial Bushmen – Fourth Queensland Contingent

John Higson was a school teacher at South Brisbane State School, and a president of the West Moreton Teachers Association. He was said to be genial, good-natured and of jovial disposition, but he never married.

He was appointed lieutenant 4th Queensland Imperial Bushmen, in the Fourth Queensland Contingent that sailed from Brisbane on 18 May 1900. During the fighting he was wounded, shot through the head. The AWM records state: '*severely wounded at Zandfontein 25/09/1900.*'

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

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He had several operations and was examined by a Medical Officer on 21st January 1901 and the subsequent Medical Report (dated: 16th February 1901) stated: *'Fair health generally, but he is suffering from the effects of a bullet wound thro' the head. His sense of smell is destroyed'*.

He returned to Brisbane on six months leave of absence, arriving on the 'Karanuo' on 16 February 1901, with no apparent ill effects other than loss of smell. His discharge address was recorded as *Mrs Cabet, Stanley Terrace Taringa*, but after being declared cured he returned to South Africa to re-join his regiment - just before it returned home in June 1901.

However, about 16 months after his return to Brisbane Lieutenant Higson died as a result of his war wounds on 12 November 1902 in Taringa, Brisbane. He was 38 years old and not married. He was buried with full military honours at Toowong Cemetery. Officers of the United Service Institution (as USC was then known) were among those who sent a wreath and several attended.

The following story appeared in the Brisbane Courier on Friday 14 November 1902:

Death of Lieutenant Higson

'The sudden death of Lieutenant John HIGSON, which took place at Mr Abell's house at Taringa on Wednesday afternoon, where he had for some time been staying, is reported. The deceased gentleman attended the adjourned meeting of the United Service Institute [as the United Service Club was known at that time] on Saturday, and was then apparently in his usual good health. On Sunday morning, however, the people of the house heard groans issuing from his bedroom, and entering, found him lying in an unconscious condition. Dr Wheeler was called with promptitude, and did what was possible; but Mr Higson never regained consciousness, and died as reported above.

At the time of his death Lieutenant Higson was a member of the committee of the Brisbane Lieudertafel, and also a member of the North Australian Masonic Lodge, and at one time was president of the East Morton Teachers Association. His only relative in Queensland is his father, a man well up in years, who lives at Milton.

The deceased soldier went twice to South Africa. On the first occasion he was a member of the Fourth Contingent, of which he was a Lieutenant, and in the course of the fighting he one day received the wound which is believed to have caused his death. He was shot through, the bullet entering on the left side of the forehead, and emerging on the right side. After receiving the wound, he did not lose consciousness for a time. Captain Berry and another Officer...helped him from the field of action, and he took shelter in a farmhouse... Several operations were performed, though it was considered a hopeless case. To the surprise of all, Lieutenant Higson made a marvellous recovery, and when he returned to Queensland was apparently little the worse of the wound. His old, genial, good nature and jovial disposition was still his main characteristic, and to outsiders there was no visible change in him. He himself said he experienced little inconvenience. He noticed, however, that feeling in that part of the head was gone, and that his sense of smell had gone and that, though he felt all right in the mornings, he got weary in the afternoons...

He returned to Queensland, having been declared cured, and later went out again to join his Regiment. He had only just arrived, however, when they were ordered home. In South Africa Lieutenant Higson was examined by a medical board with a view to pension. On returning to Queensland he resumed his duty with the Department of Education as a teacher at South Brisbane, continuing in the work until the time of his death.

During his voyage back to South Africa the second time...there had been some irritation in the locality of one of the wounds....

The remains of the late Lieutenant Higson are to be accorded a military funeral, and all the Officers and men available are being asked to attend...The funeral will move from Lieutenant Higson's late residence at 3,30 o'clock this afternoon."

He was aged thirty-eight years.

The Military funeral meant that the coffin was draped in a Union Jack and was transported on a gun carriage from his home in Taringa to the Toowong Cemetery. A military cortege consisting of soldiers, sailors, a band and a firing party from the South Brisbane State School escorted the coffin from the corner of Jephson Street and Sylvan Road (Toowong).'

The Fourth Queensland Contingent comprised the 4th Queensland Imperial Bushmen. Its strength on embarkation was 387, ordered into three mounted rifle squadrons. The Commanding Officer was Lieutenant-Colonel A. Aytoun, and later Major W. T. Deacon. They embarked with their horses in Brisbane on 18 May 1900 on the transport *Manchester Port*.

They were deployed in theatre from June 1900 - June 1901 under General Plumer in the Free State, Transvaal and East Transvaal – with principal engagements including the battle of Rhenoster Kop (29 November 1900), the "Great De Wet Hunt", and the advance on Pietersburg.

The Contingent returned dismounted to Brisbane on 5 August 1901 on the transport *Britannic*. The Contingent's casualties were eight killed or died of wounds (not including Lieutenant Higson), and five died of disease.

Sources included:

- Australian War Memorial
- National Archives of Australia
- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents