

THE ROUTE MARCH

Gilgandra to the Coast

TRIUMPHANT SEND-OFF BY THE PEOPLE.

Gilgandra's greatest of all events, the start of the route march, became a fact of history on Sunday last, when the contingent after a minute religious ceremony stepped out on its long march to the coast.

On Saturday, when the "Farmer and Settler" special reporter, who will march to Sydney, arrived at Gilgandra, he found Captain Nicholas and Drs. Burkill and Cooper, of Dubbo, on the ground. Captain Nicholas has been appointed to take charge of the contingent, and he will be their leader and instructor all the way through to Sydney.

On Saturday afternoon twenty-five recruits were sworn in. Two failed to pass the doctor, but they will march through to the coast nevertheless. The number of recruits would have been double if the recruiting association had not been compelled to wait so long for the permission of the military authorities, the result being that many men grew tired of waiting, and went into camp. The doctor said that the Gilgandra men were as fine a body of recruits as he had seen, with good feet and sound constitutions.

On Saturday night a torchlight procession paraded the town, headed by the band. The recruits were followed by the rifle club and the boy scouts. In the interval of a picture show, Major Winn, of Sydney, and Private Lee, the ex-clergyman recruit, made special appeals to the young men to volunteer.

There were fully three thousand persons, almost the whole population of the district, at the open-air consecration service on Sunday morning, when the Rev. W. Jenkins commended the men to their Creator.

The shire president, Mr. Barden, said he was sure that the twenty-five starting out would be five hundred at the end of the long march. Almost the whole of the people, the largest gathering ever seen at Gilgandra, accompanied the march to Boberah, where a general programme of hand-shaking took place. A guard of honor of young horsewomen rode at the head of the procession, and the local recruiting association and shire councillors took part. Captain Nicholas formed up his little force—grown already to thirty-one men; and Mr. W. T. Hitchens had the honor of giving the first words of command—"Quick march." Amid resounding cheers the route march had begun, and it was followed for several miles of its long journey by a great cavalcade of horses and vehicles. Then there was a halt, with more good-byes, more cheers, and the rifle club fired a parting volley.

The heat was intense, and the dust hung over the troops like a pillar of cloud—a fiery cloud, so that when the first stop, Marthaguy, was reached, all were grateful for the lunch spread by the residents, and not less for the facilities provided for a wash and a freshen up. At Marthaguy one new recruit fell in. Many of the Gilgandra folk still followed the column. The young daughter of a prominent citizen left her car and marched alongside the men for some distance; she announced her intention of being present in Martin Place at the finish, and declared that if she had been a boy she would have marched all the way, and gone to the front with the contingent. It is a pity that some of the boys have not the spirit of the girls.

At Balladoran the townspeople met the column a mile out of town and escorted them to their camp with banners, and gave them a hearty welcome. The camp was reached at five o'clock, and here another recruit joined the column.

Following are the names of the first twenty-five to enlist:—

John Quinn, John Macnamara, Stanley E. Stephens, Jack H. Hunt, William L. Hunt, Albert W. Peaver, Leslie W. Greenleaf, Arthur C. Finn, Francis N. White, Alfred Wurdroffe, Victor Quinlan, William Atison, Sidney Bennett, John R. Lee, Harold Baxter, Charles R. Wheeler, E. T. Hitchens, James McKenna, James Crawford, Charles E. Macchini, Andrew J. MacGregor, Lawrence L. McGuire, Robert C. Campbell, Peter Wilson, and Frank Hainsbury.

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