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BOOK REVIEW

Light Horse: a history of Australia's mounted arm

by Jean Bou

Cambridge University Press: Port Melbourne, Vic.; 2010; 361 pp.; ISBN 978-0-521-19708-3; RRP \$137.95 (hardback); Ursula Davidson Library cal no. 570.2 BOU 2010.

Light Horse is the fourth in the series of titles being produced in the Australian Army History Series by eminent military historians. This excellent, readable book examines, analyses and dissects the Australian Light Horse from its colonial origins to its demise in 1944. The author, historian Dr. Jean Bou, correctly observes that: "The mounted soldier is one of the evocative symbols in Australian military history". He should be congratulated for his dedication in fleshing out this interesting story.

Like the ANZAC legend, much of the story of the Australian Light Horse, with its origins in practical soldiering, has also become myth. The book's nine chapters, in chronological succession, discuss topics such as the mounted troops of the British Empire, Australians in the Boer War, Major-General Hutton's influence, the militia light horse, the impact of universal training, soldier-citizen interaction, aid to the civil power, and action in two world wars. There is also a 15-page appendix dealing with the vexed question of the 'Beersheba Charge Photo'.

From the ANZAC Mounted Division, through the little known use of small-horsed units in the 2nd Australian Imperial Force campaigns in Syria and New Guinea, to venereal disease, the author has tackled these and a myriad of topics in-between. To

the author's credit, he has also examined and discussed the part played by the Light Horse in suppressing the Egyptian uprising of 1919. Both his praise, "Light Horse...was still an important part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force" (page 170), and his criticism, "Cavalry, their valuable, large and powerful horses destroyed by poor logistics" (South Africa, page 47), provide balanced perspectives. This affords the reader an opportunity to draw his/her own conclusions.

During the centenary of the Australian Army in 2001, strong emphasis was placed on ancestry, including slouch hats with emu feathers! A small criticism of this book is that the full ancestry of the Light Horse units does not emerge. A table illustrating the territorial origins of all the Light Horse regiments would have solved this problem.

Unfortunately, at \$137.95, this will not be a book for everyone's bookshelf.

Roland Millbank'

¹Major Millbank was attached to 1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers in 1978.