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BOOK REVIEWS

Red coat dreaming: how colonial Australia embraced the British Army

by Craig Wilcox

Cambridge University Press: Melbourne; 2009; 198 pp.; ISBN 978 0 521 19360 3; RRP \$66.95 (hardback); Ursula Davidson Library cal no. 472 WILC 2009

In *Red coat dreaming*, Dr. Craig Wilcox has embraced an increasing trend in which military aspects are melded with both personal and social history. The result is a most interesting and readable account of the period in the 19th century when the British Army was also Australia's army. Using numerous personal narratives and extensive research, Wilcox demonstrates how Australian military history has been bound up to Britain. These stories weave in and out of his theme, the sartorial signature of the British Army, the "red coat".

The author presents a convincing argument as to why the population, with its British roots, indulged in "red coat dreaming". Middle-class attitudes towards the British Army, particularly its officers, were strongly positive. Indeed, thousands had served in the British Army before settling in Australia; many were proud of the British Army's achievements on battlefields far from Australia; and hundreds of Australians enlisted in the Army or married its officers.

Part of the book's value is that it delves into history, hitherto unexplored or forgotten, of the military tradition in Australia before Gallipoli. While "slouch hat" military

history has sprung from the ANZAC tradition, Spicer Cookworthy is emblematic of the earlier "red coat" tradition. From a family of squatters on the Vasse River, 200 km south-west of Perth, Cookworthy, then an ensign of the Royals, splashed ashore at Gallipoli in the spring of 1854, some 61 years before any other Australian soldier (shades of the 10th Light Horse at the Nek).

Although *Red coat dreaming* is specifically written about Australia from 1788 to 1915, "red coats" are still in evidence in Australia today. Anyone watching the Australian Army Bands on parade cannot fail to notice their sartorially splendid "red jackets". This is echoed in the scarlet sashes worn by the sergeants of the Australian infantry regiments.

A small criticism of this excellent book is that the author simply identifies each British regiment by its number, e.g. the 77th. However, all British regiments that served in Australia had territorial connections. Therefore, it might have been helpful to have an appendix pointing out that it was, say "77th Regiment of Foot (East Middlesex)".

Roland Millbank