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BOOK REVIEW

The ANZACS: Gallipoli to the Western Front

by Peter Pedersen

Penguin Group: Camberwell, Victoria; 2007; 513 pp.; ISBN 978-0-1430084-6-0; RRP \$35.00 (paperback); Ursula Davidson Library cal no. 570.14 PEDE 2007

Somewhat belatedly, the Ursula Davidson Library has acquired this excellent, one-volume account of the contribution of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), including the Australian Flying Corps, to the Great War of 1914-18. Despite the title, the New Zealand contribution is only described to the extent necessary to understand the Australian contribution. Similarly, the contribution of the Royal Australian Navy to the conflict is dealt with more or less in passing.

Dr. P. A. Petersen is well-qualified to write this book. A graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, he rose to command 5th/7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, before embarking on a new career as a military historian. Now a senior historian at the Australian War Memorial, he has led numerous battlefield tours of the Western Front and Gallipoli and has published six other books, including ones on General Monash, and the battles of Fromelles, Villers-Bretonneux and Hamel. He is a member of the Institute and draws on the resources of the Ursula Davidson Library to support his research.

Petersen commences his narrative with a recounting of the international events which led to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 and Australia's offer of naval and military forces to Britain. He then briefly describes the occupation of German New Guinea by the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force, before describing the raising of the AIF and its despatch to Egypt. The Gallipoli campaign of 1915 is covered in detail as are the major battles of the Western Front in which Australians were involved between 1916 and 1918 – Fromelles, Pozières, and Mouquet Farm in 1916; Bullecourt, Messines, Menin Road, Zonnebeke, Polygon Wood, Poelcappelle, Broodseinde and Passchendaele in 1917; and the German offensive, Le Hamel, Amiens, and the final allied advance to victory, including Mont St Quentin, Bellicourt, Beaurevoir and Montbrehain, in 1918. A chapter only is devoted to the achievements of the Australian Light Horse in Sinai, Palestine and Syria from 1916 to 1918, but I found the coverage adequate. The book concludes with a chapter of 'reflections', which nicely puts the contribution of the AIF to the overall war effort in context, doing so in a very balanced and insightful way.

Petersen sets the broad international strategic context at each stage of his narrative, which gives the reader a clear basis on which to judge the value of each contribution made by the Australians to the overall war effort. He does not attempt to promote the ANZAC 'legend'. Rather, he tells the bad as well as the good in

the performance of the soldiers and their leaders. For example, he recounts the ill-discipline of many soldiers when on leave in Egypt and France – behaviour which brought the AIF into disrepute and drew deserved criticism at the time. But he balances this with accounts of the excellent battle discipline of the same units, which led to the achievements upon which the ANZAC legend has grown subsequently.

He points out that at the beginning of their war in 1915, the AIF was a force of enthusiastic amateurs led by officers who had no concept of the industrial warfare they were about to face. Mastery of industrial warfare did not come until 1918 when the Australian Corps commander, Monash, demonstrated how to defeat the defence in a meticulously-planned and well-coordinated attack at Le Hamel on 4 July involving infantry, artillery, tanks, engineers and aircraft, and soldiers from several nations. By this time, though, after three years of campaigning, the AIF was a truly professional force from top to bottom. Indeed, many independent observers considered that the AIF, along with their colleagues from Canada and New Zealand, had developed into the best of the allied troops.

Petersen's narrative is underpinned by extensive research which has unearthed many points of detail not reported previously, adding considerable value to the book. Sadly, though, the locations of these events usually are not evident from the book's ten maps. Despite having walked most of the battlefields described, I frequently was unable to relate features mentioned in the text to the battlefield as the maps provided were very general and did not illustrate the finer detail that the author sought to convey. This is increasingly common in books of this type. In contrast, de Guingand used 55 maps to illustrate his 488-page memoir published in 1947 (see review on page 33). These maps were drawn specifically for the memoir and showed only those details to which the author wished to draw attention. There are also a few annoying editorial errors in *The ANZACS*, including a failure to list the publishers of the books in the bibliography.

Overall, *The ANZACS* provides a concise, well-written and accurate account, together with a balanced assessment, of the contribution of the Australian Imperial Force to the Great War. I commend the book to anyone who seeks an overview of that contribution in one volume.

David Leece

