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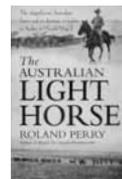


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BOOK REVIEW

The Australian Light Horse: the magnificent Australian force and its decisive victories in Arabia in World War I

by Roland Perry



Hachette Australia: Sydney; 2009; 576 pp.; ISBN 978 0 7336 2272 4; RRP \$50.00 (hardback); Ursula Davidson Library cal no. 576. PERR 2009

There have been a number of books written on the Australian Light Horse, so, having served in an armoured unit with a Light Horse lineage, I approached this book seeking a new perspective on this well-known chronicle of the Great War. I did not find a convincing one.

That said, *The Australian Light Horse* is a very readable story. Roland Perry, an experienced author, uses a clear journalistic style to put across a very exciting narrative of events that led to the demise of the Ottoman Empire, rulers of the Middle East for 400 years. Commencing with the all important battle for Beersheba, the story then backtracks through the career of Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Chauvel, initially commander of the ANZAC Mounted Division and, from August 1917, commander of the Desert Mounted Corps. A backdrop to this account is the political and economic story of Britain's need and greed for oil.

The author has drawn on the private papers of many light horsemen involved in the campaign to bring a strong personal dimension to the skirmishes and battles. This use of personal reflections draws the reader in, heightening interest in the story.

While the book is intended primarily for Australian readers, its focus on the Light Horse tends to obscure the fact they were a part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, formed by the British High Command specifically to fight against the Turks in Sinai and Palestine. Also, while the author's concentration on General Chauvel is understandable, mention of him in 235 of the book's 512 pages seems excessive.

In his epilogue, Perry did provide a new perspective on the Light Horse: "*Their (the Light Horse) global legacy is greater than that of their digger brothers in General Sir John Monash's army in Europe after they had defeated two German armies in the battle of Amiens that led to the end of the war.*" This perspective is highly contentious on at least two points. Although both had to meld citizen soldiers into fighting armies, Monash was always a citizen soldier whereas Chauvel was a professional from his Boer War days – nevertheless, Chauvel's achievements certainly do not overshadow those of Monash. Secondly, and most importantly, the Great War was fought to defeat the Germans in a contest in which the Turks were almost incidental.

Roland Millbank