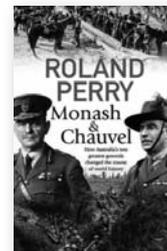


BOOK REVIEWS:

Monash and Chauvel: how Australia's two greatest generals changed the course of world history

by Roland Perry

Allen & Unwin: Sydney; 2017; 567 pp.; ISBN 9781760291433 (paperback); RRP 34.99;
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Monash and Chauvel is a biography of two eminent Australians, one a citizen soldier, the other a regular soldier, both born in 1865 and both rising to command an army corps in the Great War, one on the Western Front, the other in the Middle East. While the biography covers each man's whole life, the focus is on 1918, the year in which each man reached the pinnacle of his military career.

The citizen soldier was General Sir John Monash, GCMG, KCB, VD, a brilliant civil engineer, lawyer and businessman, who had been commissioned into the Garrison Artillery of the Victorian colonial militia in 1887. He was an avid student of military history, with an exceptional analytical mind and capacity for detailed planning and reasoned debate. Prior to the Great War, he was a part-time soldier specialising in artillery and military intelligence and, by 1914, had risen to command a militia brigade. Following transfer to the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in 1914, he commanded the 4th Brigade on Gallipoli in 1915, before being given command of the 3rd Division in July 1916 which, after lengthy training in England, he led with distinction in Flanders in 1917 at the battles of Messines (June) and Broodseinde Ridge (October).

In May 1918, Monash was promoted to lieutenant-general and given command of the recently-formed Australian Corps (which Perry erroneously and repeatedly refers to as the 'Australian Imperial Force'), consisting of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, at the time the largest corps on the Western Front. He subsequently led it masterfully at the tactically-innovative battle of Le Hamel (4 July), then the battle of Amiens (8 August) followed by the final 100-days offensive, including the battles of Chuignes, Mont St Quentin-Péronne, Hargicourt, Hindenburg Line and Montbrehain, leading to the collapse of the German war effort on the Western Front and the armistice on 11 November 1918.

Post-war, Monash was initially director-general of Repatriation and Demobilisation, then returned to civilian life becoming head of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria from October 1920 and concurrently vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne from 1923 until his death in 1931. Together with his friend, Harry Chauvel, he was promoted to general in 1929.

The regular soldier was General Sir Henry ('Harry') Chauvel, GCMG, KCB, who initially was commissioned into the Upper Clarence Light Horse of the New South Wales colonial militia in 1886. He transferred to the Queensland Mounted Infantry in 1890 and to its regular staff in 1896. He commanded a company of the Queensland Mounted Infantry during the Boer War. Post-

war, he transferred to the permanent component of new Australian Military Forces (AMF) with responsibility for light horse training and later became the adjutant-general. Following transfer to the AIF in 1914, he commanded the 1st Light Horse Brigade (dismounted) on Gallipoli, where he and Monash became friends. In 1916, he took command of the Anzac Mounted Division in Egypt. His division played a crucial role in the battle of Romani in August (defending the Suez Canal) and in driving the Ottoman raiders back across the Sinai to Palestine, particularly at the battle of Magdhaba (December), before playing a useful, though secondary, role in the first and second battles of Gaza (March, April 1917).

Before the third battle of Gaza (October-November 1917), Chauvel was promoted to lieutenant-general and given command of the Desert Mounted Corps consisting of the Australian Mounted Division, Anzac Mounted Division, British Yeomanry Division and Imperial Camel Corps (a brigade-sized formation). Chauvel was the first Australian to reach this rank and attain a corps-level command. The Desert Mounted Corps played a crucial role at Beersheba, the first phase of the finally-successful Third Gaza, and then during the subsequent advance to Jerusalem. His *pièce de résistance*, however, came in September 1918 when he launched a successful surprise attack on the Ottomans at Megiddo, which he exploited with one of the fastest pursuits in military history driving the Ottomans to Aleppo in Syria where they surrendered to General Sir Edmund Allenby's victorious army.

Post-war, Chauvel became chief of the Australian general staff in 1923 and was promoted to general in 1929, before retiring from the army in 1930.

Roland Perry, writer-in-residence at Monash University, is the author of some 32 books, many of them biographies and several focused on the Great War. *Monash and Chauvel* is written in his usual easy-to-read, entertaining style. Perry makes a compelling case for why Monash and Chauvel should be regarded as great generals, world leaders in the art and science of 20th century warfare. It is a bit of a stretch, though, for him to argue that they changed the course of history. In making his case, Perry tends to give inadequate consideration to the contributions of other commanders (such as Foch, Haig, Plumer and Currie on the Western Front; and Allenby and Chetwode in Palestine/Syria) and other major formations (such as the other 19 corps fighting alongside the Australian Corps on the Western Front, or the British XXth Corps at Beersheba).

Unfortunately, the book has several deficiencies which may disconcert more discerning readers and may

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confuse others. The two maps – one of the Western Front; the other of the Middle East – are barely adequate for strategic comprehension and totally inadequate for any tactical understanding of the battles described. Military formation names and ranks presented on occasion are wrong, such as the terms 'division' and 'brigade' being alternated. Descriptions of battles at times give an incomplete impression of the what occurred and give inadequate credit to other forces which took part. While there are many footnotes, some quotations go un-

referenced and the underpinning evidence for many statements is not evident.

Those deficiencies notwithstanding, the book is a really good read and I would recommend it to anyone keen to learn about the military contributions of two truly great Australians. If, however, you are a student of military history or seek an objective assessment of Monash's and Chauvel's contributions, then I suggest you turn to other readily available histories on the subject, such as *The commanders: Australian military leadership in the twentieth century* edited by D. M. Horner (George Allen & Unwin: Sydney) 1984.

David Leece