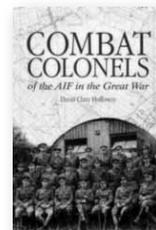


BOOK REVIEWS:

Combat colonels of the AIF in the Great War

by David Clare Holloway

Big Sky Publishing Pty Ltd, Newport NSW; 2014; 417 pp.; ISBN 978-1-922132-97-0 (hardcover); RRP \$31.75; Ursula Davidson Library call number: 570.02 HOLL 2014



David Holloway has produced an invaluable reference on the surprising number of men who, in the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF), commanded combatant infantry battalions, light horse regiments, artillery brigades, machine-gun battalions, cyclist battalions, Camel Corps battalions, divisional ammunition columns, and units of the fledgling Australian Flying Corps. It goes further than its title suggests by prefacing coverage of each group with a cogent summary of the group's employment and contributions. There are notes on formation commanders, but the emphasis is on unit (battalion and regimental) commanders.

The author was a primary school inspector in Victoria who spent some 50 of his 87 years collecting the material and insights he has shared. His quest originated when he asked his father – a 41st Battalion AIF member – who his commanding officer (CO) had been. He found there had been three. When searching other units, Holloway found that many unit histories made sparse mention and offered little detail of their commanders. He sourced a prodigious range of official records, newspaper references, and state registries of births, deaths and marriages.

The volume contains a useful glossary of acronyms and phrases often used about the AIF. These include 'Desert March', 'Hindenburg Line' and 'Training Battalions'. There is a cogent summary of the achievements of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) that captured Rabaul in September 1914 and the later record of its senior officers. There are well-captioned photos, numerous references and 17 appendices. The latter record actions and battles; ages of COs at appointment (oldest 58 and youngest 22); senior officers who assisted United States forces as members of the Australian Advisory Mission; COs who had served in the Sudan Campaign (3), the Boer War (77), ANMEF (15), British Army, were of German lineage (9 including Monash), from the Permanent Military Force (45); COs who became prisoners-of-war (2);

and COs who enlisted as privates (18, including Moreshead). A roll of honour lists COs killed or who died from wounds or illness – at Gallipoli (14), on the Western Front (34) and in Palestine (6). Many others suffered from exhaustion, illness, stress or shell-shock.

Sixty AIF battalions, grouped in five divisions, saw active service. A sixth division was proposed and approved in February 1917. It was to include another 10 battalions and several COs were selected for them. But heavy casualties on the Western Front required the existing five divisions to be brought to full strength, so the sixth division proposal was abandoned in September 1917¹.

Clear lessons for today's military planners include the numbers who may be required to command combat units in sustained operations, the merits of training two ranks above the current one, the stresses on commanders who make life and death decisions, and the need to provide for their resettlement into civil and family life. There are poignant references to COs who went back to civilian jobs as captives of their previous education and status, and had mundane roles much less challenging than that of a CO in combat operations. Conversely, a number of COs and acting COs became well known in later civil life. Not least of these are: L. F. Giblin, who became an internationally renowned economist; Harold (Pompey) Elliott, who was elected to the Australian Senate; and Lawrence Wackett, a founder of the Australian aircraft industry.

This work's capable and diligent author – the late David Clare Holloway – has provided an enduring legacy to all those named in it, and to Australia².

Ken Broadhead

¹The planned brigade and battalion numberings were used when 6th Division 2nd AIF was formed in 1939.

²The copy reviewed was kindly donated to the Institute's Ursula Davidson Library by the author's widow, Mrs Jean Holloway, via a family friend, Colonel Don Swiney MBE (Ret'd).