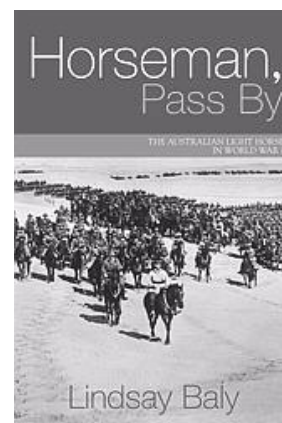


Horseman, Pass By: The Australian Light Horse in World War I

Lindsay Baly

Reviewed by Neil James



Lindsay Baly's book of the Middle East campaigns fought by the Australian Light Horse in World War I is a delightful read. It is even more enjoyable when read in conjunction with Jill Hamilton's recent book on the desert poets of the same theatre and war (also reviewed in this *Defender*). The title of Baly's book comes not from a light horse drill command but from the inscription on the grave of William Butler Yeats:

Cast a cold eye

On life, on death.

Horseman, pass by.

Baly begins his account by noting that the last light horseman, Trooper Albert Whitmore, died in July 2002 just short of his 102nd birthday. In his preface Baly gives a succinct but sensitive and illustrative summary of why the Australia that produced the light horsemen is a different country to the Australia of today. He quotes his mother, '... they were prototypes that stopped with that one breed and were no more. ... it had something to do with confidence and a capacity to engage the grand, princely gesture when others might dither'. The book as a whole provides some interesting insights into why the post-war psychology and culture of World War I veterans from the European and Middle Eastern theatres were often so different.

The author adopts a workmanlike approach from the beginning and includes an outline of what constitutes Army units and formations, and what are the metric equivalents of imperial weights, measures and currency. Having taught military history to the often uncomprehending secondary school students of today, I can swear to the value of this commonsense approach. The maps used throughout are basic but cover most of the accounts described and are clear and easy to follow. The black and white photographs used illustrate the text and are not just 'fillers'. The only major improvement that could have been included was an outline order-of-battle of the Light Horse divisions, brigades and regiments, and their commanders, throughout the war.

The book is a well-paced and easily understood chronological account of the static campaign at Gallipoli and the later mobile campaign in Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. It is told primarily from the perspective of the Light Horse formations and units employed. Each

chapter summarises an important phase of campaigning in the Middle East theatre. These are well interspersed and illustrated by accounts drawn from the letters of individual participants, especially the author's father, Sergeant Byron (Jack) Baly, MM; Major Nathaniel Barton, MiD, CBE; and Major Jack Davies, MC. The author has also drawn deeply at the well of the personal and unit records held by the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and much early and more recent scholarship and memoirs concerning the campaigns and battles discussed. This book could probably have only been written so well in recent times when there was so much to draw on when setting the letters (and his father's stories) in context.

Interestingly, Jack Baly served in Nat Barton's squadron for some time but neither mentions the other by name in their letters, perhaps because of censorship. Their complementary accounts of the same actions, notably the battle of Amman in 1918 (where Baly won his Military Medal), present a fascinating view of several actions from different tactical and personal perspectives

The book starts with Jack Baly sailing from Sydney in June 1915 as a reinforcement for the 7th Light Horse Regiment. Gallipoli is disposed of by Chapter 2. The next 21 short chapters cover the key events of 1916–18. The book culminates with six chapters, broken up on a day-by-day basis, covering the 'sleepless fortnight' in late September and early October 1918, when the British Commonwealth forces fought their way through northern Palestine and across Syria in a series of hard-fought, mobile manoeuvres. This fortnight broke Ottoman military and political power outside its Anatolian heartland for ever. The book ends with the surrender of Aleppo in northern Syria, when the armistice with the Turks came into force on 31 October 1918, the post-war consolidation operations and the return to Australia.

Lindsay Baly's *Horseman, Pass By* is a story told with great feeling and understanding, but it is not just one man's tribute to his father and his father's comrades. It is a thoroughly researched, well written and very readable account of the exploits of the Australian Light Horse in the Middle Eastern campaigns of World War I. ♦

Lindsay Baly, *Horseman, Pass By: The Australian Light Horse in World War I*, Kangaroo Press (Simon & Schuster), Sydney, 2003, pb, 337pp, RRP \$29.95.