Cover illustration: Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall, executive officer of the U.S. 15th Infantry stationed at Tientsin, China, in 1925 at the unit's summer resort at Nan Ta Ssu. An avid horseman, Marshall acquired a number of Mongolian ponies to mount a regimental detachment of "a sporty-looking cavalry troop" and sponsored horse shows and riding formations until the officers, listed as infantrymen, began to feel, in the words of their regimental poet, that they had joined the "Foot Hussars."

For article reprints, please go to the website of the Copyright Clearance Center at www.copyright.com or contact a customer representative at 978-750-8400. All reprinted articles must bear a credit line acknowledging the source of the article.

Correspondence concerning essays submitted for publication, editorial content, reprint permissions, back issues, advertising, institutional subscriptions, and mailing should be sent to Bruce Vandervort, Editor, at this office.

Books for review, book reviews, and correspondence concerning reviews should be sent to Bruce Vandervort, Editor, at the editorial office. Unsolicited book reviews are not accepted.

Annual memberships in the Society for Military History (including subscriptions to the newsletter and *The Journal of Military History*):

Regular Membership: \$50.00

Student (with professor's signature): \$25.00
(limited to 3 years—renewable annually)

Institutional subscriptions: \$75.00

Additional overseas postage: Members and subscribers outside the United States-Canada-Mexico add \$10.00 for postage (all prices in U.S. funds only). Time for issues to reach members varies, particularly for non-U.S. addresses.

Individual articles are available online at some libraries through ProQuest, MUSE, or JSTOR (for which there is a three-year lapse before online access). If you cannot access these databases, contact the Journal office at 540-464-7468 or e-mail: jmhsmh@vmi.edu. The article will be sent to you at a charge of \$10.00 postage paid.

Back Issues of *Military Affairs* and *JMH*

When available, back issues may be purchased from the editorial office for \$14.00 per copy (\$20.00 outside the United States-Canada-Mexico). Missing issues will be replaced free within six months of the date of publication.

Back issues are now available online, to SMH members only, through JSTOR's individual access program. Full-text searches can be made of all issues from 1937, excluding the most recent two years, for \$15.00 annually. Please contact the *Journal* office for details.

© SOCIETY FOR MILITARY HISTORY 2007 All rights reserved

Contents

ARTICLES

The Defense of the Crown of Aragon during the War of the Two Pedros (1356–1366)

Donald J. Kagay 11

Editor's Note

Bruce Vandervort 35

Scapegoat Arm: Twentieth-Century Cavalry in Anglophone Historiography

Gervase Phillips 37

The Boer War (1899–1902) and British Cavalry Doctrine: A Re-Evaluation

Stephen Badsey 75

Cavalry, Firepower, and Swords: The Australian Light Horse and the Tactical Lessons of Cavalry Operations in Palestine, 1916–1918

Jean Bou 99

General Hawkins's War: The Future of the Horse in the U.S. Cavalry

Alexander M. Bielakowski 127

A History of Effects-Based Air Operations

Phillip S. Meilinger 139

"Our equivalent of guerrilla warfare": Walt Rostow and the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1961–1968,

David Milne 169

BOOK REVIEWS

Launch the Intruders: A Naval Attack Squadron in the Vietnam War, 1972, by Carol Reardon, reviewed by Ralph F. Wetterhahn

and by Malcolm Muir, Jr. 205

The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History,

by Thomas T. Allsen, reviewed by Timothy May 207

SOCIETY FOR MILITARY HISTORY

President: Carol Reardon
Vice President: John A. Lynn
Executive Director: Robert H. Berlin
Recording Secretary: Thomas D. Morgan
Treasurer/Comptroller: Graham A. Cosmas
Archivist: Harold D. Langley
Newsletter Editor: Kurt Hackemer
Parliamentarian: Jeffrey Grey
Webmaster: Kurt Hackemer
Editor: Bruce Vandervort

Board of Trustees

(terms expire with the annual spring meeting)

2007	2009
Alexander S. Cochran	Conrad C. Crane
Jeffrey Grey	Joseph T. Giarthaar
John F. Guilmarin, Jr.	Mark A. Stoler
Eugenia C. Kiesling	John F. Votaw
Brian M. Linn	Kathleen Broome Williams
Brian Holden Reid	David W. Hogan

Editorial Advisory Board

Ira D. Gruber, Chairman
 (terms expire with the annual spring meeting)

Christon I. Archer (2007)	Malcolm Muir, Jr. (2009)
Dale Clifford (2007)	Brian Holden Reid (2009)
Mark K. Wells (2009)	Kathleen Broome Williams (2009)
Stephen M. Miller (2009)	Susannah U. Bruce (2010)

All correspondence concerning personal memberships should be sent to the editorial office: Journal of Military History, George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, VA 24450-1600.

Telephone: 540 464 7468 Fax: 540 464 7330 (or 464 5229)
 Internet: www.smh-bq.org E-mail: jahsmh@vmi.edu

The Journal of Military History (ISSN 0899-3718) is published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by the Society for Military History. The Journal is provided free to all Society members. The office of publication is 90 the Journal at the George C. Marshall Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia 24450. Periodicals postage paid at Lexington, Virginia 24450, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to: Journal of Military History, George C. Marshall Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, VA 24450-1600.

The Journal of Military History

☆

Volume 71, No. 1 January 2007

Editor: Bruce Vandervort

Managing Editor: Larry I. Bland
 Assistant Editor: Anne S. Wells
 Assistant Editor: Blair P. Turner
 Assistant Editor: Spencer C. Tucker
 Assistant Editor: Rose Mary Sheldon

Office Manager: Wendy Vandervort

*Published quarterly by
 The George C. Marshall Foundation
 and The Virginia Military Institute
 for the*

SOCIETY FOR MILITARY HISTORY

Cavalry, Firepower, and Swords: The Australian Light Horse and the Tactical Lessons of Cavalry Operations in Palestine, 1916-1918

☆

Jean Bou

Abstract

Despite their frequent description as mounted infantry, more than half of the Australian Light Horse finished the First World War as full sword-carrying cavalry, making use of both fire and modern shock tactics. This change ran counter to the traditions of the Australian mounted service, which had long emphasised rifle-based firepower for modern mounted troops. This article will examine the reasons why such a force adopted the sword in 1918, the nature of the change, and the experiences behind it. Even in the last year of the First World War, cavalry shock tactics still had a place on the battlefield.

THE Australian Light Horse of the First World War (1914-18) is frequently portrayed as mounted infantry, which by using rifle-based firepower and the mobility of its horses alone, played a prominent and

Jean Bou completed a Ph.D. in History at the University of New South Wales, University College of the Australian Defence Force Academy, in 2005. With the assistance of an Army History Research Grant, he is presently working on a history of the Australian Light Horse and its colonial predecessors based on his doctoral thesis. Since May 2006 he has been working at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University on the multivolume *Official History of Australian Peacekeeping and Post-Cold War Operations*. A captain in the Australian Army Reserve, he is also a historian with the Army History Unit, where he is associate editor of the forthcoming revised edition of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, as well as the co-editor of the forthcoming revised edition of the history of the Royal Australian Regiment, *Duty First*.

United States Commission on Military History

Founded in 1972, the United States Commission on Military History is the official American representative to the International Commission on Military History. It arranges for American scholars to present papers at the International Commission's annual colloquies, where representatives from more than thirty nations gather to present formal papers and to exchange ideas and information on research topics and resources.

Application for Membership

\$30 per year

(additional \$2.00 fee for checks drawn on a foreign bank)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

HOME PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

Mail to: Dr. Hans Parvitzsch, 121 W. Larnvale Street
Baltimore, MD 21210-2699

successful role in the defeat of the Turkish armies in the Sinai Peninsula and later Palestine.¹ Such a conception is, however, somewhat simplistic and not completely accurate. As this article will demonstrate, the Light Horse was not mounted infantry but, from its inception, was a form of abbreviated cavalry known as mounted rifles (which, as will be shown, is different from mounted infantry), and then late in the war became full cavalry. That more than half of the Light Horse had opted by the last months of the war to become full sword-wielding cavalry is not widely appreciated. That the change took place and was deemed useful at a time when cavalry was increasingly viewed as the anachronistic arm was a remarkable development, even more so when it is considered that the Light Horse had no strong tradition of using the sword or lance (the *arme blanche*). Its entire tradition had been based on the opposite belief, that only horsemen making exclusive use of firepower were going to be of use on modern battlefields. Once at war, however, this model was found to have limitations: while firepower was undoubtedly vital, the exclusive use of the rifle had not provided the tactical flexibility that mounted troops needed in this campaign. The present article's aim is to understand the change in tactical outlook that the Light Horse in the Sinai and Palestine underwent, examine the reasons behind this change, and highlight the fact that in 1918 modern shock tactics still had a place in a cavalryman's array of skills.

The Australian Light Horse—Origins to 1917

The Australian Light Horse had been created in 1903 following the federation of the Australian colonies in 1901. Drawing on the disparate

1. Descriptions of the Light Horse are subject to an unusual international divergence. Australian historians, both scholarly and amateur, persist in describing the Light Horse as mounted infantry. This representation appears to be born of an uncritical acceptance of the simplified description that Henry Gullet gave them in his volume of the Australian official history. See H. S. Gullet, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, vol. 7, *The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine* (1923, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), 29 (hereafter, Gullet, *The AIF in Sinai and Palestine*). Gullet's actual words are: "They were mounted riflemen, AIF in Sinai and Palestine), and their horses were intended merely to give or in other words, mounted infantry, and their horses were intended merely to give them the greatest range of activity as a mobile body." For examples of how this simplification has been perpetuated, see Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (1990, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 114; and Ian Jones, *Australians at War: The Australian Light Horse* (North Sydney: Time-Life Books, 1987), 17; see also the description of the Light Horse attached to the mounted soldier display in the Palestine gallery of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, Australia. In this author's experience, this idea also seems to be common among Americans with an interest in the subject. Curiously, British historians, by contrast, seem to have no difficulty in accepting the Light Horse, far more properly, as a form of cavalry.

prefederation colonial militia and unpaid volunteer units, the new General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Commonwealth Military Forces, Major-General Sir Edward Hutton, had established it as the mounted arm of this nascent army. Hutton had long-standing views on the role and form of modern mounted soldiering, having been a keen and active proponent of mounted infantry in the British Army since the 1880s. He had commanded the mounted infantry formed from the King's Royal Rifles in the Egyptian War of 1882, fought in a number of African campaigns, been a commandant of the Mounted Infantry School established at Aldershot in 1888, and commanded a mounted infantry brigade in South Africa in 1900.² His background, experiences, and theoretical inclinations had made him a keen supporter of the idea that modern horse soldiers should be armed and trained so that firepower formed the centrepiece of their employment. Influenced also by certain interpretations of the American Civil War (1861–65), and his experience and view of the First (1880–81) and Second (1899–1902) Anglo-Boer Wars, his numerous military writings revealed a particular interest in the ideas of Lieutenant-Colonel George Denison, the Canadian cavalry historian and theorist.³

Denison was but one of a number of theorists and officers in the late nineteenth century who took part in what was, at times, a heated debate about the future direction of cavalry, given the changes that were then taking place on modern battlefields. After analysing the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), he had concluded that cavalry had to place more emphasis on dismounted firepower if it was to continue to be relevant. He did not reject mounted shock action but contended that such opportunities would be rare and only a small portion of the cavalry should be prepared for such an eventuality (and should perhaps use a pistol rather than the sword).⁴ The bulk should be trained to use firearms as the weapon of first resort, that is, to become mounted riflemen. Hutton and others found expressions such as Denison's convincing due to their colonial experiences where hastily raised *ad hoc* units of mounted infantry had proved to be of considerable value when

2. E. T. H. Hutton, "The Evolution of Mounted Infantry," *Empire Review* 1 (May 1901): 374.

3. Maj.-Gen. Sir E. T. H. Hutton, "Tactical and Strategic Power of Mounted Troops in War," in *The Defence and Defensive Power of Australia* (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1902). Originally given as a lecture at the United Service Institution of New South Wales, 28 September 1894.

4. Lt.-Col. George T. Denison, *Modern Cavalry: Its Organisation, Armament and Employment in War* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1868), *passim*; and Lt.-Col. George T. Denison, *A History of Cavalry from the Earliest Times: With Lessons for the Future* (reprint of 1913 2nd ed., 1st ed. published 1877, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), *passim*.

cavalry was not available.⁵ Naturally, not everyone found the argument convincing, and in the British Army right up until the First World War it was possible to find men holding the full spectrum of views from the traditionalist cavalry reactionary to the most ardent supporter of firepower.⁶ By the 1890s, however, there began to evolve a disparate group of reformist cavalry officers, who advocated that all cavalrymen could be trained to use both shock action and fire tactics depending on the tactical situation. This ideal (which one historian has termed a cavalry "hybrid") proved to be well suited to regulars, and it was to this standard that British cavalry broadly aspired before the First World War.⁷ Such a model required intensive training, however, and had limitations for non-regulars, for which other schemes were required.

Hutton was well aware of these limitations and had considered them when formulating his thoughts. Despite his background as a mounted infantryman, he had long believed that on modern battlefields there should be at least two forms of rifle-equipped horsemen. In 1891 he had contended in an article that:

Mounted or Mobile Infantry are infantry soldiers *pur et simple*, who are so organized, equipped, and trained as to be capable of receiving any available means of rapid locomotion to enable them to act as infantry soldiers with the greatest rapidity and mobility.

Mounted Rifles on the other hand, are defined as horsemen trained to fight on foot, men who are mounted and intended to perform all the duties of cavalry, except that which may be best described as "the shock." It is expected of them that they should perform all the outpost, reconnoitering, and patrolling of an army in a manner similar to cavalry; the only difference being that they must rely solely upon their fire power for defensive and offensive action.⁸

5. Hew Strachan, *From Waterloo to Balaclava: Tactics, Technology and the British Army, 1815-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 88-90.

6. The differing views all had their printed expositions. A short list of the huge literature may include, apart from the Denison books: A. V. Boguslawski, *Tactical Deductions from the War of 1870-71*, trans. Col. Lumley Graham (London: Harry S. King and Co., 1872); Erskine Childers, *War and the Arme Blanche* (London: Edward Arnold, 1910); Lt.-Gen. F. von Bernhardi, *Cavalry in Future Wars*, trans. Charles Goldsmith (London: John Murray, 1906); Lt.-Col. F. N. Maude, *Cavalry: Its Past and Future* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1903). This list represents but a fraction of the paper and ink dedicated to the topic. The subject also received considerable attention in service and other periodicals.

7. Stephen Badsey, "Fire and the Sword: The British Army and the Arme Blanche Controversy, 1871-1921" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1981), iv and *passim*. Perhaps the two best-known officers of this group, controversial for other reasons, were the later Field Marshals John French and Douglas Haig.

8. Lt.-Col. E. T. H. Hutton, "The Mounted Infantry Question in its Relation to the Volunteer Force of Great Britain," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 35 (June 1891): 787.

Given that mounted infantry had often been raised as an *ad hoc* cavalry substitute in Britain's colonial wars, such definitions may appear as little more than military sophistry, but to Hutton the delineation was desirable and useful. If nothing else, it can be seen as an effort by an officer with a keen interest trying to inject into the debates that were then occurring a set of common definitions. During this period and continuing up to the eve of the First World War, exchanges about the form and direction of mounted troops in Britain and the empire were to be bedeviled by loose, ill-considered, and interchangeable use of the terms "mounted infantry," "mounted rifles," and "cavalry."⁹ Hutton, and others of a like mind, promoted the ideal of the mounted rifleman as a form of cavalry for two key reasons. First, it reflected their view that firepower was the way forward for mounted troops, and second, they thought that creating full cavalrymen from part-time citizen horsemen was difficult and time consuming.¹⁰

Hutton's definitions found traction in Australia, and they must be noted if one is to understand the nature of Australia's mounted troops. Between 1893 and 1896, when he had been seconded to be the commandant of the New South Wales colonial forces, he had reorganised and renamed the local mounted infantry so that they conformed to his template of mounted rifleman as a type of cavalry.¹¹ When, upon federation, he was handed the opportunity to create an entire military force much as he wanted (within the budgetary and organisational limits set by the government), he wasted no time in ensuring that the new Light Horse was established along similar doctrinal and organisational lines.

Australia's prefederation mounted units had had no uniform structure. Some had been established along the lines of traditional cavalry (part-timers akin to Britain's Yeomanry), while one or two units were closer to Hutton's definition of mounted infantry, but most had been set up along lines that were closer to his conception of mounted rifles. Under Hutton's plans, and in light of the recent experiences in South Africa, all of these units, plus a few dismayed militia and volunteer infantrymen, found their prefederation arrangements cast aside. Deprived

9. Badsey, "Fire and the Sword," 94 and 241. Attempts to inject uniform definitions were also undermined by the fact that once on campaign, the distinctions between mounted troops tended to break down. For example, see *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa* (London: HMSO, 1903), 49.

10. Maj.-Gen. Sir E. T. H. Hutton, "Preface," *Mounted Service Manual for Mounted Troops of the Australian Commonwealth* (Sydney: F. Cunningham and Co., Government Printer, 1902), x-ix.

11. Maj.-Gen. E. T. H. Hutton to Principal Undersecretary, New South Wales, 28 June 1893, Item 93, 8407, Box 5/6139, Colonial Secretary's Correspondence, State Records of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

of their *arme blanche* weapons, the cavalrymen and the other mounted units were all reorganised into the new Light Horse. The frequent description of the Light Horse as mounted infantry is quite incorrect: the Light Horse was, from the start, conceived of as mounted rifles, that is, an abbreviated form of cavalry. If used locally or independently, it was a replacement for cavalry; on an imperial campaign it could act independently or as an auxiliary for regular cavalry.¹² Organised into squadrons and regiments, rather than companies and battalions, a Light Horse regiment was, at best, only half the size of its infantry equivalent (a regiment at war establishment contained about 450 to 500 men, depending on time and place, whereas a battalion contained closer to 1,000 men).¹³ Though the possession of rifles and machine guns gave it considerable flexibility, and an ability to seize and hold ground, the relatively small size of a regiment or brigade meant that Light Horse, like dismounted British regular cavalry, tended towards skirmishing, action on the flank, rapid fire and manoeuvre, surprise attack, and putting every available rifle in the firing line (as opposed to the deeper formations of infantry) in an effort to quickly overwhelm the enemy. Though able to take its place in the line in all phases of war, as a form of cavalry it was intended also for reconnaissance, protection, raids, screening, patrolling, foraging, and the guarding of communications. The manual that Hutton prepared for his new mounted troops ensured that firepower was at the centre of all tactical employment.¹⁴ Though some occasionally expressed doubts that the mounted rifle model was not perhaps all that it was portrayed to be, Australian officers never entered into the sort of heated debates about the future of mounted troops that were then occurring in Britain.

Thus oriented, the militia Light Horse continued until 1912 when it underwent some organisational changes to better bring it into line with imperial standards (largely a reduction of regiments from four to three squadrons). The Light Horse now closely resembled Britain's part-time Yeomanry in structure and, as the changes also saw the Australian adoption of the imperial *Yeomanry and Mounted Rifle Training* manual, the two forces now had an almost identical outlook and tactical role. The British Army never adopted a set of definitions for its mounted troops as explicit as that which Hutton had given the Australian military,¹⁵ but by the eve of the First World War the Yeomanry, the Light Horse, and virtually all other British Empire citizen-mounted rifle units were training to

much the same model. The 1912 *Field Service Regulations* stated:

Yeomanry and Mounted Rifles . . . act chiefly by fire but may, when they have received sufficient training, employ shock action in special emergencies . . . Mounted Rifles, when cooperating with cavalry assist that latter to combine fire with shock action; when cooperating with other arms their mobility enables a commander to transfer them rapidly from one portion of the field to another, and thus turn to account opportunities which he would otherwise be unable to achieve.¹⁶

Despite the efforts that had been put into the militia Light Horse since federation, the restrictions of the Australian Defence Act of 1903 meant these units could not be sent overseas to fight and, with the raising of the expeditionary Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in late 1914, it proved necessary to create completely new units for war service. Initially, one Light Horse brigade (the 1st) was raised, but by early 1915 there were two more (the 2nd and 3rd), to which another two were added later in the war (the 4th in 1917, and the 5th in 1918). Following concentration in Egypt the first three brigades fought dismounted at Gallipoli in 1915 before being reorganised as mounted formations back in Egypt in early 1916, a process quickly followed by the formation of these three brigades, along with the New Zealand Mounted Rifles (NZMR) Brigade, into the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division (correctly abbreviated to A&NZ Mounted Division but more usually described as the Anzac Mounted Division). This division was prominently involved in the late 1916 operations that defeated Turkish attempts to reach the Suez Canal (the Battle of Romani), and then, as part of the corps-sized Desert Column under Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Chetwode, took part in further operations that drove them out of the Sinai Peninsula. Following the unsuccessful attempt to capture Gaza in March 1917, the mounted troops were reorganised to accommodate extra Yeomanry brigades brought in from Salonika, and the Light Horse brigades were split between the Anzac Mounted Division and the new Imperial Mounted Division. The latter was soon renamed the Australian Mounted Division after most of the Yeomanry were further reorganised into the Yeomanry Mounted Division in mid-1917.

The mounted troops demonstrated considerable value throughout 1916, but this is not to say they had no limitations. First, logistics remained a significant matter for the mounted troops. Though by no means perfect, logistical arrangements for the mounted troops during the Sinai and Palestine campaigns were, broadly speaking, quite good. There would be occasions when mounted troops were severely hampered

12. Maj-Gen. Sir E. T. H. Hutton, *Minute Upon the Defence of Australia*, 1902/2688, Commonwealth Record Series (CRS) B168, National Archives of Australia (NAA); and Hutton, "The Cavalry of Greater Britain," *Cavalry Journal* 1 (1906): 24.

13. Militia and Volunteer Peace and War Establishments, pp. 7 and 19, 1902/2688, CRS B168, NAA.

14. Hutton, "Preface," ix.

15. Badsey, "Fire and the Sword," 94 and 241.

16. War Office, *Field Service Regulations, Part I, Operations, 1909* (reprinted with amendments, 1912) (London: HMSO, 1912), 15.

by a lack of supplies, but to anyone familiar with the grim statistics of British horse wastage in South Africa just fifteen years earlier, the way that the mounted units generally performed in the Sinai and Palestine is testimony to the improvements that had taken place.¹⁷ Still, those arrangements had to be thorough. The mounted forces were capable of stretching them well beyond their intended limits and at times, this could, and did, have a parlous impact on operations. The attempted pursuit after Third Gaza/Beersheba and the Megiddo advance are perhaps the most obvious examples of how mounted operations were complicated by severe logistical difficulties. Second, success had so far relied on the ability to make rapid and surprising thrusts across the desert at fixed, and often isolated, Turkish positions. As part of this there had been a tendency to employ the Light Horse more in the mould of mounted infantry than mounted rifles. At Magdhaba and Rafa the Light Horsemen had been used to undertake dismounted assaults against Turkish strong points. In these attacks they had been successful, but in each case victory was achieved only late in the day after difficult fighting. The small size of a Light Horse regiment compared to an infantry battalion was exacerbated by the need to have one in four men act as a horse holder. As a result mounted troops had difficulty amassing the firepower and depth that infantry-style attacks required. Artillery could have compensated for this to some extent but mounted divisions (that is, dominion mounted rifles and Yeomanry) were entitled only to 18-pounder field guns (cavalry divisions proper had only 13-pounders), and these guns were not the best for attacking prepared positions. The heavy batteries that might have been useful did not exist in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) until the second half of 1917; thus, using mounted troops like infantry against prepared positions was a decidedly risky venture.¹⁸ Because success had masked this problem, however, the lesson was not as widely grasped as it should have been. Throughout the campaign mounted troops would be ordered to undertake operations that would perhaps have been better allocated to the infantry, especially after mid-1917 when the number of infantry in the theatre was increased and greater artillery strength available.

These factors notwithstanding, the employment of the Light Horse thus far had conformed to prewar ideas about how Australian mounted troops would be used. The mounted rifle model, which placed firepower

17. See F. Smith, *A Veterinary History of the War in South Africa* (first published anon., 1910; London: H. W. Brown, 1919), 227–30 and *passim*.

18. Archibald Wavell, *The Palestine Campaigns* (London: Constable, 1928), 125. Matthew Hughes has made a similar point in relation to the use of cavalry during the two trans-Jordan raids of March and April–May 1918; see Matthew Hughes, "General Allenby and the Palestine Campaign, 1917–18," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 19, no. 4 (1996): 73–79.

at the centre of all action, had seemingly been proven to be the best suited to modern war. The Yeomanry that fought alongside the Light Horse and NZMR had swords but had so far found little or no use for them and had effectively fought as mounted rifles also. Events in late 1917 and into 1918, however, would cause the mounted rifle model to be closely examined by officers of the Australian Light Horse and, in the view of some, be found deficient.

The Battle of Beersheba and Its Tactical Consequences

Following a second failed attempt at capturing Gaza in April 1917, a new commander, General Sir Edmund Allenby, was appointed to command the EEF. The Desert Column had been stripped of its nonmounted troops and, renamed the Desert Mounted Corps, had come under the command of the Australian Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Chauvel. By October, Allenby, drawing on a plan first drafted by Chetwode some months before, was ready to again attack the Turkish defences running from Gaza near the coast and stretching out southeast to their leftmost position at Beersheba. This called for a feint to be launched against the main defensive position at Gaza and then for a rapid strike by the mounted troops around the Turkish left at Beersheba. With Beersheba in British hands, the entire Turkish position could be threatened from behind and the enemy's withdrawal route from Gaza jeopardised by the Desert Mounted Corps.¹⁹ Although the Corps faced a difficult problem of crossing a large tract of near waterless country in order to get at Beersheba, some good intelligence work, a series of thorough reconnaissances, and some industrious work by field engineers meant that sufficient water was found for the plan to become a reality.²⁰

On 27 October the guns of XXI Corps commenced a bombardment of Gaza, and on the night of the thirtieth the Desert Mounted Corps, less the Yeomanry Mounted Division which was detached, left the watered staging points and commenced the final approach on Beersheba.²¹ The attack of the Desert Mounted Corps began at dawn the following morning and lasted all day. Under Chetwode, XX Corps completed their tasks and captured a number of the enemy positions southwest of the town through the day, but the efforts of the Anzac Mounted Division along the Beersheba-Hebron road, northeast of town, were met by heavy fire, and they took most of the day to secure their objectives. The plan had called

19. Alec J. Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse: A Biography of General Sir Harry Chauvel, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1978), 115.

20. The Australian Light Horse in the Great War, prepared by Lt-Gen. Sir H. Chauvel, pp. 15–16, 33 68/15152, CRS A1194, NAA.

21. Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, 125.

for an attack to be made against the relatively vulnerable eastern side of the Turkish defences. Only mounted troops could have made the approach that the plan called for, but the difficulties the Anzac Mounted Division encountered were perhaps another example of the problems that mounted troops faced when required to make dismounted attacks with only field artillery support against prepared positions.²² With the plan in the balance, late in the day Chauvel ordered Brigadier-General William Grant, commanding the 4th Light Horse Brigade in the Australian Mounted Division, who had proposed a mounted attack, to charge across the open ground to the southeast of the town to seize it and its wells. Two of the brigade's regiments, the 4th and 12th, formed up in squadron extended order with 4 yards between each man and 500 yards between each squadron. Supported by two batteries of horse artillery, the regiments galloped at the trenches ahead of them. The first squadrons dismounted on the trenches and engaged in a fierce close-quarter fight while successive squadrons wheeled onto alternate objectives or charged on into town to capture the wells.²³

In a later report the Commanding Officer of the 4th Light Horse Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Murray Bouchier, whose regiment had led the charge, summed up the effect of the attack:

In commenting on the attack I consider that the success was due to the rapidity with which the movement was carried out. Owing to the volume of fire brought to bear from the enemy's position by Machine Guns and rifles, a dismounted attack would have resulted in a much greater number of casualties. It was noticed also that the morale of the enemy was greatly shaken through our troops galloping over his positions thereby causing his riflemen and machine gunners to lose all control of fire discipline. When the troops came within short range of the trenches the enemy seemed to direct almost all his fire at the horses.²⁴

22. The most recent historian of the Palestine Campaign, Matthew Hughes, has criticised the Beersheba plan for its failure to take advantage of the new artillery and infantry superiority the EEF possessed in front of Gaza. He claims that a combined artillery and infantry assault, using Western Front techniques, on the relatively weak (by Western Front standards) Gaza defences would have facilitated a more sustainable and useful thrust along the coast. His reasoned and helpful argument is, by the author's own admission, based on a certain amount of counterfactual analysis. Alternative strategies for the campaign are beyond the scope of this article, which focuses on tactical matters rather than those of an operational or theatre nature. See Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917-1919* (London: Frank Cass, 1999).

23. Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, 127-28.

24. Lt.-Col. M. Bouchier for Commander 4th LH Bde. to HQ Aust. Mtd. Div., 20 Dec. 1917, 455/2, Record Series (RS) 25, Australian War Memorial (AWM), Canberra, Australia.

Analysis of this attack, aside from acknowledging the sorts of factors that Bouchier identified, has often focused on a common, but usually undefined, idea that the Light Horse was successful because of poor defences.²⁵ This last point has often revolved around discussion of the nature of the Turkish trench lines but has not generally noted what, for mounted troops, was perhaps the most significant aspect of the Turkish defences at Beersheba. In his report Bouchier pointed to the generally overlooked but salient fact that this "method of attack would not have been practicable were it not for the absence of barbed wire and entanglements."²⁶ Thus, for the remarkably light casualties of thirty-one killed and thirty-six wounded, most of which occurred in the fighting in the trenches rather than during the charge itself, the brigade had secured the wells necessary for the mounted troops and captured over 1,000 Turks and nine guns.²⁷

The left of the Turkish defensive line thus secured, Allenby's plans to dash into the flanks and rear of the Turkish army seemed set for success, but a combination of factors worked against this. Dispersion, fatigue, and determined rear-guards (supported by German and Austrian artillery and German machine gunners) all contributed to the miscarriage of the attempted pursuit, but it was the problem of logistics (particularly a lack of water for the mounted troops) which did most to ensure its failure. Thus though the enemy were pressed, disaster did not overtake them. Nevertheless, there followed much hard fighting, and not until just after the new year did the post-Gaza/Beersheba operations come to a halt for the mounted formations. The pause in operations allowed for the events at Beersheba and of late 1917 to be taken into consideration. In particular there was an enthusiastic discussion amongst the mounted troops about what the Beersheba charge meant for both the Light Horse and, more generally, cavalry in modern war.

25. For a detailed examination of the charge and the way it has been presented, see Ian Jones, "The Charge at Beersheba and the Making of Myths" (paper, Australian War Memorial History Conference, 8-12 February 1983), copy in Australian Defence Force Academy Library, Canberra, Australia. In this paper, Jones deals in detail with assertions by the British official historian and others that the trench lines were thin. More recently, Matthew Hughes has, for example, asserted that the "Turkish defences at Beersheba seem to have been so weak that the Australians were able to charge in and take the town" but does not elaborate on the nature of that weakness. See Hughes, "General Allenby and the Palestine Campaign, 1917-18," 73. Such assertions also do little to address the fact that the supposedly weak defences were capable of holding up dismounted attacks for most of the day.

26. Lt.-Col. M. Bouchier for Commander 4th LH Bde. to HQ Aust. Mtd. Div., 20 Dec. 1917, 455/2, RS 25, AWM.

27. Jones, "The Charge at Beersheba and the Making of Myths," 15, and Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, 125.

British cavalry, in particular, having undergone a thorough period of reform since the Second Anglo-Boer War that emphasised both effective mounted and dismounted action, had proved a valuable and flexible force in 1914 on the retreat from Mons.²⁸ That experience was, however, soon forgotten as the open warfare of the first months of the war was supplanted by trench fighting dominated by artillery, infantry, and increasingly dense defensive schemes. In 1915 the British commander of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Major-General Alexander Godley, who had a background as a proponent of mounted infantry, had written from Egypt that this was "an infantry and artillery war—exactly the opposite of South Africa, and mounted troops are at a discount."²⁹ This view was not uncommon, and when in late 1914 the 4th Light Horse Regiment had charged Australian infantry during training, umpires declared that it had suffered nearly 100 percent casualties from machine gun fire.³⁰ Phillip Chetwode, who had commanded a British cavalry brigade in 1914–15, and then ascended to command the 2nd Cavalry Division in France before coming to Egypt, had despairingly written of the unlikelihood of cavalry ever again taking part in significant charges:

Our dismounted training has proved its soundness and value on every occasion and the tactics we employed with it are, as far as we can see, absolutely right and require no modification. Both in principle and execution we were on the right lines throughout. . . . Right or wrong one is irresistibly compelled to conclude that modern firepower has gradually, for some years, and now almost finally put an effective check on the mounted employment of masses of cavalry.³¹

He considered that small, squadron-sized actions were still occasionally possible, but there was little point in continuing to direct resources to training for mass action, and concentrating on fire action was the best solution for British cavalry. As Henry Gullet, the official historian of the AIF in Palestine, later put it, "with occasional exceptions, the cavalry leaders were inclined to accept the view established by the struggle in France, that trench warfare and machine guns had . . . greatly curtailed the possibility of cavalry shock tactics."³²

Light Horsemen, inheritors of the prewar militia at home and products of the mounted rifle template that Hutton had introduced, appeared

28. Badsey, "Fire and the Sword," 282–93.

29. Maj.-Gen. Alexander Godley, GOC New Zealand Expeditionary Force to Col. Alfred Robin, Commandant New Zealand Military Forces, 5 April 1915, cited in Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Centenary History of Defence*, vol. 1, *The Australian Army* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 42.

30. Jones, *Australians at War: The Australian Light Horse*, 24–25.

31. Unpublished paper by Maj.-Gen. Phillip Chetwode, Commander 2nd Cavalry Division [1916?], 94/1/1, Part 3, RS 25, AWM.

32. Gullet, *The AIF in Sinai and Palestine*, 403.

to have a variety of opinions on the issue. After its return from Gallipoli, the Anzac Mounted Division had reportedly carried out trials with a type of lance, but for some reason it proved unsuitable and was not adopted.³³ Light Horse training records for 1915 include part of a South African mounted rifle manual, published in 1906, that contained a section on fixing bayonets and using them mounted in the pursuit.³⁴ How much this was practiced by any of the Light Horse, if at all, is uncertain, but clearly it was of interest to someone. Such thinking remained well in the background, however, as dismounted skills and mounted rifle mobility remained the centrepiece of training and fighting. Just a few weeks before Beersheba, the Anzac Mounted Division had gone out of its way to rationalise and improve its dismounted work for what it thought the coming battle would require.³⁵

Nevertheless, a number of events showed that the usefulness of mounted charges was under serious consideration. At Qatia, in August 1915 during the pursuit of the Turks after Romani, part of the Anzac Mounted Division, perhaps using the techniques of the South African manual, had fixed their bayonets while mounted and charged a Turkish position. Intended more for moral effect than anything, the charge, the first by the Light Horse in action, was unsuccessful as it petered out in boggy ground.³⁶ A similar charge by the 5th Light Horse Regiment and the Auckland Mounted Rifles on the same day was defeated by the belated realisation there were in fact no enemy at the objective.³⁷ A few days later at Bir el Abd, a squadron of the 10th Light Horse Regiment made another fruitless mounted movement.³⁸ More notable was another effort by the same regiment at Magdhaba in 1916. There that regiment's acting commander, Major Horace Robertson, opted not to advance on

33. Anon., "Operations of the Mounted Troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force," *Cavalry Journal* 10 (October 1920): 387.

34. Drill for Mounted Riflemen, Cape Colonial Forces, 1906, Appendix III, Mounted Bayonet Practice, 94/1/1, Part 1, RS 25, AWM. An article reprinted from the *Army Review* in *The Australian Military Journal* in early 1914 had referred to South African trials using the bayonet when mounted. The article claimed that the trials had found it unsuitable for such use but did not mention if the bayonet was held in the hand or fixed to the rifle as per the 1906 instructions. See: "G.G.A." "The Bayonet for Mounted Riflemen," *Australian Military Journal* 5 (January 1914): 135.

35. Memo on Dismounted Attack, A&NZ Mtd. Div. to 1st LH Bde, 9 Oct. 1917, 94/1/1, Part 4, RS 25, AWM.

36. Gullet, *The AIF in Sinai and Palestine*, 171–72. The size of the charge and the identity of the units involved are unclear due to conflicting information from different sources.

37. Ibid. It was believed that the *hod* these two regiments were ordered to gallop at contained a number of Turkish guns. (A *hod* was a patch of trees and vegetation, usually associated with an oasis or subterranean water, in the Sinai Desert.)

38. Major H. C. H. Robertson, "The 10th Light Horse Attack at Magdhaba, 23rd December, 1916," *Cavalry Journal* 25, no. 96 (1935): 230.

foot at the redoubts, as all the other regiments were doing, but instead "went forward in a succession of mounted rushes, galloping from cover to cover."³⁹ By doing so the mounted men demoralized and confused the Turks, captured a number of redoubts, and eventually took over 700 prisoners.⁴⁰ More generally, by early 1917 the rapidity and surprise inherent in well-executed mounted manoeuvre or attack in open country was being recognized as a valuable tactic. Notes on "cavalry fighting" circulated in April 1917 pointed out:

(d) Advances were made successfully over exposed ground moving at the gallop, extended.

NOTE—Both at QATIA and OGHRAITINA by the 2nd L.H. Bde. and W.M.R. [Wellington Mounted Rifles] and at MAGDHABA by the 1st L.H. Bde. an advance at a gallop under fire was made. In both cases the losses were practically nil. At RAFA also Bdes. galloped up to 2000 yards before beginning the dismounted attack. . . .

(f) When attacking, a sudden opening of hostile machine gun or rifle fire from a flank may be dealt with by detaching a troop or Squadron to gallop at the gun or rifle men while the main body continues its advance.⁴¹

This last point, given the widespread belief that it was the machine gun and modern firepower in general that spelt doom for cavalry, is particularly significant.

The charge of the 4th Light Horse Brigade was not, in light of these expressions and experiences, an inspired exception, but the culmination of a series of tactical experiments and lessons that appear to have resonated with a number of key members of the Australian Mounted Division. The 12th Light Horse Regiment's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Donald Cameron, had apparently remembered mounted rifles charging Boer sangers in South Africa and maintained a conviction of the ability of mounted men to gallop at Turkish defences if the conditions were right.⁴² One can only wonder if the fact that he had started his military career before federation as a militia cavalryman was also of some import.⁴³ More significant, however, was the view of the divisional commander, Major-General H. Hodgson. A British cavalryman with a firm belief in the value of mounted action, he had unsuccessfully attempted before Beersheba to have the two Light Horse brigades of his command equipped, like

the Yeomanry, with the sword.⁴⁴ Frustrated in this course, he instead issued a detailed order on mounted action to his formation just before the battle:

(i) It is to be noted that the country is built for mounted action, whereas any dismounted attack is handicapped for want of cover. The Divisional Commander hopes that all brigades will endeavour to profit by their knowledge of these facts.

(ii) To manoeuvre an attack mounted an *arme-blanc* weapon is necessary. The Divisional Commander suggests that the bayonet is equally as good as the sword, if it is used for pointing only; it has the same moral effect as a sword as it glitters in the sun and the difference could not be detected by the enemy.

(iii) If used in this manner, the point only should be sharpened, to ensure the men point instead of striking.

(iv) The Divisional Commander suggests that the bayonet, used thus, will be more effective as an *arme-blanc* weapon than the rifle with bayonet fixed, as he fears that the latter method would leave the control of the horse too difficult in manoeuvre, and would leave the right arm too tired to give the final thrust.⁴⁵

As one history notes, the utility of the bayonet as a substitute for the sword was probably overstated,⁴⁶ but—assuming that the 4th Light Horse Brigade did as it was ordered—the men who charged at Beersheba had blades suitably prepared, and the senior officers, at least, presumably must have known their divisional commander's views.

After the charge those within this same brigade could not help but compare their relatively cheap success at Beersheba with their involvement in the Second Battle of Gaza. There "this Brigade made a long advance on foot, with two Regiments (11th & 12th) and the Machine Gun Squadron, and had 187 casualties without any satisfactory result being obtained."⁴⁷ Lessons were being learnt: a week after Beersheba a squadron of the 4th Light Horse Regiment, conducting a reconnaissance, galloped in open order for more than two miles under heavy rifle and howitzer fire and incurred no casualties.⁴⁸ The open fighting north of the Gaza-Beersheba defences in November and December provided more examples of what charges could do. On 8 November at Huj, a mixed group of Yeomanry from the 5th Mounted Brigade (the only Yeomanry still in the Australian Mounted Division) drew swords and charged a

39. Gullet, *The AIF in Sinai and Palestine*, 223.

40. *Ibid.*, 223–24.

41. Notes on Recent Cavalry Fighting up to 7th April 1917, 923/27, RS 25, AWM.

42. Gullet, *The AIF in Sinai and Palestine*, 403.

43. Peter Burness, "The Australian Horse: A Cavalry Squadron in the South African War," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* 6 (April 1985): 44–45.

44. Lt.-Col. Rex Osbourne, "Operations of the Mounted Troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force," *Cavalry Journal* 12, no. 42 (1921): 351.

45. Aust. Mt. Div. order, cited in *ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. History of the 4th Light Horse Brigade, 1915–19, p. 10, 455/67, RS 25, AWM.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11. The charge was not directed at a defended locality but across the front of two separate ones in order to find the cover of a wadi.

series of strong positions made up of riflemen, machine guns, and Austrian artillery. Hastily organised and conducted without any fire support, the charge was costly. Figures proffered vary, but it seems that of the 120 or so men who actually took part in the charge, somewhere between 70 and 90 men became casualties.⁴⁹ For that, however, they took 30 prisoners, a remarkable eleven field guns, and four machine guns. The commander of the 60th Division, whose own formation had benefited from the charge, expressed regret at the casualties but was pleased that they "completely broke the hostile resistance and enabled my division to push on to Huj."⁵⁰ Following this, on 13 November the 6th Mounted Brigade at El Mughar very successfully carried out a charge, which had good fire support and was well executed. As well as clearing a long ridge from which the Turks had held up the 52nd Division most of the day, the brigade killed an unknown but large number of the enemy, took nearly 1,100 prisoners and captured two field guns and fifteen machine guns.⁵¹ In doing so they had lost 16 men killed and 107 wounded.⁵² Other successful charges by the Yeomanry that November were made at Khuweifeh, Yebnah, and Abu Shusheh.⁵³ During the same period two regiments of the Anzac Mounted Division's 1st Light Horse Brigade galloped more than four miles to capture the village of Ameidat and nearly 400 prisoners. The 1st Light Horse Regiment captured Ludd on horseback and galloped down an enemy rearguard beyond the town to take more than 300 prisoners and two machine guns.⁵⁴

The charge at Beersheba, arguably the most impressive (though El Mughar was surely at least as spectacular), was but one of a rapid series of events that pointed to the continued tactical utility of sensibly executed shock tactics carried out under the right circumstances. During the quiet period that followed Beersheba and subsequent operations, there was a flurry of communications around the Desert Mounted Corps about tactical lessons learned, including queries about the judged value of mounted attack. The experiences of the 1st Light Horse Brigade notwithstanding, there was a degree of ambivalence within the Anzac Mounted Division. The general view was that because they had done nothing like the charge by the 4th Light Horse Brigade, they could not pass any worthwhile comment, though it was noted that advancing

49. The Marquess of Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry 1816 to 1919*, vol. 5, *Egypt, Palestine and Syria, 1914 to 1919* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994), 181.

50. Maj.-Gen. Shea, GOC 60th Division, to Chauvel, cited in *ibid.*, 175.

51. Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry*, 5:198; and Table of Mounted Actions of Des. Corps, Oct.-Nov. 1917, 923/27, RS 25, AWM.

52. Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry*, 5:198.

53. Table of Mounted Actions of Des. Corps, Oct.-Nov. 1917, 923/27, RS 25, AWM.

54. Des. Corps to all subordinate formations, 24 Jan. 1918, 923/27, RS 25, AWM.

mounted under shellfire in suitable formations did not present a good target to the guns, and thus casualties were generally slight.⁵⁵ The Australian Mounted Division's responses to these queries have not been found, but a year later Grant, of the 4th Light Horse Brigade, wrote of the operations after Beersheba that:

[I]n such an operation as this pursuit they [the Light Horse and NZMR] were severely handicapped for want of an *arme blanche* weapon. The tactics of mounted rifles in pursuit necessitate turning movements, which are comparatively slow. The sword permits a far more direct line of attack and brings quick decisions. . . . If we had swords, I am sure we could have ridden on and captured thousands; as it was we stood off and shot hundreds only.⁵⁶

For this commander at least, it was not just a lack of water that had frustrated the pursuit after Beersheba.

A memorandum in January 1918 set out the Desert Mounted Corps' thinking on the matter, apparently after considering the developments:

- (i). Mounted troops are capable today, as in the past, of crossing a fire swept zone, so long as they move quickly and extended. In most of the attacks the Squadrons of each Regiment followed on another in a succession of waves. They were carried through at the gallop.
- (ii). The moral effect of a mounted attack has lost none of its potency. On one occasion the horses were so exhausted, after the gallop, that the enemy, if he had stood his ground, could have shot down our men with ease as they topped the crest.
- (iii). It is in close cooperation with infantry and not when acting independently, that mounted troops may expect to find the most favourable conditions, and to gain the most far-reaching results.

The same document went on to point out that dismounted attacks were vulnerable to being severely delayed by a few enemy machine guns and then told mounted commanders to be sure that a mounted attack would not produce success before dismounting for a firefight.⁵⁷

That the Light Horse should begin to seriously consider the advantages of mounted attack was, in the end, not much of an extension of its existing role. As highlighted earlier, the difference between British cavalry, in the form of the Yeomanry in Palestine, and the Light Horse had not been that great to start with. Since 1912 both had used the same manual and occupied virtually the same doctrinal ground under the

55. Training notes regarding recent operations by Anzac Div., 16 Dec. 1917, 941/1, Part 4, RS 25, AWM.

56. Brig.-Gen. W. Grant cited in Osbourne, "Operations of the Mounted Troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force," 365-66.

57. Memorandum on Recent Operations, attached to, Des. Corps Gen. Staff to A&NZ Mtd. Div., Aust. Mtd. Div., Yeo. Mtd. Div. & 7th Mtd. Bde., 24 Jan. 1918, 923/27, RS 25, AWM.

Field Service Regulations. Never very content as mounted rifles, and benefiting from a prewar decision to allow it the *arme blanche* upon hostilities, the Yeomanry had taken up the sword in 1914.⁵⁸ Yet the dismounted tactics of the Yeomanry and Light Horse were virtually identical. At the Cavalry School of Instruction at Zeitoun in Egypt, all horse-mounted officers in need of qualification in Egypt or Palestine attended the same lectures on the full gamut of cavalry duties, with virtually no distinction made between those equipped with a sword and those not.⁵⁹ Within the theatre of operations the term cavalry was regularly used to describe all the horse-mounted troops. The distinction between cavalry and mounted rifles was always a relatively small one and, by 1917, was negligible. A 1917 memo on dismounted attack, aimed at all mounted troops, contended for all that it should not be "made unless it is morally certain that the object cannot be attained by the real cavalry methods. That is to say, by a direct attack mounted or by gaining the enemy's flank."⁶⁰

The increasing focus on mounted tactics did not mean, however, that the Light Horse was beginning to subscribe to a doctrine of hell-for-leather close order charges. The intense cavalry debates of the years before the war and the reforms carried out meant that British and dominion mounted tactics called for relatively dispersed formations (unless charging cavalry when tighter formations were called for), the use of concealed approaches, comprehensive use of fire and manoeuvre, and the judicious use of shock tactics in a modern and tactically adept way. The notes for a mounted attack exercise of 1918 in Palestine bear this out:

1. (i) In [an] enemy's position one locally may appear most valuable tactically.
 - (ii) Take special precautions [to] get to this point by
 - a—sweeping it with fire
 - b—arrange that successive lines should sweep over it
 - c—let your last line halt on it
 - d—send up Hotchkiss battery at once to consolidate.
2. (i) Give an objective to each attacking squadron.

58. Badsey, "Fire and the Sword," *passim*; and Osbourne, "Operations of the Mounted Troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force," 333.

59. Results of Examinations, Imperial School of Instruction—Cavalry Wing, 28th Course, 27 Jul. 1917, 306/1, RS 27, AWM; and Imperial School of Instruction, Zeitoun—Cavalry Course, Syllabus, May 1918, 877/11, RS 25, AWM. The only distinction was a few extra lessons on use of the sword/lance for those who came from regiments that were equipped with it.

60. Memo on dismounted attack in-depth, undated but 1917, 942/1, Part 4, RS 25, AWM.

- (ii) Squadron[s] will probably have to dismount to complete job; keeping one troop mounted as reserve.
- (iii) Hotchkiss battery [to] follow squadron close, come into action close behind melee ready to—
 - a—shoot if things go badly in melee
 - b—if melee successful at once consolidate position.

- (iv) Having consolidated with Vickers, Hotchkiss etc., rally all horsemen with a view to attack.

Not mentioned here but certainly to be considered was the liberal application of horse artillery support.

By now Hodgson, not surprisingly, was thoroughly animated on the issue of getting swords for his Light Horse. One participant and early historian of the campaign noted that Beersheba had "thoroughly confirmed to the G.O.C. Ausdiv [Australian Mounted Division] . . . his opinion that his two A.L.H. Bdes. [Australian Light Horse Brigades] were seriously handicapped for want of a sword, and he determined to continue to press this question the moment operations come to a halt. He knew that his opinion was shared by the C-in-C [Allenby] himself."⁶¹ This same historian also asserted that since Beersheba all ranks of the 4th Light Horse Brigade "wished to be armed with the sword."⁶² This was not strictly the case. In his post-Beersheba reports, Bouchier wrote on behalf of his Brigade Commander that "it is the general impression, and I strongly support it, that similar mounted attacks could frequently be carried out with success if all ranks were armed with revolvers."⁶³ This recommendation does not seem to have gone far, and in March 1918 the regiments of the Australian Mounted Division were informed that mounted training with the bayonet, using slightly modified sword drill, was "to be at once taught to all ranks."⁶⁴ Hodgson also continued to agitate for his Light Horsemen to be given swords. Even in the Anzac Mounted Division, a formation generally much more equivocal about mounted action, the 1st Light Horse Brigade was telling its regiments to "always look out for a chance for a mounted attack."⁶⁵

61. Osbourne, "Operations of the Mounted Troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force," 354.

62. *Ibid.*

63. Lt.-Col. M. Bouchier, for Commander 4th LH Bde., to HQ Aus. Mtd. Div., 20 Dec. 1917, 455/2, RS 25, AWM. Edward Hutton had advocated such an armament in 1903–4 in substitution for the *arme blanche*; see *Australian Regulations and Orders for the Military Forces of the Commonwealth, Provisional Edition, 1904*, Section 14, Vol. 1, CRS A2657, NAA; and Correspondence between Hutton and A. Dawson, Minister of Defence, 1904, 1903/4892, CRS B168, NAA.

64. Assistant Brigade-Major, 3rd LH Bde. to 8th, 9th and 10th LHRs, 4 Mar. 1918, 941/1, Part 7, RS 25, AWM.

65. Lt.-Col. J. Browne, A&NZ Mtd. Div., to 1st, 2nd & 3rd LHRs, 28 Feb. 1918, 941/1, Part 7, RS 25, AWM.

1918

Hodgson's agitation for the *arme blanche* for his Light Horsemen continued through 1918, but he met, initially, with little success. Not until after an event in mid-July did his arguments begin to hold sway. On 14 July the Turks launched an attack by two divisions, spearheaded by two and one-half German battalions, at the Anzac Mounted Division at Abu Tulul. Quickly defeated by a rapid counterattack by the 1st Light Horse Brigade, the Turks' attack proved to be their last of the campaign.⁶⁶ Further south, as part of the same general action, the three Indian regiments of the 15th (Imperial Service) Cavalry Brigade took part in a series of mounted actions around El Hinu, where they employed their lances to deadly effect, spearing about ninety Turks, capturing another ninety, and taking four machine guns.⁶⁷ This relatively small action produced from the staff of the Desert Mounted Corps another widely circulated memo setting out the value of the *arme blanche*:

(i) The mounted action of the 15th (Imperial Service) Cavalry Brigade, who brought off several charges, is further proof of the value of shock tactics and cold steel . . .

(iv) With an enemy such as we have against us, Turks or Germans who are "tailors" on horses and have no spirit for a mounted fight, the greatest risks can be taken.

A troop can easily dispose of a hostile squadron, provided they are charged with decision, rapidity and cohesion.

(v) During the training period shock action against cavalry, infantry, and guns should be practised.

There is no enemy we are likely to meet who can use rifle or machine gun with effect on rapidly moving mounted men, unless they themselves are secure behind wire and works. Artillery does not hurt extended and moving horsemen.⁶⁸

Hodgson used this memorandum as the basis for a new attempt to get the sword for his Light Horsemen. Claiming support from his two Australian brigade commanders, and pointing to the pursuit after Beer-sheba, he again set out his view that "the conditions in this theatre of war are particularly suited to the employment of a steel weapon" and that he could "expect greater and more rapid results from my Light Horse brigades if they are equipped with a sword."⁶⁹ He contended that

66. *Ibid.*, 160.

67. Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry*, 5: 239-40.

68. Notes on Enemy Attack on Desert Mounted Corps, 14 Jul. 1918, by Brig-Gen. Godwin, Gen. Staff, Des. Corps, 941/1, Part 8, RS 25, AWM.

69. Maj.-Gen. Hodgson to Des. Corps, 27 Jul. 1918, 941/1, Part 8, RS 25, AWM. It is clear that once authorised to use the sword, Aus. Mtd. Div. effectively abandoned the *Yeomanry and Mounted Rifle Training* manual, which did not include sections on sword use, in favour of *Cavalry Training*, which included drill specifically designed

the dash shown during the recent trans-Jordan operations was a reflection of the training with the bayonet he had ordered and dismissed the arguments that had been used against the sword for Light Horse: that the seven pounds of sword weight would be better used for ammunition, that the conversion from mounted rifles to cavalry would only "result in badly trained cavalry," and that the drill taken from *Yeomanry and Mounted Rifle Training* was not suited to shock action. As the amount of ammunition carried by each man in the Desert Mounted Corps had recently been cut from 230 to 180 rounds, the issue of weight, always a paramount one for horsemanship, could be dismissed. He promised to overcome any training obstacles and stated he could produce cavalrymen in a month.⁷⁰ Chauvel, commanding both the corps and the AIF in the Middle East, apparently was finally swayed by the actions of the three Indian regiments on 14 July and now agreed to Hodgson's request.⁷¹

The staff of the Australian Mounted Division was prepared for such an eventuality, having written a sword-training programme on the same day as the Indian regiments were spearing the Turks, and once authorised they quickly swung into action. Rifle buckets and swords (the British 1908 Cavalry Sword) were procured and issued, and training commenced in mid-August, continuing until the middle of the following month.⁷² Whatever the passions for the *arme blanche* among the senior officers of the division, the move raised a few eyebrows further down the ranks. One brigade recorded that at "first the new arm for Light Horse was looked upon with a certain amount of doubt, but once the troops had become accustomed to it, and commenced training in earnest all feeling within the Division against its use soon vanished."⁷³ For the newly raised 5th Light Horse Brigade (which included a mixed French colonial cavalry regiment), this change was particularly challenging, as the bulk of its men had just been transferred out of the Imperial Camel Corps. Many of these men had been Light Horsemen to start with, but a significant number had transferred to the camels from the infantry in 1916 and now faced the double challenge of learning how to ride as well as use the sword.⁷⁴ Things were eased for the extant formations by the mounted

for use with the *arme blanche*. Lt.-Col. R. Osbourne, Gen. Staff, Aus. Mtd. Div. to 3rd, 4th & 5th LH Bdes., 14 Jul. 1918, 941/1, Part 8, RS 25, AWM.

70. Maj.-Gen. Hodgson to Des. Corps, 27 Jul. 1918, 941/1, Part 8, RS 25, AWM.

71. Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, 154; and Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry*, 5: 223.

72. Table of Marching Order, Aus. Div. to Brigades, 10 Sep. 1918, 941/1, Part 9, RS 25, AWM.

73. History of the 4th LH Bde., 455/67, RS 25, AWM.

74. Imperial Camel Brigade Re-organisation Order, No. 8, 25 Jul. 1918, 157/1, RS 25, AWM; and The Australian Light Horse in the Great War, prepared by Lt.-Gen. Sir H. Chauvel, 33.68/15152, CRS A1194, NAA.

bayonet training that Hodgson had instituted earlier in the year, as the regiments had then gone through a vigorous period improving their mounted manoeuvring, including mounted attacks, mêlées, and rallying.⁷⁵ The Hotchkiss gunners, too, had already been trained to operate in machine-gun groups at squadron and regimental level, as was necessary for mounted actions, rather than as part of each troop as had been done previously.⁷⁶ Regardless of this enthusiasm, the Anzac Mounted Division, under the New Zealand Major-General Sir Edward Chaytor, remained unconvinced. What was being discussed at this time in this division about the sword is, unfortunately, largely unknown. The account of the campaign that appeared in the British *Cavalry Journal* in the early 1920s, written by Hodgson's divisional chief of staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Rex Osbourne, provides one of the few indications: "The Anzac Div. was content to remain a mounted rifle division, as it had proved itself of magnificent quality at mounted rifle work, and the Divisional Commander [Chaytor] was by no means certain it would gain anything by adopting the sword."⁷⁷ With the two Light Horse divisions having thus taken divergent approaches to battle, the final plans for the next operations were being made.

Allenby was now planning a new offensive that in some ways recalled the conception of the Beersheba plan the previous year. Then he had intended that after the securing of the enemy's flank, the mounted troops would launch themselves into the enemy's rear either to force a collapse or at least cut off their withdrawal. Though that plan had not come off, he was now aiming for much the same outcome from a cavalry penetration of the Turkish lines along the coast flank, to be followed by an attack into the Turkish rear.⁷⁸ But this time the initial strike at the Turkish defences would be made not by the mounted troops, as at Beersheba, but by the infantry of XXI Corps and their supporting artillery. The cavalry, kept fresh and uncommitted, would then exploit the gap created. The bulk of the Desert Mounted Corps was thus concentrated in secret just north of Jaffa. Excepted from this plan was the Anzac Mounted Division, which was made the centrepiece of a force that would attack northeast from the Jordan Valley towards Amman. Apparently some in this division were dismayed that they were to be left out of the cavalry operations along the coast and muttered that they were being disadvantaged because the formation had opted not to equip with the

sword.⁷⁹ Whether this was so is far from certain, but undoubtedly some concerns had been expressed about the utility of mounted rifles in the pursuit, and this may have been a factor. The division was a highly experienced one, however, and Chaytor a highly regarded commander, so the tasking may equally have reflected trust rather than concern about their possible limitations.⁸⁰

Following an artillery barrage that would not have been out of place on the Western Front, XXI Corps attacked on the morning of 20 September 1918 and within three hours had opened a gap in the Turkish lines sufficient for the Desert Mounted Corps to pour through. It was an excellent example of the success of a well-organised and well-conducted all-arms attack—one of the most dramatic of the war. By adopting such a plan, the mounted troops had been spared the need to assault the prepared enemy defences and were instead used in a more suitable exploitation role. Chauvel elatedly wrote to his wife that day that he "had a glorious time. We have done a regular Jeb Stuart ride," and then pointed out that it was "the first time in the war that the G in Gap Scheme has really come off and I am feeling very pleased with myself."⁸¹ The corps quickly reached the initial objectives and when the victory, known by the British as Megiddo, proved greater than had been expected, it was exploited so that by the end of October the EEF had destroyed three Turkish armies, captured Damascus, and pushed on as far as Aleppo, whereupon Turkey agreed to an armistice that brought the campaign to a close.

Tactically, however, this last phase of the Palestine campaign had strongly justified Hodgson's faith in, and determination to get, swords. Light Horsemen had drawn their new weapons and used them numerous times to great effect. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade had done so at Jenin; the Light Horsemen and French cavalry of the 5th Light Horse Brigade also used them near Nablus. The 11th and 12th Light Horse Regiments had charged in the pre-dawn darkness at Semakh, and the 3rd Light Horse Brigade made more charges during operations around Damascus.⁸² In its postwar operational narrative, the 4th Light Horse Brigade recorded one such instance on the road to Damascus:

"A" Squadron took the right flank of the 4th [Light Horse Regiment] line & "C" Squadron to the left, with "B" Squadron in reserve behind

75. Brig.-Gen. L. C. Wilson, *Narrative of Operations of Third Light Horse Brigade, AIF, From 27th October to 4th March 1919* (Cairo: Oriental Advertising Company, 1919), 53.

76. HQ 12th LHR to Squadrans, 14 Apr. 1918, 941/1, Part 8, RS 25, AWM.

77. Osbourne, "Operations of the Mounted Troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force," 350.

78. Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, 161.

79. Lt.-Col. Rex Osbourne, "Operations of the Mounted Troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (continued)," *Cavalry Journal* 13 (1923): 150–51.

80. *Ibid.*, 151; and *The Australian Light Horse in the Great War*, prepared by Lt.-Gen. Sir H. Chauvel, 33.68/15152, CRS A1194, NAA.

81. Chauvel to his wife, 20 September 1918, cited in Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, 171.

82. *The Australian Light Horse in the Great War*, prepared by Lt.-Gen. Sir H. Chauvel, pp. 36–44, 33.68/15152, CRS A1194.

the low ridge. Both Squadrons had ground scouts out in front, as they advanced at the trot, this proved very fortunate as just before the final assault "C" Squadron ground scouts gave the signal to take ground to the left, and the whole squadron as one man swung to the left thus avoiding disaster in an impassable ravine. After passing this obstacle "C" Squadron again swung to the right and both squadrons locked in one strong line charged the position; 12th Regiment charging their sector on the right at the same moment. Covering fire was given by the artillery [the Notts Battery, Royal Horse Artillery] until the charging line was very close to its objective, with the result that the enemy was unable to work his machine guns, and at the near approach of steel fled, leaving his guns and prisoners.⁸³

British and Indian regiments made at least six notable charges during the same period, only one of which, by the Indian 2nd Lancers at Ibrid on 26 September, that reinforced lessons about adequate reconnaissance and fire support, was a failure.⁸⁴

The Light Horse charge recounted above and the failed charge at Ibrid were testimony to the fact that although the Turkish Army had been decisively defeated at Megiddo and been largely destroyed as a viable force in Palestine and Syria, the mounted troops could not treat all that opposed them as defeated rabble (though there was no shortage of these either). Some Turkish troops were still dangerous and willing. The Turkish Army had never been considered the equivalent of its German allies, but as Edward Erickson has pointed out, it was an army capable of remarkable resilience and regeneration.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the fracturing of the Turkish armies and the concomitant decline in their morale meant that the Australian Mounted Division and other mounted troops equipped with *arme blanche* were able to use speed and shock tactics as a method of quickly and easily dealing with groups of Turks who might have proved more resilient if afforded an opportunity to gather themselves. A tactical narrative of the operations around Damas-

83. History of the 4th LH Bde., 455/67, RS 25, AWM.

84. Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry*, 5: *passim*; see 319 for the 2nd Lancers.

85. Edward Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 195–204. The state of the Turkish Army in late 1918 is not a subject on which there is a uniformity of opinion. Erickson acknowledges the disaster that was confronting it in Syria in October 1918 but also notes it was still in the field, was conducting rearguard actions, and was actively preparing for the defence of the Anatolian homeland. Matthew Hughes is more scornful and clearly views the army as one beyond the point of effectiveness. He also asserts that the EEF would have been far less successful against German opposition. This is a useful historical discussion point, and quite possibly true, but is also largely speculative. See Hughes, "Allenby and the Palestine Campaign"; and Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917–1919*.

cus by the Australian Mounted Division serves to highlight the tactical powers that the sword gave them in the last days of the campaign:

Every time during this portion of the campaign that a mounted attack was made it was highly successful. Despite their numerous machine guns the Turks could not stand the charge of the cavalry and every instance only tended to increase the moral superiority of our troops over the enemy. Against prepared and wired positions, of course it would be madness for cavalry to try these tactics, but in open warfare where the results to be gained are so great, it is worth risking a number of casualties to gain a quick decisive victory. The KAUKAB position would probably have been very costly for an attack dismounted, but the rapid rush of the horsemen and the sight of the steel had its usual unnerving effect. In the operations to the North East of the city [Damasus] the 3rd Brigade showed that the sword was the most effective weapon to use; every time the mounted men got a chance to get home victory was theirs. It would have been a very slow and difficult job to have worked the enemy out of their vineyards and orchards but for the constant threat to their flank. Again at KHAN AYASH on October the 2nd the enemy force there would have undoubtedly have escaped from anything but a cavalry rush. Only a determined charge prevented the enemy bringing his numerous machine guns into action and a fire fight would have been all in his favour.

The experience of the division throughout the operations from 19th September to 2nd October 1918 was that our force had its value practically doubled by the issue of the sword. They retained all their old value as mounted rifles, with exactly the same firepower, and added to this was the power of shock action—a power [whose lack] had been keenly felt on previous occasions since leaving the desert of SINAI.⁸⁶

Conclusion

The weakness of the Ottoman Army in 1918 had undoubtedly made the task of the Light Horse and other mounted troops in late 1918 an easier one than might otherwise have been the case. But mounted actions, if poorly handled, were still risky things, as was discovered at Ibrid. It was not just at the end of the war, however, that charge tactics were found to be useful. The Australian Light Horse, and the force it was part of, had been gradually rediscovering the tactical utility of mounted manoeuvre and shock tactics since 1916, and the Turks, if not always first rate, were not a disintegrating force then.

86. Aust. Mtd. Div. Tactical Narrative—Operations resulting in the capture of Damasus, 2 Oct. 1918, 455/7, RS 25, AWM.

The Battle of Megiddo demonstrated the power of a well-planned all-arms attack and demonstrated that the "G in Gap" scheme, so often derided by historians, was more than just a fanciful gleam in a so-called chateau general's eye. In the right circumstances it was viable and, for the enemy, a potentially devastating scheme of manoeuvre. This is not to say that it was one that could be successfully applied everywhere. Cavalry formations on the Western Front waited fruitlessly for such an opportunity for much of the war. Yet the reasons for that inactivity are not necessarily as straightforward as is often suggested. The experiences in the Middle East during the same period clearly indicate that fire in and of itself was not necessarily cavalry's biggest problem on the battlefield. It was evident that in mobile warfare in open country, the effects of firepower were diffused and cavalry had scope to employ not just fire tactics but also their traditional weapons using modern methods. In Palestine cavalrymen noted that artillery generally had little effect on them, provided they could move rapidly and in extended formations. Much the same thing was noted of machine-gun fire, and widely circulated tactical advice actually advocated galloping at any machine guns that suddenly opened fire on mounted cavalry.

As the comments by Lieutenant-Colonel Bouchier after Beersheba clearly indicated, and the Australian Mounted Division's final operational summary reiterated, barbed wire was probably the single greatest obstacle to mounted action. Had the Turkish defences at Beersheba been wired, the charge by the 4th Light Horse Brigade could not have taken place. This device had, after all, been originally designed to stop animals, and cavalry could not get through it. If confronted by such an obstacle, cavalrymen were faced with the options of either withdrawing rapidly or milling around in front of it where, as a stationary target, they could be engaged with area weapons such as artillery and machine guns. It was dense defence-in-depth systems made up of formidable obstacles (incidentally including shell-broken ground), covered by heavy direct and indirect fire, that made operations so difficult for cavalry on the Western Front. The same military problem, it seems worthwhile to note, took infantry and artillery the better part of four years to consistently overcome.

In another theatre where the enemy could not or would not develop the defensive competence of the German allies (despite the presence of German and Austrian troops, advisors, and commanders), and probably lacked the necessary resources, the full potential for mounted action remained available to cavalry. That even early in the twentieth century this potential still also included the use of the *arme blanche* and sensibly executed modern shock tactics deserves more understanding. Certainly the Light Horse had discovered that the mounted rifle model had its limitations and that something else provided more flexibility. The les-

son of 1918 for the Australian mounted branch was summed up in an article in the *Kia Ora Cooe* by the journalist, and soon to be official historian, Henry Gullet:

Before this campaign many experienced Light Horse officers were strongly opposed to the sword, but since they have seen the remarkable saving it has made in hard fighting and in casualties they have entirely changed their opinion. The Light Horseman has become a cavalryman.⁸⁷

87. H. S. Gullett, cited in "A Retrospect," *Kia Ora Cooe*, 2 (15 November 1918): 1. The *Kia Ora Cooe* was a troop newspaper established in mid-1918 for the Australian and New Zealand soldiers in the Middle East.