



The Journal and
Proceedings of the
Military Historical Society
of Australia
(founded 1957)

Society website
www.mhsa.org.au

Patron

Air Marshal I B Gratton,
AO, AFC (retd)

President

Major R Morrison, RFD

Federal Secretary

Kristen Alexander
fedsec@mhsa.org.au

Editor

Anthony Staunton
editor@mhsa.org.au

Sabretache
material to:
editor@mhsa.org.au
PO Box 5030
GARRAN ACT 2605

SABRETACHE

September 2009

The Military Historical Society of Australia

The aims of the Society are the encouragement and pursuit of study and research in military history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment and kindred matters; the promotion of public interest and knowledge in these subjects, and the preservation of historical military objects with particular reference to the armed forces of Australia.

MHSA Constitution and Rules

The Constitution of the Society dated 1 August 1993 appears in *Sabretache* January-March 1993. The Rules of the Society adopted on 14 April 1997 appear in *Sabretache* April-June 1997.

Sabretache

The Federal Council which is located in Canberra, is responsible for the publication of the Society Journal, *Sabretache*, which is mailed to each member of the Society quarterly.

Membership subscription

The annual membership subscription, due on 1 July each year, is \$30 plus branch subscription. Details of subscriptions and meetings are available from branch secretaries.

Federal Secretary

Kristen Alexander, PO Box 5030, GARRAN ACT 2605

Branch Secretaries

ACT – Robynne Mitchell, PO Box 7139, Watson ACT 2602
Albury-Wodonga – Chris Seymour, PO Box 5221 Wodonga Plaza Vic 3690
Geelong – Steve Chilvers, 15 Skinner Crt, Grovedale Vic 3216
Queensland – Kayleen Freeman, PO Box 743, Maryborough Qld 4650
South Australia – A F Harris, PO Box 550, Mitcham SA 5062
Victoria – Stephen Gray, 34 Grevillea Cres, Hoppers Crossing Vic 3029
Western Australia – Rhonda Grande, 19 Sillmon Way, Duncraig WA 6023

Editorial

On Monday, 6 July 2009, it was a great pleasure to attend the launch of Federal Secretary Kristen Alexander's latest book *Jack Davenport Beaufighter Leader* at the Courtyard Gallery of the Australian War Memorial. The Federal President of the Society Major Robert Morrison RFD was the MC for the occasion and Major General Ian Gordon AO launched the book. This is Kristen's second book following the highly acclaimed *Clive Caldwell Air Ace*. Wing Commander Jack Davenport AC DSO DFC* GM served two tours with 455 Squadron RAAF and Kristen charts Davenport's development from his childhood, to his first Bomber Command operations, through to his Coastal Command leadership on successful strikes against German shipping to his post war career.

A full review of *Jack Davenport, Beaufighter Leader* will appear in the December issue of *Sabretache* but the book is now available in bookstores including Alexander Fax Booksellers (see advertisement page 63). If you order from Alexander Fax Booksellers there is a 10% discount to MHSA members and Kristen will sign the book if you like.

During the Second World War nine Australians were awarded the Victoria Cross in what is now Papua New Guinea. Seven of the awards were on the island of New Guinea and two on Bougainville. Of the seven on the island of New Guinea, the last award was to Ted Kenna at Wewak in May 1945. Ted Kenna died in July and an obituary appears in this issue of *Sabretache*. The first Victoria Cross award in what is now Papua New Guinea was to Corporal John French for Milne Bay and was gazetted before the award to Private Bruce Kingsbury which was for gallantry a week earlier at Isurava. Nearly every reference states that the award to French was for New Guinea but the words New Guinea do not appear in either the gazetted citation or in the UK War Office 1953 *Alphabetical list of recipients*. Milne Bay is, of course, on the island on New Guinea but in 1942 it was in the Australian Territory of Papua claimed by Queensland in 1881 and the responsibility of the Australian Government since federation on 1 January 1901. It was jointly administered with the mandated Territory of New Guinea but the territories were separate legal entities.

Anthony Staunton

SEPTEMBER 2009

VOLUME L — NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

5. Sold or shot?
The fate of the light horse's mounts — 1919
Jean Bou
10. Military heroes — fact and fiction
Tom Johnstone
11. From the Sea of Marmara to the North Gate of Baghdad:
the story of four HMAS AE2 crew members
Colonel Marcus Fielding
19. The Australians at Jutland
Greg Swinden
21. Orders, Decorations and Medals of the Republic of the Philippines
Part 2: Decorations
Paul A Rosenzweig
32. Obituary - Ted Kenna VC
Anthony Staunton
33. Racecourses and GIs: Australia—WW2—The American invasion
Raymond W Clarke
38. Afghanistan Medal of Honor
Anthony Staunton
39. The Bisley boys:
The Victorian Rifle Team at Bisley 1897
Andrew Kilsby
49. Around the water cart
53. New releases
57. Society News
59. Book reviews

Published by authority of the Federal Council of the Military Historical Society of Australia. The views expressed in this journal are those of the relevant contributor and not necessarily those of the Society.

2010 MHSA CONFERENCE
Melbourne, Victoria
Easter Weekend, 2nd to 4th April 2010

Registration of Interest
(Speakers/Presentations)

The Victorian Branch will be hosting the Military Historical Society of Australia's Biennial Conference in 2010 at the popular and supportive Box Hill RSL complex. Rather than focus on one specific theme for the Conference, it has been decided to cover a broad range of matters in the program so that all those who attend enjoy an informative and interesting weekend.

A draft program is already being compiled and it is hoped that as with previous conferences, interstate and even overseas visitors may wish to address the Conference. As part of the planning process the Victorian Branch Committee is now seeking Registrations of Interest from members and friends of the Society who would like to present a paper at the Conference. Whilst detail would be welcome it is more important at this stage to identify the intention to speak rather than detail of the subject matter.

The very useful Research in Progress segment will be included in the program once again. Accordingly any intending participants who have a research project underway or feel they may have an update or perspective of interest to the gathering, are encouraging to use this forum for a short and informal presentation. Further details on this aspect of the program will be advised in due course and members who can identify a subject for this session are encouraged to contact the Branch at their earliest opportunity.

A format dinner will be incorporated in the Conference program together with other less formal social activities. In addition excursions to facilities and venues of significance such as the RAAF Museum Point Cook, Shrine of Remembrance and Victoria Barracks War Rooms are being investigated.

Input to the Conference is welcome at any point and an early commitment by way of Registration of Interest is sought in the short term. To advise this interest and for any further information please contact:

Mr Stephen C Gray,
 Secretary
 MHSA (Victoria Branch)
 1 Kelwin Court,
 Hoppers Crossing, 3029
 Tel: 03 9749 5829
 E Mail: stephencgray@hotmail.com

SOLD OR SHOT?
THE FATE OF THE LIGHT HORSE'S MOUNTS –
1919

Jean Bou

In 1919 in a book called *Australia in Palestine*, Major Oliver Hogue, using his *nom de plume*, Trooper Bluegum, published a poem entitled 'The horses stay behind'. A heartfelt reflection of the realisation that the light horse's mounts would not be returning to Australia, in part it read:

I don't think I could stand the thought of my old fancy hack
 Just crawling round old Cairo with a 'Gyppo on his back.
 Perhaps some English tourist out in Palestine may find
 My broken hearted waler with a wooden plough behind.

No, I think I'd better shoot him and tell a little lie:-
 'He floundered in a wombat hole and then lay down to die.'
 Maybe I'll get court martialled; but I'm damned if I'm inclined
 To go back to Australia and leave my horse behind.¹

To saddle this poem with burden of being a starting point is perhaps too onerous, but in the years since the end of the First World War the themes expressed in it have echoed and there has developed a persistent notion that light horsemen surreptitiously shot their horses in significant numbers so that they would not be sold to the local population who, the soldiers felt, would treat them with cruel indifference. This, however, is a myth.

Though establishing accurate numbers for such things is an inherently difficult thing to do, the most authoritative source, the Australian official history of the war, found that Australia shipped 39,348 horses overseas to serve with the AIF. Shipments to Egypt for this purpose began with the first convoy in October 1914 and, after a hiatus for much of 1916, ceased with the 26th convoy in October-November of that year.² Shipping limitations, which by that stage of the war were becoming acute, were the main cause for the cessation (Australian wheat being more important to the war effort than Australian equines), but concerns that the standards of Australian horses were beginning to slip may have played some part, as might a realisation by the War Office that it was considerably cheaper to buy and ship horses from North America than Australia, particularly for use in Europe.³ Shipments to India for military use continued throughout the war, however, with over 80,000 being sent there.⁴

- ¹ 'Trooper Bluegum', 'The Horses Stay Behind', Gullett, *Australia in Palestine*, p. 78. Gullett had written an article of the same title in the AIF's Middle East troop newspaper, *The Kia-Ora Cooee*, in November 1918 to explain the decision and also to commiserate with the readers, Gullett, 'The Horses Stay Behind', *The Kia-Ora Cooee*, 15 November 1918, p. 10.
- ² Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 543; Sea Transport of the AIF, AWM: AWM27: 397/1; see Yarwood, *Walers*, pp.180-81 for different figures based on remount purchases.
- ³ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 543; War Office to AIF Administrative HQ, London, 12 February 1919, AWM: AWM: 25, 29/3.
- ⁴ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 543. The figure for horse shipments to India given by the official history is 81,976. Both this figure and that for the shipments for the AIF were, not surprisingly, difficult to ascertain with certainty. The figures for the AIF can be taken as quite accurate (though the

Of the AIF's mounts about 10,000 went to France with the bulk of the force in 1916 and the remainder were used in Egypt for the AIF and the empire's army. Remounts, mostly from the Americas, continued to come to Egypt, but shipping limitations caused this to stop too in late 1917 and thereafter the EEF had to ensure that its existing horse pool was kept healthy.⁵ Upon the armistice in 1918 the AIF in the Middle East possessed 9,751 horses of all types.⁶ It was soon evident that these horses would not be returning to Australia due to the disease threat they posed to the Australian livestock industry and because the expense of their transport would be more than their value.⁷ That the horses might be sold to the local population, as was done by various means in England, France and Belgium, was contemplated but quickly dismissed, partly because of opposition to the possibility that the horses might go to those of an 'Eastern Nationality', but also because the market for horses in Egypt and Palestine was thought to be limited (camels and donkeys being more attractive to buyers there).⁸ Thus the Australian government agreed in early 1919 that the animals would be classified with a view to the younger and fitter animals being either passed directly to imperial units or 'pooled' in remount depots for imperial reissue or, failing that, sale. Older and unfit horses were to be destroyed.⁹

Accordingly in February 1919 the horses of the AIF in Egypt, Palestine and Syria were classified by veterinary officers. All riding horses over 12 years old, all draught horses over 15 years old, all unsound horses and those so sick as to require more than two months treatment were to be destroyed. Those horses so categorised were shorn of their manes and tails (horsehair being a commodity), had their shoes removed and were then taken to selected spots by working parties made up of men from the units which, under the direction of a veterinary officer, shot the animals with pistols, gutted them and salted their skins.¹⁰ Only a minority of horses were disposed of in this way and most horses, being fit and under the prescribed age limits, went to the imperial authorities. The Australian Mounted Division spent the months after the war camped near Tripoli and its fit horses were handed over either directly to the largely Indian Army 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions, or to local remount depots supporting them.¹¹ The Anzac Mounted Division was further south in

number may have been somewhat lower at around 36,000 or 37,000) but those for India are open to more debate as the imperial authorities used several channels for horse buying and were not always obliged to inform Australian authorities about the export arrangements. For much correspondence on the matter see AWM: AWM 27, 397/1.

⁵ Preston, *The Desert Mounted Corps*, p. 95, 311-21.

⁶ Again establishing accurate figures for such things is somewhat difficult but the 1932 figures were based, it seems, on the financial adjustments at the end of the war which can be considered as accurate as possible for accounting purposes, Finance Secretary to Secretary of Defence (for the Minister), 15 March 1932, NAA: B1535, 799/3/39. The figures in correspondence in 1919, though more often concerned with 'animals' generally rather than horses specifically, differ only by slightly, see AWM: AWM 25, 29/1.

⁷ Gullet, 'The Horses Stay Behind, *The Kia-Ora Cooee* 2:5 (15 November 1918) 10.

⁸ Copy of cable from Chauvel to AIF Administrative HQ, London, 21 November 1918, AWM: AWM25, 29/62; Notes on disposal of AIF animals in Egypt and Palestine, AWM: AWM 25, 245/112.

⁹ Finance Secretary to Secretary of Defence (for the Minister), 15 March 1932, NAA: B1535, 799/3/39; Disposal of AIF Horses in Egypt, AWM: AWM 25, 29/3.

¹⁰ Commandant AIF HQ Cairo to ADVS, AIF in Egypt and HQ A&NZMD, 7 February 1919, and DADVS AMD to 4th LH Bde, 15 February 1919, 4th LH Bde war diary, appendix, February 1919, AWM: AWM 4, 10/4/26; Olden, *Western Cavalry in the War*, pp. 295-307.

¹¹ Finance Secretary to Secretary of Defence (for the Minister), 15 March 1932, NAA: B1535, 799/3/39; 4th LH Bde war diary, February 1919, AWM: AWM 4, 10/4/26.

Palestine and its fit horses were mostly sent to the remount depot at Moascar in Egypt.¹² For both divisions the entire process was complete by the end of February. All this was somewhat complicated, however, by the outbreak of the Egyptian Uprising within days of the last horses being handed in, whereupon mounts had to quickly be re-issued for use in putting down the rebellion. Considered a temporary issue by the imperial authorities, these horses were then handed back in May upon the completion of the light horse's final duties in Egypt.

Of the horses passed to the Indian cavalry divisions in Syria they were immediately absorbed and used for the occupation duties which took up these formations after the war.¹³ Their ultimate fate is unknown but it was presumably little different to that experienced by hundreds of thousands of walers sold to the Indian Army before and after. Of the horses returned to the remount depot at Moascar it became clear even before the Egyptian Uprising that the imperial forces would use most of the riding and light draught horses to police this often-restive country. Again their ultimate fate is not clear, but it seems possible that some may have ultimately been sold in Egypt. The medium and heavy draught horses were not so easily accommodated, however, and the remount authorities eventually sent the bulk of them to the south of France where they found ready buyers.¹⁴

The horses of the AIF in Egypt and their fate in 1919/15

Fate of the horses	Number
Transferred to imperial authorities for military purposes	6057
Transferred to 'pool' for sale	72
Destroyed by the AIF due to age or debility	2569
Destroyed by imperial authorities due to age or debility	490
Died (i.e. normal wastage during disposal period)	67
Lost	1
Evacuated sick to imperial veterinary hospitals	495
Total horses (held by AIF in Egypt upon the armistice)	9751

How the rather ordinary, if unpleasant, administrative process of horse disposal became largely forgotten and then transformed into the idea the large numbers of light horsemen quietly slipped away from camp to secretly, and illegally, shoot their horses is by no means obvious. There is no doubt that there was much regret amongst the light horsemen about the fact the horses would not return to Australia. The horse is clearly one of those animals that humans are capable of forming a strong bond with and regimental histories, troop newspapers and personal records make clear the general distress felt at the decision to leave the horses in the Middle East. Even more upsetting was the possibility that the local

¹² Horse returns, AWM: AWM 25, 29/61 pt1 and pt 2.

¹³ Finance Secretary to Secretary of Defence (for the Minister), 15 March 1932, NAA: B1535, 799/3/39; 4th LH Bde war diary, February 1919, AWM: AWM 4, 10/4/26.

¹⁴ Disposal of AIF animals in Egypt, AWM: AWM25, 29/3.

¹⁵ Finance Secretary to Secretary of Defence (for the Minister), 15 March 1932, NAA: B1535, 799/3/39

population, to which most light horsemen had a strong antipathy, might end up owning and perhaps mistreating them. The military authorities quickly dismissed the suggestion that they be sold locally, however, and Chauvel, as commander of the AIF in Egypt, made his objections to the idea clear to the Australian authorities and the War Office within a few weeks of the armistice.¹⁶ Rumours and speculation may have lasted longer of course, but that this possibility was discounted as all but a last resort must quickly have become apparent within the light horse regiments. Its role as a possible motivation for killing horses must therefore be open to some doubt, though it does seem possible that the destructions which took place came to be seen in these terms – that is a way of saving these horses from the hands of the Arabs.

When the official destructions were authorised in February 1919 there was some fear that officers and men might attempt to have their horses falsely classified and destroyed, but the process was carefully managed by veterinary officers and there is no evidence to suggest, that if this was tried, anyone was successful.¹⁷ Nor is there any evidence to suggest, that during this period when horses were being officially moved for destruction or being sent to other units, men took the opportunity to kill their horses. The horse returns for the AIF in the Middle East for 1919 have largely survived and an examination of them reveals no spike in 'lost' or 'died' horses as might be expected, and the meticulousness with which the official destructions and horse transfers are documented belie the suggestion that men could have gotten away with such behaviour without it being noticed. Nor is there any evidence of disciplinary action being taken against men or that killings might have been ignored as it is unlikely that widespread action would have been overlooked by commanders faced by a serious matter of indiscipline. Nor by the higher military authorities who, aware that financial adjustments between the British and Australian governments were at stake, were most concerned that the administrative requirements be observed.

Indeed the evidence that any light horseman surreptitiously shot his own horse simply does not exist. Ion Idriess wrote in 1946 that many horsemen shot their 'faithful friends' rather than see them go to 'fellaheen and the Arab', but he had been returned to Australia and discharged by mid-1918 so he certainly was not witness to any end-of-war horse deaths and it seems he was carelessly referring to the official process, or what he knew of it.¹⁸ Three years later George Berrie, who had served with the 6th Light Horse Regiment, wrote something similar in his novel *Morale* and though he was present in 1919 whether, in writing a novel, he was accurately portraying the events or perpetuating sentimental tall stories seems open to question.¹⁹ In *First to Damascus* the Duchess of Hamilton tells a story of her father, a trooper in the 10th Light Horse Regiment, taking his horse from camp and shooting it, but particulars and supporting evidence are not provided. The story appears more family lore than historical evidence and she mentions elsewhere in the book that an

16 Copy of cable from Chauvel to AIF Administrative HQ, London, 21 November 1918, AWM: AWM25, 29/62.

17 Berrie, *Morale*, p. 235; Commandant AIF HQ Cairo to ADVS, AIF in Egypt and HQ A&NZMD, 7 February 1919, 4th LH Bde war diary, appendix, February 1919, AWM: AWM 4, 10/4/26; Starr and Sweeney, *Forward*, p. 154, as this history notes, the horses' teeth and brandings were guide enough for veterinary officers to establish age.

18 Idriess, 'Stout Hearts that never failed', p. 110; Service record, IDRIESS, Ion Llewellyn: service number 358, NAA: B2455, IDRIESS ION LLEWELLYN.

19 Berrie, *Morale*, p. 235; Service record, BERRIE, George Lachlan: service number 724, NAA: B2455, BERRIE, G.L.

aunt passed the story to her.²⁰ Many similar stories fit into the same category – the historian's netherworld of anecdote, hearsay and hazy memory. In *Red Dust*, J.L. Gray (using the pseudonym Donald Black) touchingly writes of taking his horse, Blackboy, out of the lines for a quiet few last hours together, but then returns with him so that he can be taken away with the other animals marked for destruction.²¹ The only clearly established case of a light horseman shooting his own horse is that of Henry Bostock who recalled the experience in his book *The Great Ride*. From his description, however, it clear that he did this as part the official process in 1919 when he was detailed to be a member of one of the destruction parties and was unfortunate enough to shoot his own horse (or did he volunteer?).²² For some years the Australian War Memorial contended that between 200 and 250 horses were destroyed without permission by their light horse riders at the end of the war. It was a statement which was repeated regularly, particularly on the internet, but a recent investigation into these figures was unable to discover where they originated and the assertion has since been removed from the Memorial's online encyclopaedia.²³

There is no doubt that a significant number of the AIF's horses in the Middle East were destroyed in 1919. These destructions were, however, fully sanctioned by the military authorities and carried out on animals specifically chosen due to their age or debility. Moreover men acting under the direction of veterinary officers undertook those destructions in a controlled manner. There are no known recorded instances of men carrying out unauthorised destructions and the common idea that they did so simply to avoid the horses being sold to the local population is erroneous.

--oOo--

20 Hamilton, *First to Damascus*, p. 11, 197.

21 Black, *Red Dust*, pp. 293–95.

22 Bostock, *The Great Ride*, pp. 202–03. We can only wonder if he in fact volunteered to carry out this melancholy duty.

23 For the way this statement has cropped up on the internet see http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-conflicts-periods/ww1/lt-horse/stout_hearts.htm, as well as various discussion threads on the Australian Light Horse Association forums, <http://www.lighthouse.org.au/forum/>. The investigation was undertaken by Jennie Norberry of the Memorial's Research Centre upon my inquiry as to where it had originated. Searches of the likely sources by her, as well as my own examination of a wide range of sources, cannot find where the figures might have originated. See <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/horses/index.asp>.

