BİRİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŞI ŞİİRİNDE ATLAR*

THE HORSES IN WORLD WAR ONE POETRY

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Mustafa GÜLLÜBAĞ
Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı ABD

Abstract

When the subject matter is World War I poetry, the Western Front comes to mind in the first place. The reason for this comes from the fact that famous poets of WWI overwhelmingly served on the Western Front and reflected their Western Front experiences in their literary outputs. It is not certain whether these famous poets and future war poets served there as a result of a coincidence or not, a reader who is not familiar with World War I history may think that the whole warfare took place on the Western Front. However, there had been though battles in Mesopotamia where more than five new states were founded thereafter. A few English and Australian soldiers who were known as professional poets fought in the salient. It is rather unfortunate that the poetry produced by those men of talent were not put into a book until a time which could be considered rather recent. Therefore all that happened in Mesopotamia Campaign are nothing but historical facts to many. Australian and Indian cavalry corps fought tooth and nail by their soldiers from motherland, England. The battles conducted in the salient are realized mostly as cavalry charges; and horses have a pivotal role and significance in the victory. Handling the reflection of a historical fact into literary works, this article also examines the war poems, especially the ones which put emphasis on the place of horses in battle fields and their significance. In addition, this study is noteworthy in terms of reflecting how differently horses were viewed by English and Australian riders.
Key Words: WWI Poetry, horses in war poems, war horses, image of horse in war poetry

Öz


Anahtar Kelimeler: Birinci Dünya Savaşı Şiiri, Savaş şiirinde atlar, Savaş atları, Savaş şairinde at imagelemi.

When the Great War began no one expected it to be “great” or the “first” war that would devastate so many lives, expand so widely and be so fruitful in terms of literary production. As literature is about the lives of man, the subject matters are closely interwoven with the factuality man goes through, and they find repercussions in works of literature. Therefore it is usual to frequently find horrific descriptions in war writings. Soldiers rank the first place because they are the greatest in number, then officers and others. Yet, very few soldier writers mention the horses in their wartime experiences. It may be because their current existence does not directly rely on them or, as they are barely ‘were creatures to be owned and used’ (47) as Edwin Muir puts it in his poem titled “the Horses” where the horses become the saviours of mankind after a devastating war. This article is essentially about the horses in World War One poetry; however, certain points raise issues relevant to the development of technology, people’s expectation from technologically developed machinery and the role of the horses on the way to victory.
World War One was the last one where horses were massively used in cavalry charges and logistic backing. Marquess of Anglesey, as quoted in Hamilton, calls this “the last [campaign] in the history of the world in which the mobility conferred by men on horseback was successfully employed on a large scale. Never before in the annals of the British army had so numerous a mounted force been employed” (2002: 8). Despite fact that there was a great expectation from motor vehicles, horses proved far more practicable in hauling heavy equipment in the quagmires of Somme, Flanders, Ypres and other parts of western front line. Yet their share in British victory emerges prominently in Mesopotamia campaign so much so that a poetry collection on the war horses was published in Australia by the title of *Australian Light Horse Ballads & Rhymes by Trooper Gerardy*, and there are considerable number of poems about horses written by A. B. Paterson, Edwin Gerard, L. Richmond Wheeler and some others who are obscure men who scribbled down thought and feeling arising from the circumstances they were experiencing at the moment.

What makes A. B. Paterson special among others comes from the fact that he had worked with horses in his youth before moving to Sydney and becoming a solicitor, and was a poet second to Rudyard Kipling in English language. Having already served as a war correspondent in Boer War, he wished a position in France. Being 51, he was rejected. He dropped his age, from 51 to 49. Commissioned as lieutenant, Paterson disembarked at Suez on 8 December 1915. Then he was promoted to chief officer with the rank of major. During his service of four years he took care of at least 50,000 horses and 10,000 mules (Hamilton, 2002: 164-6).

Difference in climate and geographical formations posed different but similar circumstances in nature on the Western and Mesopotamian fronts. The Western front was the place of wilderness of mud, Mesopotamia sand, where, in both cases motor vehicles often stuck into and were rendered immobile. A similar difficulty in the Western front was for the airmen. They were having difficulty in taking-offs and landings due to woods and forests around, and of course, muddy ground. The Western front was neither a place for the horses nor the airmen, the only surviving relics of chivalric wars of old.

New technologies turned this war to be the playground of “faceless combat” with its machine guns, long-range artillery, poison gas, explosives, submarines, airplanes and tanks. They were the legacy of war’s mass destruction. Soldiers killed or were killed without establishing any sort of chivalric contact. Except for some very limited occasions of hand-to-hand combats, only airmen’s “dog-fights” and cavalry charges were the grounds where chivalric codes still survived. Nevertheless, the Western front was not the place. It was the place of “stalemate” which George Robb briefly depicts as follows:
In September 1914, the Germans marching toward Paris reached the Aisne River and dug themselves in to face the approaching French and British Armies. The allies, finding themselves unable to penetrate the defensive line, dug themselves in as well. The war of movement was over. The battle lines were not to alter significantly until 1918. Trenches protected by barbed wire and occupied on both sides by soldiers with machine guns and rapid-fire rifles were difficult to storm, and any attempts to do so were extraordinarily costly of lives. The technological advances in weaponry which had engendered this stalemate did not provide any easy solutions to it (2002: 187).

The Allied forces on some battles of the Eastern front encountered strong resistance and in some cases retreated and in some surrendered as in the case of Kut-al-Amara. However, when cavalry charges are attempted they rarely encountered a resistance similar to those in the Western front which Jill Hamilton depicts as follows:

German machine-guns had butchered and decimated the horses when they had been brought into the assault at the Somme in 1916, and a year later at Arras with Allenby. The death of a horse often meant the death of the man riding him. If a horse failed, the man in the saddle could fall to the ground and be trampled by other horses or dragged along, sometimes clinging onto the stirrups of another rider (2002: 80).

The destructive power of machine gun was beyond expectations, which rendered cavalry charges futile attempts and a source of meaningless sacrifice of both animals and men. An American who observed the scenery reached the conclusion that “[y]ou can’t make a cavalry charge until you have captured the enemy’s last machine gun” (quoted in Ellis, 1978: 176). As such developments were taking place on the Western front; General Sir Archibald Murray had lost the first battle of Gaza and sent a misleading report to the London Headquarters. The second battle was even worse with a loss of “6444 men, as compared to 2000 for the Turks. Once again Murray’s report was unrealistically optimistic” (Hamilton, 2003: 146). The war office decided to replace Murray with General Sir Edmund Allenby, who was a cavalry officer and then serving in France.

The capture of Jerusalem was fixed as a Christmas present for the British nation and an antidote to the catastrophic losses on the Western front. Yet on their way to Beersheba the British were to witness the Turks’ legendary resistance on scarce means in the face of a devastating power of the allies. Despite the disparity in means and men, “only 4,000 Turkish soldiers and 28 field guns as against 58,500 allied men and 242 guns – the Turks were managing to keep the Allies at bay”. The capture of the Beersheba was a must for the allied forces before the nightfall or else the horses were to “have a twelve-hour trek back to water at Khalasa and Asluj” (Hamilton, 2002: 110). At this critical hour, cavalry charge played, perhaps the most, significant role in the
capture of the Palestine, Lebanon and Syria salient. The last decisive cavalry charge on Beersheba strongpoint held by Turks is described by Ellis as follows:

It had been a source of great soreness with them that the Yeomanry used the sword whereas they were equipped with rifle and bayonet only. Not to be deterred by that, however, they mounted and formed into line; then fixing their bayonets and holding their rifles down under the right armpit, they galloped across the plain and charged at the remaining Turkish trenches, using rifle and bayonet as lance. It was a magnificent sight to see these fellows setting their horses to jump the trenches, and at the same time lunging and thrusting with this cumbersome weapon (1979: 177).

The charge was a complete success. The capture of Beersheba saved the allied forces to return Khalasa or Asluj to water the horses. This historic event found repercussion in Trooper Edwin Gerard’s poem titled “The Wells of Old Beersheba”. The poem portrays all sorts of difficulties horses and men experienced on the sands of Beersheba and the salient; their desperate need for water and significance of victory was poeticised in line (12) as “to victory or doom”.

The enemy [Turks] turned their machineguns on the advancing lines of horsemen but within minutes were overwhelmed as the Australians jumped their horses over the first line of the trenches and leapt off to engage in fierce hand-to-hand fight. The Australians lost 31 killed and 35 wounded. They had taken the town against all odds. Their amazing charge across Turkish trenches has gone down in history as one of the great cavalry feats of warfare (Hamilton, 2003: 148).

The whole story is told by Edwin Gerard in verse:

The Wells of Old Beersheba

In saga and in story their tale has been told,
As long down the years of madness the battle tides have rolled;
Their drops of crystal water — more precious than gold
The Wells of old Beersheba were battle-scarred of old.
On an Autumn evening that seems so long ago
The war-worn Walers reached them with stately step and slow,
And the guns roared welcome, peal upon thunder peal,
The Wells of old Beersheba were held by Moslem steel.
On barren cactus ridges the British army lay,
All sore in need of water at the burning close of day;
And so the desert riders must charge at evening gloom —
The Wells of old Beersheba — to victory or doom.
A league across the desert, slowly Walers came,
And Turkish shrapnel answered with a burst of flame
That flashed amid the smoke clouds, deep in the murky haze,
The Wells of old Beersheba with trench-lines all ablaze.
They lined the ridge at sunset and, in the waning light
The far-flung line of squadrons came on in headlong flight,
The desert land behind them — in front the fearful fight,
The Wells of old Beersheba must fall before the night.
The Turkish rifles raked them and horse and man went down,
But still they held the gallop towards the blazing town;
They heard the hot lead whining, the big guns’ thunder-roll —
The Wells of old Beersheba their destiny and goal.
With cold steel bayonets gleaming, in sodden seas of blood
They raced towards the stronghold, all in a crimson flood,
Such maddening surge of horses, such tumult and such roar
The Wells of old Beersheba had never seen before.
They stormed across the trenches and, so the stories say,
They drove the Moslem gunners as wild winds scatter spray.
No force or fire could turn them on that long maddening run,
The Wells of old Beersheba had fallen with the sun.
Fast through the gap behind them column on column poured,
Loud in the darkening dust — wrack the guns of England roared;
Won in a race of ruin through the lurid waves of flame
The Wells of old Beersheba had brought them deathless fame!
Remember them, my brothers, lend them a helping hand —
They led that charge of splendour that won the Promised Land —
And those who came not homeward, their memory is grand —

The Wells of old Beersheba will guard their graves of sand.

With Beersheba captured, the allies now had enough water supplies for the horses, yet no time to rest or get enough drink. They went on to capture Gaza. On their way, the Desert Mounted Corps seized some trench systems Kauwukah and Rushdi. After a certain amount of opposition, a line at Bir el Marruneh-Towel bau Jawal is captured with 179 prisoners and four machine-guns (Hamilton, 2002: 113). The third battle of Gaza turns out to be the last one and Gaza, at last, had fallen on the second of November. Then, on the eighth of December Jerusalem was taken. The northerly ride of the Mounted Allied Forces headed for Damascus. At a certain distance to the objective their speed was slowed down by the condition of the road. Stones got stuck into the horses’ shoes “causing suffering and pain. The farrier’s equipment, including the horseshoeing forges, had no been able to keep with the troops, let alone ford the river” (Hamilton, 2002: 160). Lack of water and fodder, dehydration and sore backs, extreme tiredness and restless journeys, and etc. were among the many hardships war horses endured during Mesopotamia campaign. The soldiers had no exception from similar hardships that the horses went through.

At the end of the campaign Banjo Paterson was back in Egypt where he composed some of his poems exalting the army mules and horses. Paterson is well aware of the fact that this campaign turned to be success thanks to the sacrifices of men and animals, especially army mules and horses, and in some cases camels. Paterson’s “the Army Mules”, as clear from its title, takes the army mules as subject matter and compares their significance to that of airman. One ought not to judge Paterson that he missed the fact that airmen and cavalrymen were the only chivalric aspects in the World War One:

**The Army Mules**

Oh the airman’s game is a showman’s game for we all of us watch him go
With his roaring soaring aeroplane and his bombs for the blokes below,
Over the railways and over the dumps, over the Hun and the Turk,
You’ll hear him mutter, ‘What ho, she bumps,’ when the Archies get to work.
But not of him is the song I sing, though he follows the eagle’s flight,
And with shrapnel holes in his splintered wing comes home to his roost at night.
He may silver his wings on the shining stars, he may look from the throne on high,
He may follow the flight of the wheeling kite in the blue Egyptian sky,
But he’s only a hero built to plan, turned out by the Army schools,
And I sing of the rankless, thankless man who hustles the Army mules.
Now where he comes from and where he lives is a mystery dark and dim,
And it’s rarely indeed that the General gives a D.S.O. to him.
The stolid infantry digs its way like a mole in a ruined wall;
The cavalry lends a tone, they say, to what were else but a brawl;
The Brigadier of the Mounted Fut like a cavalry Colonel swanks
When he goeth abroad like a gilded nut to receive the General’s thanks;
The Ordnance man is a son of a gun and his lists are a standing joke;
You order, ‘Choke arti Jerusalem one’ for Jerusalem artichoke.
The Medicals shine with a number nine, and the men of the great R.E.,
Their Colonels are Methodist, married or mad, and some of them all the three;
In all these units the road to fame is taught by the Army schools,
But a man has got to be born to the game when he tackles the Army mules.
For if you go where the depots are as the dawn is breaking grey,
By the waning light of the morning star as the dust cloud clears away,
You’ll see a vision among the dust like a man and a mule combined —
It’s the kind of thing you must take on trust for its outlines aren’t defined,
A thing that whirls like a spinning top and props like a three legged stool,
And you find it’s a long-legged Queensland boy convincing an Army mule.
And the rider sticks to the hybrid’s hide like paper sticks to a wall,
For a ‘magnoon’ Waler is next to ride with every chance of a fall,
It’s a rough-house game and a thankless game, and it isn’t a game for a fool,
For an army’s fate and a nation’s fame may turn on an Army mule.
And if you go to the front-line camp where the sleepless outposts lie,
At the dead of night you can hear the tramp of the mule train toiling by.
The rattle and clink of a leading-chain, the creak of the lurching load,
As the patient, plodding creatures strain at their task in the shell-torn road,
Through the dark and the dust you may watch them go till the dawn is grey in the sky,
And only the watchful pickets know when the ‘Allnight Corps’ goes by.
And far away as the silence falls when the last of the train has gone,
A weary voice through the darkness: ‘Get on there, men, get on!’
It isn’t a hero, built to plan, turned out by the modern schools,
It’s only the Army Service man a-driving his Army mules.

Considering this poem “was not published in Australia until 1992” (Hamilton, 2003: 166) rarely did cavalrymen receive D.S.O. from a general. The significance of horses in the lives of Australians is rather different from those of the British. While horses were means of living for the Australians, they were means of pastime for British aristocrats, among whom the officers were chosen. “Despite reforms the British army generally remained a class-structured entity. Aristocratic traditions, wealth, social distinction and well-cut uniforms still counted. With few exceptions, status conferred by birth and schooling remained the prerequisite for choosing the upper ranks of the military” (Hamilton, 2002: 70). So the difference in attitude towards horses is conspicuous, which is elucidated by Hamilton as follows:

The Australian attitude to horses was far removed from that of the English. In England, finely bred horses were associated with recreation, wealth, privilege, fox-hunting, the aristocracy and sport, whereas in Australia horses were a means of existence. Horses had opened up the country. Without them as transport, or to speed stockmen around huge properties with few fences, there would have been no cattle and sheep stations in Australia. Riding as an art had never been confined to just the rich in Australia (2002: 115).

Considering one of the memoirs by Siegfried Sassoon was titled as *Fox Hunting Man*, one can easily see how accurate Hamilton in her judgement is. L. Richmond Wheeler’s poem “The Horses” reveal the significance of horses in ordinary Australians lives and in this particular campaign:
The Horses

Come, sing me a song in praise of the horses,
In peace time or war time on whom we rely,
Grey, chestnut, or dun,
White or black, every one
With the shimmer of health on his coat in the sun;
Sing me the horses, the galloping horses,
With joy of the morning in bold, flashing eye.

Sing me the horses, the great-hearted horses,
Whose hoofs to the baying make gallant reply,
All the shire over,
Past hedges and clover,
By down, lane, and moorland, in chase of red rover;
Sing me the horses, the galloping horses,
When Autumn woods glow `neath a pale English sky.

Sing me the horses, the cavalry horses,
The horses that charge while the bullets sing by,
With long loping stride,
In their beauty and pride,
Swift as eagles and truer than steel that is tried;
Sing me the horses, the galloping horses,
High headed, high hearted, whom naught shall deny.

Sing me the horses, the strong fighting horses,
That drag at the guns and the trains of supply,
In darkness and cold,
And through terrors untold,
Amid shell fire and bullets and deaths manifold;
Sing me a paean in praise of the horses,
For fain would we greet them again bye and bye.

Before these hymns of praise were composed for horses, there was a brief glorious moment in time for the horses and men. That was the outset of the war in August, a time when everywhere dry and warm, free from the handicaps of winter. Apart from these the intensity of the war was little more than “skirmish” rather than “battle” or “clash”. When the Great War was approaching its end the trench system dug on the Western front was about 2400 km. from Belgium to French Alps. “The men of 1914 were far fewer in number than those who served in every other year of the war, less than 10 per cent of the numbers found serving on the Western Front two years later” (Emden, 2011: 19). Considering Britain’s available men (the British Expeditionary Force) for the defence of France were 80,000 at the beginning of the war, the number of soldiers and the intensity of the clash were relatively low. In this autumn heat, the BEF retreated 280 km, suffering lack of water, food (fodder for horses) and sleep. Things were easier compared to those yet to come. Richard van Emden depicts the early days as follows:

The first weeks of war were a time of a rapid movement, of glorious withdrawal some might argue, others would say of an ignominious and chaotic retreat. This was a when the cavalry was able to fulfil its new role, acting as a fast-moving screen to protect the infantry, a time of classic mounted charges and short, dismounted action. All light artillery, all limbers and wagons were pulled by horses and mules; it was, at least at this moment, an overwhelmingly equine war. For the men who took part, it was on the four-legged friends that their survival depended (2011: 18).

Yet the winter of 1914-15 was to prove a bitter experience on the Eastern front. The author of the memoir titled A Kut Prisoner H. C. W. Bishop was a soldier in the Allied forces. David Fromkin depicts the position of Kut stating “Kut was a mud village caught in a loop in the Tigris River, and surrounded by water on three sides. Sheltering within it and entrenching the fourth side, Townshend imprisoned himself in a fortress-like position” (1989: 201). H. C. W. Bishop narrates his worst days as follows:

He [the general] announced that there were 84 days’ more ample rations without counting the 3,000 animals.

Actually the siege went on for another 94 days, but the rations were scarcely ample, even including the horse meat. However, at the time, it seemed that there was nothing to worry about, especially as the

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2 Trenches were estimated to have been filled by two million soldiers by 1916.
general said he was confident of being relieved during the first half of
February. With the beginning of February, we started eating horse,
mule and camel. There were very few camels, but they were said to be
quite good eating. For the rest, mule is very much to be preferred to
horse. There were also the heavy battery bullocks, but these were not
numerous, and were very thin already (1920: 22).

About the same time period, the Western front soldiers were experiencing
different handicaps. They might not have to eat their horses or mules, but to struggle
the conditions of the country where they fight. Private Aubrey Smith of 1/5 London
Regiment. Emden quotes from his diary notes:

You turn out and wade through this sea [of mud] with rain coming
down, and visit your poor horses, who are stuck fast. You undo their
head ropes, all soaked with the sloppy mud: the ends are frayed and
they flick a stream of mud into your face. After an effort you get the
horses out and take them for a short walk, ending up at a stream,
where you water them. Then you enter the morass again, where their
hoofs splash your mackintosh right up to the neck. You tie them up
and get a spray of mud again, put on the nosebags – which are more
like wet mud swabs – and receive biffs in the face with them, leaving
you with a face and neck of Flanders soil (2011: 118).

Despite all drawbacks on the Western Front, thousands of cavalry charges took
place, for “most of the Army commanders came from cavalry backgrounds and their
continued faith in the value of cavalry is often cited as an example of their inability to
grasp the realities of modern warfare” (Robb, 2002: 188). And therefore most of the
cavalry charges were costly attempts in terms of men and animal. A 1917 cavalry
charge quoted in Emden is depicted by Captain Douglas Cuddeford of 12th Highland
Light Infantry as follows:

They left of dead and wounded men among us, but the horses seemed
to have suffered most, and for a while we put bullets into poor brutes
that were aimlessly limping about on three legs, or else careering
about madly in their agony, like one I saw that had the whole of its
muzzle blown away. With the dead and wounded horses lying about
in the snow, the scene resembled an old-fashioned battle picture (2011:
201).

Soldiers’ memoirs are full of unsuccessful cavalry charges that took place on the
Western Front. As the German resistance begins to crumble away, tank supported
cavalry charges gains momentum. Yet one of the last relics of chivalric warfare is now
doomed to disappear from battlefields as Emden puts it “with newer, ever more
reliable tanks, the value of horses on the battlefields was slowly but surely being
undermined” (2011: 280).
Despite the fact that there were a great number of cavalry charges that had taken place and enough historical evidence to be compiled in a book elucidating the role of cavalry on the Western Front, the famous poets of the Western Front, say, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Isaac Rosenberg, Wilfred Owen, Herbert Read, Edmund Blunden, Julian Grenfell and etc. rarely mention horses or mules in their poetry. The contexts where horses are mentioned are not related to cavalry charges but their functions and fates on the battle zones or their physiologic characteristics. In Rosenberg’s poem “Dead Men’s Dump” “mules” are reflected through a wounded soldier lying on the ground. The poem essentially a reflection of his battlefield experiences and works. Rosenberg carries barbed wires to replace the damaged ones on the no man’s land. On his way, his mule drawn chart runs over dead bodies. He is well aware of the value of human life, how precious it is, and how miraculously man comes into being. Yet bodies of men are simply “sprawled dead” (17). And some still alive expect their coming, knowing that saviours come on a chart; they expect them to come with the clatter “even as the mixed hoofs of the mules / The quivering-bellied mules” (78-79). Rosenberg, the painter poet, distorts the normal view of the things making us look through the eyes of a soldier lying wounded on the ground looking up at the mules approaching. He distorts the scenery both aurally and visually (Wilson, 2009: 349-355). The horses in Sassoon’s poem “The Road” is essentially based on his experience and his diary entry of “4 July 1916” provides the background information for the “horses with stiff legs” (8) and “dead men, bloody fingered from the fight” (9). As quoted by Campbell, Sassoon conveys his experience as follows: “These dead are terrible and undignified carcasses, stiff and contorted. There were thirty of our own laid in two ranks by the Mametz-Carnoy road, some side by side on their backs with bloody clotted fingers mingled as if they were handshaking in the companionship of death. And the stench undefinable” (2007: 119). In Wilfred Owens poems there is no reference to the horses, yet his amazement at the training of war horses is depicted by Jon Purkis thus: “Although the internal combustion engines had long been invented, most of the transport of the Great War involved management of horses, and Owen was amazed to find that the course included ‘circus tricks’” (1999: 21). The only cavalry charge in connection to a British war poet is Julian Grenfell. Despite the fact his poetry does not include any reference to horses; Grenfell describes how he and his men managed to evade German artillery shelling as follows: “We simply galloped about like rabbits in front of a line of guns, men and horses falling in all directions” (Kenyon, 2011: 27).

One of the rare examples of bits of poetry composed for the horses that served on the Western front was by Aubrey Smith of London Rifle Brigade. The quatrain has been inscribed on a piece of firewood which was, as the composer indicates in his memoir, “at a premium” (Emden, 2011: 108). Yet the composition of the quatrain was a due respect to a dead comrade. Smith’s quatrain runs as follows:
Here lies a steed, a gallant steed, whose Christian name was Jack,

How of the lugged our limbers to the firing line and back.

Although he's loath to leave us, he is happy on this score –

He won’t be in this — rotten Army any more.

Such sentimental feelings towards the horses were developed by the soldiers of the Desert Mounted Corps during the long march from Egypt to Damascus. Yet the indifference of Arabs towards the plight of horses was something western mind cannot comprehend. Byron’s great granddaughter Lady Wentworth, as quoted in Hamilton, describes the indifference to horses in *The Authentic Arabian Horse* as follows:

The native habit of tethering horses and hobbling them in the full glare of a torrid sun (with a temperature of perhaps 120ºF in the shade) destroys the strongest constitution and often kills them outright. The flaming rays beat upon their defenceless heads... Ceaseless buzzing flies swarm round the horses in myriads. Closely hobbled with tightly drawn ropes they can only move by laborious hopping with arched backs. Half-starved and half-blinded with glare and flies, the horses are in a sorry condition of thirst and misery. Yet no-one gives two thoughts to their condition. It is the custom of the country, and the owners would be astonished to be told they were cruel (2002: 105).

Such sights were observed by the Australian soldiers and at the end of the campaign, knowing that they are not allowed to take their horses with them, wished to find ways to protect their beloved horses from such mistreatments. Out of such fond feelings many soldiers decided to kill their horses. Jill Hamilton’s father’s hard decision has been depicted in her book *First to Damascus* thus:

The harshness general meted out to animals by Arabs forced him to make the heartbreaking decision to shoot the companion he loved and trusted. This deed was enormously painful for him – he clearly killed part of himself in the process. He rode his horse out on a last gallop into the unforgiving desert, dismounted and tied a handkerchief onto the horse’s bridle to shield its eyes. The eyes of a horse are set in the sides of the head, so it is unable to see objects in front of it nearer than about six feet. Robbie aimed his gun and shot the horse in the middle of the forehead (2002: 198-199).

Thousands of horses were sold without exception whether they are thoroughbreds or Walers or draughthorses. Some of them were butchered and “[t]heir hides, manes and tails were sold, along with their recyclable horseshoes” (Hamilton, 2002: 199). Whereabouts of flesh is not recorded. A mounted soldier, Oliver Hogue expresses his sadness in his poem “The Horses Stay Behind”:
I don’t think I could stand the thought of my old fancy hack
Just crawling round old Cairo with a ‘Gypo on his back,
Perhaps some English tourist out in Palestine may find
My broken-hearter Waler with a wooden plough behind.

I think I’d better shoot him and tell a little lie:
‘He floundered in a wombat hole and then lay down to die.’
May be I’ll get court-martialled; but I’m damned if I’m inclined
To go back to Australia and leave my horse behind.

On the Western end of this war, the horses served as their kind did on the East. With the battles won, the horses were no more needed on the Western front as well. Those four legged beings that served for Britain so well and saved France from the Germans “were now being sold off to the French for meat and figures suggest that at least 45,000 animals were sent for slaughter for this purpose in Europe alone” (Butler, 2011: 139). They served their last task on a plate by satiating the hunger of the nation they were goaded to save.

To conclude, the horses played a significant part in the British victory both on the Eastern and Western fronts. Yet their share on the Eastern front is much greater in volume compared to that on the Western. Despite the fact that victories seem to be the gift of Allenby and his cavalry background, up until 1917 there are hardly any cavalry victory both over Turks on Eastern and over Germans on the Western fronts. Just months before his appointment to the Middle East campaign, in Monchy-le-Preux on 11 April 1917, the cavalry charge conducted under his command was a disaster (see Emden, 2011: 200, Hamilton, 2002: 104). This was a slow moving war and was going to be won by the one “that could best keep its forces supplied with weaponry and food” (Robb, 2002: 190). It is therefore that the British victories began only after the second half of 1917 with the support of sabotages on Turkish logistic supply trains and guerrilla warfare organised by Lawrence of Arabia. And the share of the Australians should not be forgotten, they were first class horsemen and their horsemanship paved the way that led up to the victory. The number of poems about horses and the way subject matter is handled show how significant a horse for an Australian. They are means of living for Australians, for the British, on the other hand, a means of aristocratic pastime or a means artistic expression as seen in Sassoon’s and Rosenberg’s poems.
WORKS CITED


WORKS CONSULTED


