

The Light Horse by Edward Cranswick

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ANZAC Day

While drinking coffee in a local Adelaide cafe one afternoon last year, 31 October 2007, I read in the local newspaper, *The Advertiser*, that there was to be a memorial service that evening for the 90th anniversary of the successful attack of the Australian Light Horse on the Turkish Army in Beersheba, Palestine, on 31 October 1917 during WWI. My grandfather, my mother's father, Thomas Roydon Hogarth, 3rd Light Horse Regiment, was a stretcher bearer who died there at the age of 35 from injuries sustained whilst carrying wounded from the battlefield, and he was posthumously awarded the Military Medal. Consequently, I have always had an interest in the history of conflict in this region.



My Grandfather,
Thomas Roydon Hogarth,
Australian 3rd Light Horse Regiment,
Died in 1917 in Beersheba, Palestine,
Fighting Muslims for Oil
For the British Empire.

My mother grew up without a father
in a household of only women, and
three of her aunts never married.

Why are there now
Australian troops
in Iraq and Afghanistan
Fighting Muslims for Oil
For the American Empire?

USA
CIA
KBR

Furthermore, my mother, Mrs. Isobel Hilary Cranswick, née Hogarth, had died six weeks before, leaving me living in her home, the walls of which are covered with photographs of family members or other people I cannot identify. One of the few photographs I know well is that of the head and shoulders of my grandfather in half-profile dressed in his Light Horse uniform wearing a Digger hat.

The whole question of my family roots has become increasingly important to me since I have learned of and met my Aboriginal cousins on my grandfather's side of the family, and it has become particularly acute with my mother's death, leaving all sorts of

unresolved questions related to her birth in 1915 and growing up with her sister and mother and no father. It occurred to me that the memorial service might provide insight into some of these family matters. Hence, I decided to attend the memorial service that evening.

I originally went to the memorial service only to listen, but I changed my mind when I encountered about fifty people standing around the War Horse Memorial Trough and Obelisk at the north end of East Terrace, at least half of whom were either wearing military uniforms or wearing medals pinned on to civilian clothes. As I listened to the military chaplain assure us that God had been and was on the side of the Australian troops, I decided I had to say something about my family history and its relationship to the current crisis in the Middle East. Having decided that I would speak, I became nervous and tense at the prospect of doing so. I was standing about five meters (15 feet) away from the chaplain, and at the conclusion of the playing of the pipes and bugle, I loudly said something to the effect:

"My grandfather, Thomas Hogarth, was killed at Beersheba with the Light Horse fighting Muslims for oil. He died then for the King, and now young Australian soldiers are dying for George Bush. Stop the War! Get the Australian troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq!"

Everyone seemed initially surprised by this outburst because there was no response at all for about five seconds, but then three or four men came up to me, one of whom said something about bashing me. Another quite calmly but firmly tried to lead me away, saying that I'd had the opportunity to speak and express my thoughts and that now my presence was no longer needed there. I told him that I had left my bicycle locked up near the monument and so he accompanied me to it. I suppose he was concerned that the ceremony run smoothly, and hence, he wanted to shield me from participants who might want to confront me. I unlocked my bike and walked off towards Rundle Street, and one of the men said, "Fuckwit" as I walked by, but I repressed my first reaction and said nothing.

I felt very shaken by the whole experience and walking down Rundle Street, I felt like an outcast from the "tribe". The strength of the tribal feeling that I sensed in the participants in the ceremony was matched by my not feeling a part of it. The archetypal confrontation between the self and society reminded me of the tribalism of the Old Testament. And this triggered my customary paranoia and insecurity about my right to inhabit this land, my right to live in Adelaide, my right to membership in the tribe. But as I thought further about this – my grandfather was one of 73 men killed or mortally wounded at Beersheba, my parents met whilst both were serving in the Australian Army in New Guinea during WWII – it became clear to me that whether I like it or not, I am largely a product of the Australian Army.

I worked as a seismologist for the US Geological Survey (USGS) for 22 years, and in 1988, I was a member of the team of seismologists and seismic engineers that was requested by the Soviet Union to assist in the investigation of the 1988 Armenian Earthquake – 25,000-50,000 people died there, about 1% of the Armenia population – the first time the USSR had requested assistance from the US government since WWII. At the time there was a conflict going on between the Soviet republic of Christian Armenia and the adjacent Soviet republic of Muslim Azerbaijan to the west. In particular, Soviet citizens of Armenian descent living in Azerbaijan were being persecuted by some Soviet citizens of Azerbaijani descent, and a few months before the earthquake many of these Armenians had sought refuge with their relatives living in Armenia. This ethnic conflict had some of the elements of the Armenian genocide conducted by the Turks in 1915 during WWI and just prior to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. It is estimated that more than a million Armenians died in the genocide with the result that the Armenian population of Turkey is now only about 40,000. When I told my Armenian colleagues how my grandfather had died fighting the Turks, they said, “You are our brother!”

A decade later, there was a similarly devastating earthquake in Turkey in 1999, and I went there with the USGS to investigate it. I worked with a Turkish seismologist, and one day when we were talking about our families, I told her that my grandfather had died fighting the Turks. She responded, “It is his fault he was killed! Why was he in Turkey? If he had stayed in Australia, he would not have been killed.” Certainly that made me think – the Turks did not come over the hill and shoot him on the property he managed in South Australia.

Later, she and I spent a night at a tent camp that had been established to house people whose homes had either collapsed in the earthquake or might collapse in an aftershock. That evening about ten of us congregated in a tent for a dinner of cheese, olives, bread, tea and raki, and afterwards we listened to a man play a saz (Turkish guitar-like musical instrument) and sing traditional Turkish folksongs. One song was about a young Turkish woman in Istanbul who laments the death of her young Turkish fiancé – he had joined the Turkish army and had died fighting the British and the Arabs in Palestine.

It was actually the Arabs, the Palestinians, who were fighting for their native land – the Turks and the British were both invaders who competed to control Palestine. The British – as represented by T. E. Lawrence, a.k.a., Lawrence of Arabia – had recruited the Arabs as allies with the promise that the British would liberate the Arabs from Turkish rule, but at the same time the British also promised the same land to the Zionists. Three decades later, almost a million Palestinians were dispossessed of their native land by Europeans of Jewish descent who occupied it and built upon it the state of Israel.

My grandfather had two brothers, and they also served and in the Australian Army during WWI (all three listed their occupations as “Station Manager” when they enlisted), but the brothers survived. However, my grandfather’s first cousin, Francis Dunbar Warren, did not serve – he stayed on “his” station property of Finnis Springs near Marree with his Arabuna wife, their children, and her other Aboriginal relatives. Her family had already been dispossessed of their land – it was not necessary to go to Palestine to dispossess other native people of their land.

My grandfather’s family were members of the Hogarth-Warren business partnership that began with the marriage of his aunt, Margaret Hogarth, to John Warren in 1865, and it became one of the largest pastoralist enterprises in South Australia in the late 1800’s – Anna Creek, SA, now the world’s largest working cattle station, occupying an area greater than that of Israel, was just one of their properties. The success of the family business was based on the presence and labour of hundreds of Aboriginal people, mostly Arabuna, who worked on the station, starting with the many Aboriginal stockmen who mustered the thousands of cattle and sheep; reciprocally, the Aboriginal people became dependent upon the rations provided by the pastoralists of European descent because the overgrazed land could no longer sustain the native food supply. This mixing of fortunes of the two peoples inevitably led to the mixing of blood, and I have met many of my cousins of Aboriginal descent whose grandfather was Francis Dunbar Warren, a pastoralist who had married the Arabuna mother of his children as formally as was then possible for a black and white to marry in that day. Francis acted to live the best life with those with whom he shared life – their example is a light from the past that beckons us into the future

The charge of the Light Horse at Beersheba was one of the last horse races in the race for the oil that destroyed the culture of the horse. Oil abruptly became the most strategic resource in the British Empire just prior to WWI after Churchill realized that ships fuelled by oil could travel significantly faster and more efficiently than those fuelled by coal – the supremacy of the British Empire was based on the strategic superiority of the Royal Navy. To ensure the critical supply of oil, the British government bought a controlling interest in the company producing oil in Iran, Anglo-Persian Oil (later renamed the British Petroleum Company, i.e., BP), and largely controlled Iran for the next 40 years.

The British also took Mesopotamia from the Turks during WWI – the British army first invaded Baghdad in 1917, and they waged a war of occupation against the Iraqis over the next decade. The British competed with the Russians to control the region between the Mediterranean and India for a century – a British army of 16,000 was completely obliterated in Kabul by the Afghanistan resistance in 1842.

As British imperial power declined throughout the world after WWII, particularly in the Middle East, it was replaced with American influence. This also includes Australia where America has dispossessed Aboriginal people of their land to build US military bases such as the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap outside of Alice Springs, a satellite-war-fighting base where much of the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan is being waged by American nerds who use satellite imagery to target weapons strikes on men, women, and children. In 2003, George Bush sent the US Army into Iraq to subdue its native population and take control of its mineral resources – last year, John Howard sent the Australian Army into the Northern Territory for similar reasons.

So if we want to honour and lament our fallen dead, we should be honest in admitting that many died to further European domination of the world, and in doing so, some participated in the genocide of native peoples to steal the land and mineral resources that are the basis of modern industrial society – a way of life that poisons the health of the Earth. If by some warp of space-time the Australian veterans of WWI were to return directly from their foreign battlefields of last century to the devastated land and drying/dying River Murray of present-day Australia, they might think that some enemy had ravaged the land whilst they were away at war. And with the inexorable process of climate change that we have set in motion, soon they might think that they had come to Hell.

The developing global oil shortage, (Peak Oil, might signal the return of the Light Horse) we may soon be returning to the ways of transport that existed before fossil fuels raised their ugly heads in human life. Thousands of Aboriginal stockmen on horseback have lost their jobs and their life on their own land as they were replaced by a few men on motor bikes or driving utes and four-wheel-drives who were in turn were replaced by a very few flying small planes around vast properties.

My mother and her older sister, Betty, grew up in Hawthorn, an old suburb of Adelaide, and they shared the one pony they kept in the paddock in the back. Betty was a proficient rider and once tried to teach her younger sister how to jump a horse. After the third time my mother lost her nerve at the last minute and pulled the horse up just before the jump, her sister, sitting on the fence, shouted at her, "Hilary, you'll ruin the horse – I'll have to take him over the jump myself." Not long after that, upon finishing her nursing certificate, my mother left to travel to Britain where one could read books instead of having to jump horses – she arrived shortly before the outbreak of WWII and was in London during the bombing of the 1940 Blitz. Betty stayed in Australia, was nearly killed in a fall while out fox hunting on horseback. She was in coma for 8 days. She later worked in the Land Army during the War when women replaced the men on the land, and after she married a man who had a sheep station in the Outback – they had no children.

I am my mother's only child, and to the best of my knowledge, I am my grandfather's the only surviving issue (I've heard some reports up in the bush about an Aboriginal man called "Tom's son", son of Tom Hogarth – but that's another story). My grandfather left Australia with the 3rd Light Horse because he was a proficient horseman – but because he did not want to kill, he walked and carried a stretcher instead of a gun. Thinking of him, perhaps it is time for us to begin to repair the damage we have done.