

## BOOK REVIEWS

king's soldiers, but of his peoples. The subjects of the empire are the real audience of these events." The boy general's later reputation for massacre, looting and assassination are fully explored in his own words. Much of it stemmed from his adjustment to "asymmetric" warfare. "To say one fights a guerrilla is inexact. One hunts them, as he would jackals or wild boars, and he can feel pity for them no more than for savage beasts. The tribesmen of Afghanistan were the fiercest fighters I ever faced, and their general, the Grey Wolf, the only adversary I ever feared."

Despite glimpses into strategic or even geo-strategic thought, Pressfield's Alexander is most alive at the tactical level, and it is his description of ancient battle with its elephants, chariots, javelins and surprising reliance on an all-arms tactical manoeuvre, that bring the soldier to this book. J.F.C. Fuller's descriptions of Caesar's campaigns cannot match these for stirring the familiar primeval pulse. Interestingly, Fuller claimed that even the much-vaunted legions of Rome would not have stood against Alexander's combined-arms army in its prime. What gives Pressfield's book this "operator appeal" is his ability to transport the reader into Alexander's saddle, and to feel what he feels while manipulating Companion Cavalry and sarissa-armed phalanxes against apparently overwhelming odds. Readers will find themselves grinning empathetically as Alexander slashes annoyingly wayward plumes off his helmet while trying to calculate the closing time of opposing forces. Be warned, while the grand tactical solutions are clear enough to withstand the ancient fog of war, the reader is still challenged in trying to comprehend the simplest things about ancient warfare. Alexander, for example, has no need to explain to

his acolyte just how he maintains his seat on a war-horse without stirrups as he hacks his way into densely packed infantry. Nor does Alexander feel the need to explain how he became the most frequently wounded supreme commander in history.

In the end, the key to understanding this Alexander is in understanding his troops and his hold on them and their hold on him. Time and again, Pressfield takes his Alexander into the ranks to sort malcontents, to inspire the dispirited, to lead the blood-maddened. His sarissa-armed phalanxes, like Wellington's Brown Bess infantry, were the heart of his army and the anvil of his designs, and his interplay with these troops will be familiar to all soldiers at all times. The reader fully understands that when they can march no more, Alexander must turn about and go home. The reader also understands that, at that point, Alexander has nowhere to go but to his own funeral. The book ends with the soldier's ditty favoured by the king-emperor. It is a soft song, sung to the music of the wind as it blows through the phalanx's stacked sarissas. I suspect that these four lines from Pressfield will evoke, for most of us, the story of Alexander more effectively than will all of the expensive imagery of Mr. Stone's epic.

*The sarissa's song is a sad song.  
He pipes it soft and low.  
I would ply a gentler trade, says he,  
But war is all I know.*

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### **THE GALLANT HUSSARS: A HISTORY OF THE 1ST HUSSARS REGIMENT 1856 – 2004**

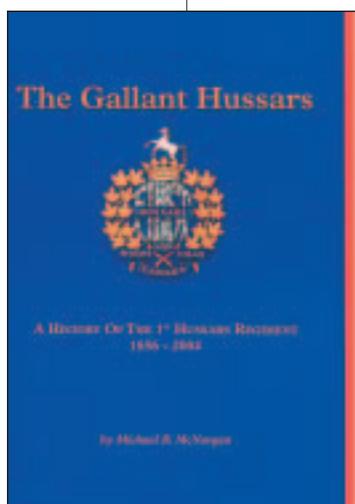
by Michael R. McNorgan

London, ON: The 1st Hussars Cavalry Fund. 359 pages, \$69.95

Reviewed by John Marteinson

The latest addition to the ever-growing body of Canadian regimental histories is a superb illustrated history of the London, Ontario-based 1st Hussars written by Major Michael McNorgan. This handsome volume complements two earlier histories of this illustrious cavalry/armoured unit with additional detail and several hundred well-chosen photos, drawings, maps and charts.

The 1st Hussars trace their origin to two independent troops of cavalry – one in St. Thomas, the other in London – formed in 1856. These two troops were amalgamated



in 1867 under the name 'St. Thomas and London Squadron of Canada,' and both were called out for service during the Fenian scare in 1870. In 1872, the unit was expanded and re-named the 1st Regiment of Cavalry. (This designation did not imply seniority within the Canadian Cavalry Corps as cavalry regiments were numbered for the Military District in which they were located.) The unit was officially designated as 'Hussars' (light cavalry) in 1888, but this meant little except in terms of uniforms as all Canadian cavalry units were gradually being transformed into mounted riflemen. The first chapter provides an engaging story of the many challenges confronted by volunteer cavalry in this period when government support was minimal, and also of the relatively high standard of training accomplished over the years because of dedicated officers and NCOs. The second chapter discusses the considerable contribution of the 1st Hussars to the Canadian contingents that served in the Boer War, and how they won for the regiment its first official battle honour.

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In the early days of the First World War, due to Minister of Militia and Defence Sam Hughes's perverse abandonment of the existing mobilization plan, the members of the 1st Hussars formed the majority in a newly raised unit entitled the 7th Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR). Among its officers was a fresh graduate from RMC named Billy Bishop, later to win the Victoria Cross as a fighter pilot. As with most units recruited in Canada at the time, the 7th CMR was disbanded in the spring of 1915 to provide reinforcements to units at the front, but not before one of its squadrons was selected to become the divisional cavalry squadron for the 2nd Canadian Division. In May 1916, the four divisional cavalry squadrons were amalgamated into the Canadian Corps Cavalry Regiment, later re-named the Canadian Light Horse (CLH). 'B' Squadron of the CLH was deemed to have come from the 1st Hussars, thus bringing its First World War battle honours to the regiment. The CLH served with great distinction at Vimy Ridge in 1917, and especially in the 'Hundred Days' in late 1918 when the Canadians led the Allied pursuit of the defeated German armies.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the 1st Hussars was one of only two cavalry regiments mobilized in Canada for active service; it was to be the divisional cavalry (reconnaissance) unit for the 1st Canadian Division. For very good reason – cavalry had become totally obsolete 20 years earlier – the regiment was left behind when the division sailed for England in the fall of 1939. But the 1st Hussars soon found a new home within the ranks of the burgeoning Canadian Armoured Corps, and in the next years it earned a place of great honour as one of the very best of the Canadian tank units to serve in the war. Fully 12 of the 21 chapters of the book recount the regiment's exploits in training and in operations between 1939 and 1945.

In a brief book review, it is difficult to choose which of the 1st Hussars' many significant operational experiences to focus on. It was one of the three Canadian tank units to participate in the D-Day landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944 in support of 3rd Canadian Division, and one of two armoured regiments whose highly-secret Duplex Drive amphibious tanks swam ashore at H-Hour that day. Only five days later, during the push inland to expand the bridgehead, the Hussars, working with a company

of the Queen's Own Rifles, suffered its worst day of the war in a battle over the village of Le Mesnil-Patry. Thirty-seven of its tanks were destroyed and another 13 were damaged. Because of the loss of so many of the officers and NCOs who participated in the action, just how this battle developed was never well understood. Major McNorgan has done here what good historians have had to do with many battles where only the plan, the start point and the results could be established as facts: by means of painstaking research he has been able to re-create, with sound and credible evidence, what happened on the ground that fateful day. This reviewer has spoken to one of the aging survivors of that fight, and McNorgan's explanation, he said, had relieved more than 50 years of questioning and uncertainty. Quite an accolade from someone who was there. The book goes on to relate the 1st Hussars' story through the Battle of Normandy, the capture of Calais, operations in the Rhineland and the liberation of the Netherlands.

The final chapters of the book relate the story of the regiment in the years since the Second World War – their good years and bad as a militia tank regiment, as a reconnaissance unit, and once again as an armoured regiment (partially) equipped with a wheeled 'tank trainer.' It is worth noting that the many photos, charts and maps are well chosen. The maps and charts are by the now-renowned Chris Johnson.

People, of course, are always the strength of a militia regiment (and indeed of a unit at war), and this book tells of the legion of faithful members of the unit who served in both adversity and good times. We need that sort of record for posterity; it says a whole lot about who we are as Canadians.

While this reviewer will admit to some considerable bias, this is a superb regimental history of one of our finest units, and I heartily recommend it.

The book is available from: 1st Hussars Kit Shop, Wolseley Barracks, Area Support Unit London, 750 Elizabeth Street, London, ON, N5Y 4T7. The cost is \$79.95, including a \$10 shipping charge.

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