

H-Net Reviews

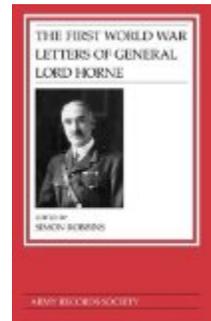
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Simon Robbins. *The First World War Letters of General Lord Horne*. Stroud: History Press for the Army Records Society, 2009. xiv + 370 pp. (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7524-5463-4.

Reviewed by Erich Lenz

Published on H-War (March, 2012)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



Lenz on Robbins

As we near the one-hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War, we do not lack for books and documentaries about its origins and later repercussions on the world as a whole. Lost in this diffusion is the essence of the conflict's influence on the individual soldier, or commander, along with the true understanding of the horrors of the Great War. For historians, the desire to understanding the past lies in the realm of the primary source, and it is through Dr. Simon Robbins's edited volume that those within the field truly gain a better understanding of the conflict from the perspective of a key commander of the British Expeditionary Force.

As is the case with any war, it is the experiences of individuals during trying times that make up the real story of the conflict in which they are involved. They express many of the same concerns, regardless of rank, to their loved ones back on the home front. By selecting a wide range of letters from General Sir Henry Horne to his wife, Robbins offers a primary insight into the events of the First World War through the eyes of one of these individuals. However, as Robbins notes in his introduction, Horne was by no means a minor personality in the global conflict. Horne was instrumental in the "Creeping Barrage" by the Allied artillery.[1] As commander of the XV Corps, he oversaw the Canadian Corps, whose penetration at Vimy Ridge in 1917 became the deepest Allied advance into German-held territory since the beginning of the war. Yet, this stellar officer, who also helped oversee the evacuation of Gallipoli, and the building of the Suez Canal defenses, is rather overlooked.

Robbins notes that there are currently no significant biographies on the general. This may be because most of his letters and documents were believed to be lost, but somehow these letters to his wife survived and remained under care of British archivists for some time. Unfortunately, Robbins does not offer Horne any significant justice with his introduction. It is rather lengthy, just under thirty-five full pages. There are many run-on sentences, and the use of slang that makes little to no sense to a non-British English-speaker potentially alienates a wider readership. Instead of explicating his British subject, Robbins offers a near biblical introduction to Horne, delineating his ancestry, even if the relation plays no significant role in the story as it applies to the letters. It comes across as nonsensical at times, becoming rather pointless. Robbins has a habit of being repetitive and writing more than is necessary in describing a situation that involves the main character. Finally, while Robbins offers biographical notes, he offers little reason for selecting one letter or another, or for leave a large gap between sets of letters. There were ample opportunities to offer explanatory notes throughout the book; instead, many questions are left unanswered.

Although Robbins fails in key areas, his collection of the letters and his decision to leave personal matters out are to be commended. Through the selections, Robbins breathes life to Horne's own experiences and concerns. He offers the reader a better understanding of why certain events happened, as they occurred on the western front, or in smaller theaters of war, such as Egypt. Horne

was certainly more than a mere corps commander. He was an essential overseer of some of the most important events of the “Great War for Civilization.” Yet, despite his position, Horne appears to be just another soldier whose cares are parallel to those of front line troops. It is for this reason that books like this allow historians further access to the fundamental nature of the war’s impact on those who fought it.

Note

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Erich Lenz. Review of Robbins, Simon, *The First World War Letters of General Lord Horne*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. March, 2012.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=34834>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.