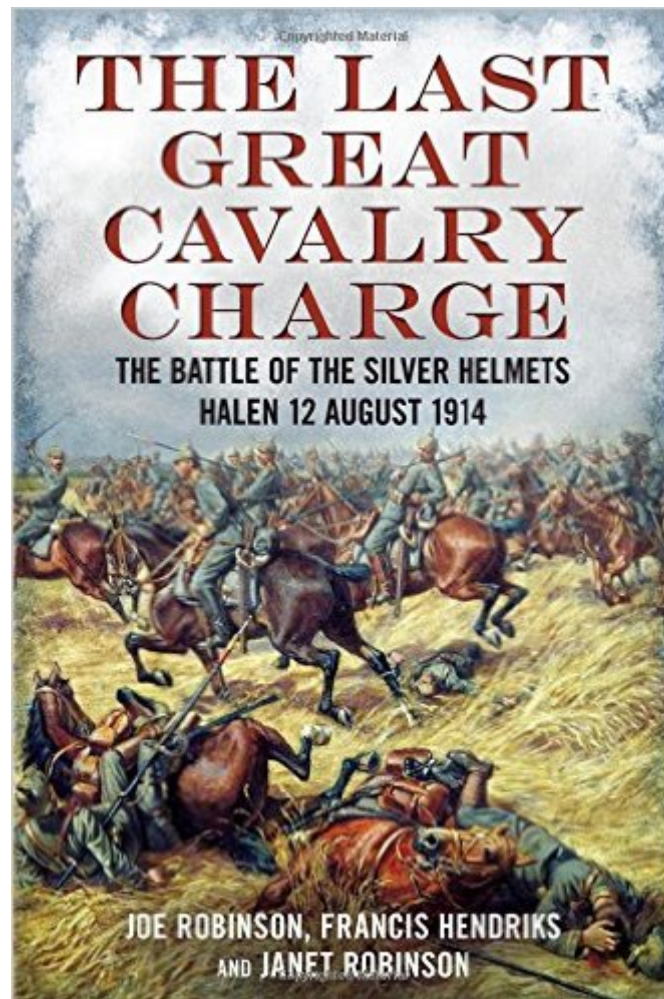


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The Last Great Cavalry Charge-The Battle Of The Silver Helmets-Halen-12 August 1914



Synopsis

The First World War saw many changes to the way that warfare was conducted. Today, it is hard to believe that the use of cavalry was still seriously contemplated in 1914. However, the Battle of the Silver Helmets at Halen, on 12 August 1914, had been orchestrated on the previous successes of the cavalry of Frederick the Great. It was staged so that the German Fourth Cavalry Division would charge into glory with sabres rattling. Instead, twenty-four German officers, 468 men, and 843 horses were lost during no less than eight separate charges conducted on that day. The entire right wing of the Imperial German Army included only nine cavalry brigades in the well-known Schlieffen Plan, and two of those brigades were decimated in this one battle. The battle has not been explored in detail in the English language, as it took place before the British Expeditionary Force landed in the channel ports and well before any American involvement. Furthermore, British historians have generally focused on Germany's efforts to enter Belgium through the forts at Liège, which are east of Halen. However, the Battle of the Silver Helmets destroyed a century-old cavalry tradition. An understanding of the battle explains why large-scale cavalry charges would never again be attempted on the Western Front.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Last Great Cavalry Charge" is one of very few books to cover the actions of the Belgian Army during The Great War. The core of the book is a well-researched blow-by-blow account of the battle. The book also provides some excellent background into the history, structure, tactics and objectives of the German cavalry. In this book, Belgians are not neglected, and we learn much of the pre-war strategic thinking and of their unexpectedly fine defensive performance in August 1914.

Even in victory there are controversies, and the book covers two of them that relate to the battle: the unfortunate positioning of the poor cyclists, who entrenched between the main Belgian firing line and the enemy ahead, and lost heavily as a result; and the late (or not) arrival of reserves in the form of the 4th Mixed Brigade. The maps in this book are excellent. I would highly recommend this insightful book to all readers of military history.

I was interested in the development of the German cavalry in WWI and this book first got my attention by starting with the little publicized battle of Halen in Belgium in August 1914. Much of my military experience was in logistics so it is of particular interest to me when history shows us the importance of effective support of combat operations. Lack of said support led to the demise of two of the nine German cavalry brigades assigned to the Belgium operation. These logistics problems led to more disastrous results for the German cavalry and the army in general. This book includes a good collection of maps and photographs to add to the reader's understanding. The flow of the narrative is not smooth in parts but this is an interesting read starting with a unique perspective. If you like military history, especially of WWI, you will enjoy this book.

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It is hard to take seriously a book with such a gross overstatement right in the title. This cavalry battle was most certainly not "The last". The authors have clearly no idea about the Eastern European theater. Just a first counterexample that may come to mind: [...]. A much larger battle from 1920, fought between two large forces of cavalry. Such choice of words in the title calls into a question the historical knowledge of the authors; or perhaps their integrity, if all they were after was a catchy slogan.

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