

## LES CARLYON - 2004

By Andrew Rule

When Les Carlyon was still in his 30s he was described as 'a journalist's journalist' and nothing has changed in three decades. Born at Elmore in northern Victoria in 1942 into a family steeped in racing and horses, he was educated at Melbourne High School and Melbourne University, where he completed a Commerce degree while already working as a reporter.

He started full-time journalism as a cadet at *The Sun-News Pictorial* in 1960 and moved to Melbourne's journal of record, *The Age*, three years later, where he was successively leader writer, finance editor, news editor, assistant editor and editor. He was an enthusiastic and much-loved lecturer in journalism at RMIT in the late 1970s and early 1980s and a valued contributor to newspapers across Australia, particularly on his favourite subject of racing. He returned to an executive role in 1984 with the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd, where he was promoted to editor-in-chief before Rupert Murdoch took over the group in 1987.

In 1993 he won the Graham Perkin Australian journalist of the year award, named after his late colleague and friend, the brilliant *Age* editor who turned that newspaper into one of the world's best in the 1970s. In 1996, 1997 and 1998, Carlyon won the Carlton United Best Australian Sports Writing Award. As a production journalist he designed the layout and typography for *China Daily*, the English language newspaper then published in the Chinese capital. He was a sought-after freelance writer and columnist in the 1990s, when he wrote mainly for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Perth Sunday Times* and *The Bulletin* and business magazines. He writes on many subjects but his first love is sports writing and, in between bouts of 'serious' journalism, he has covered most sports, notably racing, his lifelong passion. As a former finance editor and editor-in-chief, he is a keen observer of business and politics. And at an age when many people ease into retirement, he became an acclaimed author in a different field: military history.

His book *Gallipoli*, a history of the Allied campaign in the Dardanelles during World War I was published to enormous critical and commercial success in 2001 in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. It won the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Best History Book and the Australian Publishers' Association Readers' Choice Award. Now widely regarded as the definitive and most readable history of that famous

campaign, it is still in print and established Carlyon as one of the finest popular historians of his generation.

His second major work, *The Great War*, published in 2006, is the story of Australian forces on the Western Front in France and Belgium in World War I. In both histories, he wanders to far-off battlefields and re-creates the hellish landscapes of more than 90 years ago.

He has published two collections of stories about horse racing, *Chasing A Dream* in 1988 and *True Grit* in 1996, a collection of profiles, *Heroes In Our Eyes*, and an analysis of the Australian Press, *Paper Chase*.

The late Lyle Turnbull, then managing editor of the Herald & Weekly Times, wrote of Carlyon in 1982: "First of all, he *can* write; he has worked at all levels from reporter to editor, and has proved his skills to his peers; he has objectivity, but does not lack the right passions; he is perceptive; yet his ego does not get in the way of those perceptions, a quality not universally to be observed in the newspaper business."

Les Carlyon is married and lives in Melbourne. He has three adult children and when not reading, writing and talking journalism and racing, is a devoted grandfather.