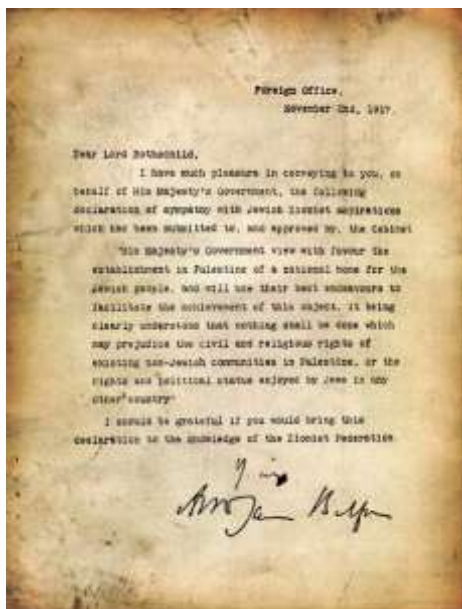## An Auspicious Anniversary Date – October 31, 2017 – Jill Curry

Australian Curriculum, Year 9 – ACDSEH095

October 31 2017 is the 100th anniversary of the battle of Beersheba. This World War 1 battle changed the course of the Palestinian campaign. The Turks were holding a line from Gaza on the Mediterranean coast to Beersheba 45 km inland. The British and their Allies had failed twice to take Gaza and General Allenby decided that they would have to storm Beersheba, which involved trekking the troops for 3 nights through the desert, where there was little water. The battle raged all day with the British and the New Zealanders taking much of the lead. However, by mid-afternoon they had still not secured the city with its vital wells, famous since the time of Abraham. Dying of thirst in the desert was a looming possibility for the troops and their horses. Decisive action was needed and General Harry Chauvel called on two regiments of Australian Light Horsemen (about 800 men) to spearhead a surprise mounted charge an hour before sunset. Light Horsemen normally rode to the battle site then dismounted and fought on foot. On this occasion they would not stop.

800 men lined up to face 4,000 entrenched Turkish troops with artillery, machine guns and German bomber aircraft. Their speed and audacity won the day as the Turkish shrapnel burst behind them. They jumped the trenches and galloped into town, capturing most of the precious wells intact. 31 Australians died, 36 were injured and 70 horses were killed, but the toll was expected to be much higher. Their success is called 'the last great cavalry charge in history' and their courage not only broke the military cordon but also meant the Turks feared the 'madmen' in the slouch hats with emu feathers from then on. This breakthrough broke the Turkish resistance and eventually cleared the land for the Jews to return to the land of their forefathers and for the nation of Israel to be born.

The same day as the physical battle was raging on the ground, the British War Cabinet was meeting in London. Their meeting was regarding how the captured lands would be administered once the war

ended. On November 2nd, Lord Balfour wrote a letter to Lord Rothschild stating their decision:

> 'His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of that object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done, which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish Communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country'[1].

The essence of this letter became the backbone of the Balfour Declaration, which was the foundation of the San Remo Agreement, ratified in 1922 by the League of Nations. This meeting allocated mandated areas to the British and French to administer until the newly-formed countries could govern independently. Thus Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Israel were birthed, with Palestine being divided to give a homeland for the Arabs, which became Jordan, and the Jews, which became Israel.

This day changed history and is truly worthy of remembrance.

Footnotes:

1. Crombie, K., *Anzacs, Empires and Israel's Restoration*, Vocational Educational and Training Pub, 2000, 181

Pictures:

1. Disputed picture of the charge at Beersheba (or re-enactment) – Australian War memorial https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A02684/ It was probably taken when two regiments of the 4th Brigade, Australian Light Horse, re-enacted the charge for the official photographer Frank Hurley, at Belah on 7 February 1918.
2. http://israelforever.org/state/balfour_declaration_original/

Powerpoint:

1. Light Horse Troop - http://clangrantaus.com/australia/australian-military-history/australian-lighthorse/
https://morgenwacht.wordpress.com/2016/05/24/der-hintergrund-des-verrats-1-die-balfour-deklaration/
2. Australian War Memorial https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P02268.012 4th Light Horse at Beersheba
3. Disputed picture of the charge at Beersheba (or re-enactment) – Australian War memorial https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A02684/ It was probably taken when two regiments of the 4th Brigade, Australian Light Horse, re-enacted the charge for the official photographer Frank Hurley, at Belah on 7 February 1918.

4. Jumping the trenches – from a photograph at an exhibition in Beersheba in 2012
5.   Watering the Horses at Beersheba - from a photograph at an exhibition in Beersheba in 2012
6. Arthur Balfour http://speedymedia.blogspot.com.au/2010/12/san-remo-conference.html
7. Balfour declaration http://israelforever.org/state/balfour_declaration_original/
8. Jews return home from Buchenwald http://gcaptain.com/maritime-monday-june-ten-twntythrteen-exodus/
9. Independence Hall Tel Aviv – J. Curry