

Centenary of WW1 - The Middle Eastern Campaign 1916-1918

Australian Curriculum Year 9 ACDSEH021, ACDSEH095, ACDSEH097, ACHHS172

HISTORY – Lesson 3 – The Last Great Cavalry Charge in History – Beersheba and Jerusalem - J. Curry

After two unsuccessful attempts to capture Gaza, General Allenby replaced Murray as commander of the Egypt Expeditionary Force. Creative thinking was needed to break the stalemate that had arisen and it was decided to trek inland to the other end of the Turkish line and capture Beersheba first, but they would have to convince the opposition that they were going to attack Gaza again. While the troops marched through the desert for three nights to avoid detection, the British heavily bombed Gaza from the sea. In addition, they had deliberately dropped a note, which the Turks ‘found’ and believed, detailing the impossibility of an attack on Beersheba due to lack of water.



The British bombardment of the Turkish trenches at Beersheba began at dawn on October 31, 1917. They suffered over 1,000 casualties. In the afternoon the New Zealand troops battled tenaciously to remove the Turks from the heavily fortified hill-top stronghold and vantage point of Tel el Saba (Tel Sheva), neutralizing the machine guns and snipers, which made the charge viable. By this time, many horses had been 48 hours and some up to 60 hours without water. Now there was an urgent need to capture the wells, famous since Abraham, before sundown.

With only an hour left of daylight, General Harry Chauvel made the decision for a surprise charge. This had never been attempted by Light Horse – 800 horsemen charging 4,000 entrenched Turks. As the jacket cover for *The Light Horsemen* movie says, “They did not know it was impossible, they just obeyed orders.”

The 4th and 12th Light Horse regiments (with the 11th following behind) set off across 6 km of open ground in the full face of Turkish artillery and rifle fire, first at a trot, then a canter and finally a full-blown charge. They wielded their bayonets and yelled as they went. The Turkish gunners were ordered not to fire until the troops dismounted, as they always did – at least up till now.



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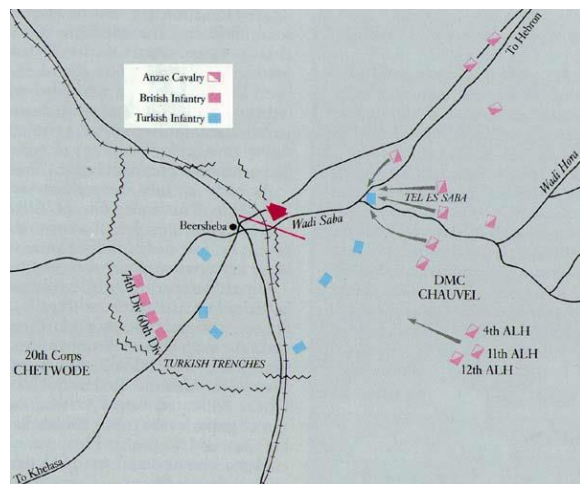
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By the time the Turks realised the horses were not going to stop, they could not wind down their heavy machinery fast enough. The shrapnel flew over the horsemen's heads and exploded behind them. The British artillery took care of the source of those initial machine guns. Of more concern were the bombs dropped from the German aircraft above.



Many riders jumped three lines of trenches and continued on into town. Others dismounted and began fighting hand-to-hand in the trenches. Some were hit and fell, injured or dead. The reserve troops began swarming on the city but there was still danger – the precious water wells had been mined and the German officers were beginning to blow them up. Trooper ‘Scotty’ Bolton managed to follow the wires, stop the German officer at the switchboard and save all the wells except a couple. Against ‘impossible’ odds, they miraculously lost only 31 men, with another 36 wounded and 70 horses dead. The Australian cricketer Albert “Tibbie” Cotter, who served as a stretcher-bearer, was one of those killed. The horse ‘Midnight’ died and his rider Guy Haydon was injured by a bullet. They had represented the ANZACs in a competition in Cairo to settle the dispute as to whether the British or ANZACs were the better horsemen. Guy and Midnight won three all events!

The battle, now known as ‘the last great cavalry charge in history’, was as significant a victory as Gallipoli was a failure. The stunning success not only broke the Turkish defence line and captured a city, but their audacity sent fear into the hearts of the Turks, weakening their resistance. Captured Turkish and German officers said they never dreamed that mounted troops would be madmen enough to attempt rushing infantry redoubts protected by machine guns and artillery. It was not only a military victory; it was also a morale booster for the Allied troops and a demoralising defeat for the Turks. This historic day turned the tide of the campaign and ultimately led to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.



In addition, on the same day, the British War Cabinet met and decided that if the Holy Land



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was liberated, the British would allow the Jews to return and be given a homeland in part of Palestine. The capture of Beersheba paved the way for the taking of the whole of the ancient land of the Bible and the creation of the present day nations of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. It opened the gate for the British to gain their prize of Jerusalem by Christmas, and ultimately the Allied troops' achievement cleared the ground for the establishment of the nation of Israel, and the unfolding of many biblical prophecies.



After Beersheba, there was no time to sit and rest. The push continued day after day towards Jerusalem. Many died in the following days. Between November 7 and 16 the British and their allies suffered 10,000 casualties. They fought their way up the foothills but a stalemate occurred outside Jerusalem. Allenby decided to surround the city and try to force a withdrawal. This strategy succeeded and the city was handed over peacefully. On December 9th the 10th Light Horse regiment was the first representative of the Desert Mounted Corp to

enter Jerusalem. It happened to be the Jewish Feast of Dedication (Hanukka), in the Jewish calendar, which is mentioned in the New Testament in John 10:22-23. This festival remembers the Maccabees' overthrow of the cruel Greek ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, and the subsequent re-dedication of the Temple. For the Jews in Jerusalem, another liberation was now unfolding – this time from 400 years of oppression under the Muslim Ottoman regime.

A re-enactment of the charge took place at Be'er Sheva, Israel, on the 90th anniversary and another is to occur on the 100th Anniversary. There will be other commemorative events happening around Australia also. You can find them at <http://beersheba100.com.au/>.

Pictures:

1. Abraham's Well tourist site, Beersheva, Israel (before latest reconstruction) – J Curry
2. Disputed picture of the charge at Beersheba (or re-enactment) – Australian War memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A02684/>
3. Midnight's Last Charge – painting by Jennifer Marshall www.lighthorseart.com.au
Midnight died and her rider Guy Haydon was injured in the charge.
4. Map of Beersheba – [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Beersheba_\(1917\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Beersheba_(1917))
5. Jerusalem surrendered – Australian War Memorial photo <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H10708/>
6. 90th Anniversary celebration of the Battle of Beersheba – J Curry

For further research:

Australian War Memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/>

Gullett, H., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918. Vol VII, Sinai and Palestine*. Angus and Robertson, 1923.

Idriess, I., *The Desert Column*, The Discovery Press, 1932, 251-252

Staunton, A., *Australians in World War 1, Australian Light Horse*, Department of Vets Affairs, 2007.

<http://beersheba100.com.au/>

Questions and activities for older students:

1. Research the lives of one of Lt Guy Haydon, Jack Cox (Warrant Officer Sergeant Arthur John 'Jack' Cox), Albert 'Tibbie' Cotter, or Trooper Sloan 'Scotty' Bolton. Write 500 words giving examples of how each of these displayed the ANZAC values of courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice.
2. In Gullett's Official history of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 (Vol 7, Page 404) he says that *the ANZACs' sheer recklessness, rather than their very limited fighting powers had defeated the enemy*. Do you agree with this statement? Why would he make such a claim?
3. The local population of Jews, Christians and Arabs living in the land called Palestine welcomed the British and Allied soldiers. Why was this so?
4. **This war, like the next war, is a war to end war.** [David Lloyd George](#) (Statement, sometimes dated to have been made in 1916, as quoted in Reading, Writing and Remembering : A Literary Record (1932) by Edward Verrall Lucas, p. 296 - https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/World_War_I). David Lloyd George was Prime Minister of Britain at the time of the charge. Discuss David Lloyd George's statement. Why do nations go to war? Are wars an unfortunate part of life? Was the war in the Middle East a necessary war? Could the issues have been solved another way, without the loss of lives and casualties? What part does human nature play as the catalyst for war? How do I deal with my anger? Can I resolve issues without fighting?

Questions and activities for younger children:

1. If you were one of the Light Horsemen in the charge, how would you feel when you got the order to mount your horse ready for action? What is 'courage'?
2. Wars happen when nations fight one another. Fighting also happens in families. Do you fight with your brothers and sisters? What can we do to avoid family fights?
3. There is a lovely Children's book about Midnight, "Midnight – the story of a Light Horse" by Mark Greenwood. See if you can read it. Draw or write a short story about 'Midnight' or 'Polo'. Polo was Barney Haydon's horse. He was also in the charge, jumped the trenches and galloped into town. They survived the war.

Lesson Aims:

1. To provide a short overview of the battles in which the ANZAC Light Horse were involved in the early Palestinian campaign.
2. To give examples of the soldiers displaying ANZAC values of courage, mateship, endurance and sacrifice, and encourage the students to exhibit these in their own lives.
3. To consider the causes of war and how these stem from the same emotions we all feel and must learn to deal with in our own lives.
4. To reflect on the concept of sacrificial service and endurance in the tough conditions in Palestine in WW1, and encourage thankfulness for those who served.
5. To research the lives of real people who served and why they were awarded medals, in order to give the students role models who selflessly put their lives on the line for others.
6. To appreciate the victories achieved by our soldiers not just the losses.

By the end of the lesson the students will:

1. Have an understanding of the sacrifices made by our soldiers.
2. Be familiar with examples of the ANZAC values of courage, endurance, sacrifice and mateship and how they were acted out in war
3. Have reflected on the importance of the ANZAC values in relation to their own lives
4. Have considered the reasons why wars are fought and alternative ways to deal with problems.

Powerpoint:

1. Light Horse commemorative statue - Photo J Curry
2. Before the Charge Australian War memorial
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A02006D>
3. View from Tel el Saba over the plain where the Light Horse charged – J Curry
4. Watering the Horses at Beersheba – from an exhibition at Be'er Sheva in 2012
5. The Lighthorsemen movie cover -
http://www.franklycollectible.com/product_info.php/the-lighthorsemen-movie-flyer-film-original-oz-1987-gary-sweet-p-2425
6. 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.
7. Midnight's Last Charge – painting by Jennifer Marshall www.lighthorseart.com.au
Midnight died and her rider Guy Haydon was injured in the charge.
8. Tibbie Cotter – recruitment poster <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P04366.001>
9. Abraham's Well tourist site, Beersheva, Israel (before latest reconstruction) – J Curry
10. Watering the 12 LH horses, Beersheba Australian War Memorial
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H15216>
11. Map of Beersheba – [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Beersheba_\(1917\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Beersheba_(1917))
12. Text only
13. Jerusalem surrendered – Australian War Memorial
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H10708/>
14. Chanuka lights - <http://imgarcade.com/1/chanukah-menorah-in-window/>
15. 90th Anniversary celebration of the Battle of Beersheba – J Curry