THE AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE IN SINAI AND PALESTINE 1916-1918

*Frank Crozier, Sergeant William Martin on Horseback (1921)*,
INTRODUCTION

After the defeat and withdrawal of the Allied invasion force at Gallipoli in December 1915 and January 1916 the AIF returned to Egypt to rest, recuperate, re-supply and re-train. Most of these troops were then sent to fight on the Western Front. Most of the Light Horse, however, became part of a British force whose aim was firstly to protect the Suez Canal from Ottoman attacks, and then push the Ottoman forces across the Sinai Desert, and then north through Palestine and Syria.

Key Inquiry Questions

- What was the Palestine campaign?
- What were its aims?
- What was the Lighthorsemen’s experience of this campaign?
- What did the campaign achieve?

Activities

There are six activities in this unit.

ACTIVITY 1
Students identify the characteristic features and qualities of a Lighthorseman.

ACTIVITY 2
Students study maps to determine where the Lighthorsemen campaigned over time.

ACTIVITY 3
Students use evidence to summarise aspects of the Lighthorsemen’s experiences of the campaign.

ACTIVITY 4
Students use evidence to create a newspaper report on the Charge at Beersheba.

ACTIVITY 5
Students use the knowledge and understanding of and empathy with the Light Horse that they have developed, and design an appropriate Light Horse Memorial.

ACTIVITY 6
Students watch the film The Lighthorsemen (1987) and analyse it as a representation of history.
2015 is the 100th anniversary of the first major Australian involvement in World War 1 — the landing at Gallipoli.

This event, together with the subsequent Australian campaigns on the Western Front and Palestine in 1916-1918, are being officially commemorated by a large government-sponsored program.

In the previous units in this series we have asked what type of society Australia was in 1914 when World War 1 began, what the reactions were in Australia to its outbreak, what decisions the society had to make once war had started, and what happened at the landing at Anzac on 25 April. We have also investigated the nature of the fighting on the Western Front, the impacts of war on the home front, and ways that you can explore the impact of the war in your own community.

For these units go to http://www.servingaustralia.info/education/#estudies

This unit focuses on the nature of the war in the Sinai and Palestine, and especially on the experience of the Australian Light Horse during their campaigns.

RSL COMMEMORATIVE PROGRAM – SERVING AUSTRALIA

This unit is part of an educational program about the centenary of Australian involvement in World War 1. It is sponsored as a civic and educational contribution to the young people of Australia by the Returned and Services League (RSL) and addresses the requirements of the Australian Curriculum History at Years 9 and 11/12.

Some of the main elements of this program include:

➤ Three curriculum units per year in eStudies for use at Years 6 and 9 to 12

➤ A new Serving Australia website, www.servingaustralia.info, that contains video, interactive modules, timelines, Centenary updates and information about youth and community programs.

➤ The App Which WW1 hero are you? in which students answer a series of personal questions which direct them to identifying a World War 1 Australian hero who had similar attitudes, values and characteristics.

➤ A series of Youth Challenges looking at the role of the RSL as a significant civics and citizenship institution in Australia, and how its activities reflect the Spirit of Anzac in our society.
ACTIVITY 1
What was the Light Horse?

The role of the Light Horse was to move quickly to a battle area, where the horsemen were to dismount, and then fight as infantry. This is different from cavalry, who attack and fight on horseback. The Light Horse in the Palestine campaign were part of a larger British force, which included infantry, artillery, supplies, medical, veterinary, engineers, armoured vehicles, and the Imperial Camel Corps. (The camels were superior to horses for mobility in the Sinai Desert, but on the harder surfaces of Palestine they were less mobile and useful.)

Here are drawings of an Australian Lighthorseman, and an Australian infantry soldier.

1.1 Describe their dress and equipment. How are they similar to and different from each other?

1.2 What other equipment do you think would be needed for a long patrol or campaign by a Lighthorseman?

1.3 What would be the military advantages and disadvantages of having soldiers on horses?

1.4 What qualities do you think the men and the horses would need to be successful in their role?

1.5 If you could talk to this Lighthorseman what questions would you ask him to help you understand his role in the war, and its impacts on him? List your questions, and discuss them with classmates. From this, you can create a final list. You will be able to return to these questions at the end of the unit and see if you can answer them.
The Ottoman Empire (Turkey) entered the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary in October 1914.

2.1 Look at the two maps. Identify which modern countries are part of what was the Ottoman Empire in 1916.

The withdrawal of Allied troops from Gallipoli in December 1915 and January 1916 freed thousands of Ottoman troops for other fronts.

2.2 Identify the location of Gallipoli on the map above.

One possibility was that the Ottoman forces would now attack and gain control of the Suez Canal, and stop all Allied supplies between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

So, between 1916 and 1918, one aim of the Allies was to protect the Suez Canal from attack, and then push the Ottoman forces (including units of both Germans and Austro-Hungarians) out of the Sinai Desert and Palestine and to force Turkey to surrender. This was to be done through the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), comprising mainly British infantry troops, but with units of the Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, Indian and other forces.

2.3 Look at the timeline of events involving the Australians in the Sinai and Palestine campaigns of 1916-1918 on page 7. Print a full page copy of the map on page 2. Find each place named in red and underlined in the following timeline, and mark its number beside the name on the map.
**Sinai and Palestine Campaign 1916-1918 Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Campaign Place Detail</th>
<th>Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>April 1916</td>
<td>Sinai Desert Jihâfa</td>
<td>Wells were destroyed there to stop any Ottoman inland advance on Suez from the east.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>August 1916</td>
<td>Romani</td>
<td>LH was part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) force that secured Romani and its water supplies. This stopped any possible Ottoman advance on the Suez Canal, and put the Ottomans into retreat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>December 1916</td>
<td>El Arish</td>
<td>Building rail tracks and water pipelines dictated progress towards the next objective – 24 km a month. The Ottomans had abandoned it when the Allies arrived.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>December 1916</td>
<td>Magdhaba</td>
<td>Allies advanced, and were about to be defeated but Light Horsemen attacked and turned the battle.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>January 1917</td>
<td>Palestine Rafa</td>
<td>The Allies again advanced and were about to be forced to withdraw when NZ light horsemen won a key position, and allowed the Allies to attack successfully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>March 1917</td>
<td>1st Gaza</td>
<td>Gaza was heavily fortified against Allied attacks, which failed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>April 1917</td>
<td>2nd Gaza</td>
<td>Another frontal attack failed, and the Allied advance was held up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>31 October 1917</td>
<td>Beersheba</td>
<td>The Ottoman defensive line stretched from Gaza to Beersheba. The Allies attacked Beersheba, the only source of water, which had to be taken or the Allies would have to retreat again. A charge by the 4th Light Horse Brigade crashed through Ottoman trenches and into the town, and secured the vital water supply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>November 1917</td>
<td>3rd Gaza</td>
<td>The Allies could now advance to Gaza from the south and west. They took Gaza, but failed to trap and cut off the retreating Ottoman forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>December 1917</td>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>EEF enters Jerusalem, after having driven out the Ottoman defenders. EEF now rested as winter cold and rain made campaigning impossible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>February 1918</td>
<td>Jordan Valley To Jericho</td>
<td>EEF took Jericho.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jordan Valley</td>
<td>To Jericho</td>
<td>EEF took Jericho.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>March 1918</td>
<td>Amman</td>
<td>Attempts to take Amman were unsuccessful despite heavy fighting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>April 1918</td>
<td>Es Salt</td>
<td>Attempts to take Es Salt were unsuccessful despite heavy fighting which came close to destroying the main Australian forces in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>September 1918</td>
<td>Megiddo</td>
<td>After a brutally hot enforced summer ‘rest’ the EEF split to advance north parallel to the coast while pretending to mass troops for an inland assault in the Jordan Valley. The Ottoman forces were split, and the coastal body of the EEF swung inland to trap and defeat the Ottomans at Megiddo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>September 1918</td>
<td>Syria Damascus</td>
<td>This opened the way for a pincer approach through Nazareth and Deraa to take Damascus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>30 October 1918</td>
<td>Homs</td>
<td>Parts of the EEF then advanced to Aleppo, but the last Australian troops were at Homs when the Ottoman Army surrendered, ending the war in Palestine.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>December 1918</td>
<td>Palestine Surafend</td>
<td>Australian troops were brought back to Palestine to be sent home. On 10 December at Surafend, a small village south of Jaffa, a group of New Zealand, Australian and Scottish troops raided a village in retaliation for thefts and the shooting of an NZ soldier, and killed probably at least 20, and as many as 40, local Bedouin tribesmen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>March 1919</td>
<td>Egypt Egyptian revolt</td>
<td>Australian troops waiting to be sent home were used to control and suppress Egyptian nationalist protests and riots.</td>
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### ACTIVITY 3

**What was the soldiers’ experience of the campaigns?**

**3.1** Look at the evidence (sources 1–13) that follows, and use it to complete a summary of the aspects of life during the Sinai/Palestine campaign listed in this table. You might look at all the evidence yourself, or you might divide it up among a group, and have group members summarise the evidence they study. In this way you will be able to create a summary for every aspect even if you have not read the evidence about that aspect. Refer to the map on page 2 to identify any place names mentioned in the evidence.

<table>
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<th>B Summary of what the evidence tells you</th>
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<td>Egypt</td>
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<td>Palestine</td>
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<td>Jordan Valley</td>
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<td>Attitudes to war</td>
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<td>Attitudes to allies</td>
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<td>Attitudes to enemy</td>
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<td>Attitudes to horses</td>
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<td>Qualities shown by the Light Horsemens</td>
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<td>Impacts of the campaign on them</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Significance of the campaign in the war</td>
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</table>
**Source 1**  
**Organisation of the Light Horse**

The Light Horse was organised into Brigades.
- Each Brigade had a Headquarters, a Signals troop, and 3 Regiments.
- Each Regiment had about 500 men, formed into three Squadrons of about 140 men each, and Field Ambulance, Machine Gun and Mobile Veterinary unit.
- Each Squadron was divided into four Troops of 40 men each, and 1 Lewis Machine Gun section.
- Each Troop was organised into 10 Sections of four men each.

When the Light Horse went into combat one member of the section would hold all the horses while the other three fought.

![Diagram of Light Horse Brigade Organisation]

*Based on Ian Jones, *The Australian Light Horse*, Time-Life Books and John Ferguson, 1987*

**Source 2**  
**Photographs of Light Horsemen**

3.2 The photographs in Source 2 show Light Horsemen. Decide if the group shown in each photograph is likely to be a regiment, a squadron, a troop or a section, and justify your choice.

![Photograph A]

![Photograph B]

![Photograph C]

![Photograph D]

**Source 3**  
**The Waler**

The Light Horse rode horses called ‘Walers’. They were called that because they originally had been supplied to the Indian cavalry during the nineteenth century from New South Wales—though in fact the horses supplied to the Light Horse during World War I could have come from almost any state in Australia.

These were cattle horses, smaller and lighter than traditional cavalry horses, but faster, more agile, and able to carry a heavy weight for a long distance and still be able to gallop if needed. They required less food and water than traditional cavalry horses.

The typical horse was 14-16 hands (a ‘hand’ is four inches, or about 10 cm, and the height of a horse was measured to the top of its shoulder), so was about 1.42–1.62 metres high.

*Based on Ian Jones, *The Australian Light Horse*, Time-Life Books and John Ferguson, 1987*
**ACTIVITY 3 >>**

### Source 4  
**A Lighthorseman and his horse (1)**

In those weeks of desert fighting, terrible marches, thirst and heat and longing for sleep, horse and man grew very close. It was the period that cemented the lasting mateship between them. Each man came to realise that his horse no longer looked on him as "The Master" but as "My Friend". The friend who cared for him by day, slept beside him by night, the friend who grimly saved, stole, fought for every precious grain from comrade or foe that his horse might eat. The friend who comforted him when the rifles were crackling like a bushfire raging with the dawn. The friend who washed his muzzle with the last few drops from his water-bottle during the terrible marches when man and horse battled on in a sleepless half-world of exhaustion and fantasy.

And in return for the friendship of the man, the horse never failed him throughout the stern years that followed. Man and horse became one, each knew the other’s exhilaration, thirst, dog-tiredness, laziness, expectancy or sense of immanent danger. The feel of the man in the saddle, the pressure of knees or rein, his tone of voice told the horse exactly what was doing.

Trooper Ion L. Idriess, 5th Light Horse

www.minerva.com.au/austwardiary/warriors/Army/ww1/Middle%20East/stout%20hearts.htm

### Source 5  
**A Lighthorseman and his horse (2)**

A Lighthorseman loves, lives with, cares for, and is sometimes saved by his horse. The horses are never left, day or night. Normally they are groomed twice a day, watered twice a day, fed three times a day, and picqued [tied to a long strand of rope strung between stakes] at night. On picquet duty, a trooper will seek out and snuggle up to his own horse, which returns his affection in the long watches of the night. Tough troopers have been known to weep when their beloved horses are wounded, and have to be shot, which is often the case.

A horse knows his own master by voice, sight and smell. He will whinny with pleasure at your approach, and can recognise your voice in the dark. You can do anything you like with your own horse, whereas he will readily kick a stranger who touches him.

In action, a horse and his rider are one. A horse is a trooper’s faithful companion, his pride and joy, his ally and friend, and, on occasion, his salvation.

Patrick M. Hamilton, Riders of Destiny, Mostly Unsung Military History, 1985 pages 59-60

### Source 6  
**Aspects of life in the desert**

Water was sometimes scarce. There were wells. Men needed a litre a day, but a horse needed 22 litres a day to stay in good condition. All depended on the supply of clean water. Horses often fell sick after drinking from stagnant pools.
- Horses needed regular care. When in the lines, horses were groomed three times daily, watered twice, fed three times and exercised twice.
- When on the move they were ridden for 40 minutes, led for 10 minutes and rested for 10 minutes each hour.
- Food in tins could be a risk – if food had not been properly treated before canning the heat could cause the food to become contaminated with bacteria.
- Cases of heat exhaustion and sun stroke were common.

Based on Ian Jones, _The Australian Light Horse_ Time-Life Books and John Ferguson, 1987, page 87

### Source 7  
**A contact with Turkish cavalry**

We rode at the gallop towards their rear. They, in turn, ... lined a ridge directly in our path. We rode over a bald hill and came right into their rifle fire ... The bullets were hissing around me when ... my horse fell on the hard stony ground. I thought he had been killed and had my left leg under him. He had stopped a bullet on the top of his neck just behind his ears but was not hurt really, just enough to drop him. We were both up and gone in quick time ... The game was now on ... Our officer, Lieut Rickaby, who rode the ‘fastest’ horse, soon overtook the slowest Turk. He emptied his revolver at him at close range but to no effect. The Turk, being well trained, pulled up his horse and reversed his lance to the rear for Rickaby to gallop into. He nearly did, the lance leaving a rusty mark on his shirt sleeve ... The running fight continued for some distance—about [five kilometres]. We took back five horses and their gear with swords and lances, as proof of our success.

Ian Jones, _The Australian Light Horse_ Time-Life Books Australia and John Ferguson, 1987, page 87

### Source 8  
**Conditions in the desert**

‘I think this is the most hellish wind I’ve experienced yet. It sears through the oasis, through our blanket shelters and scorched our naked bodies.’

Ion L. Idriess, _The Desert Column_ Angus & Robertson, 1932, page 68

### Source 9  
**A Turkish General to his soldiers**

‘Brave soldiers, you are going into the Desert. I ask you to have patience and perseverance. You will return bearing your arms in victory, or you will leave your bones in the Desert. Everything is bad in the Desert, hunger, nakedness, dirt, every privation, therefore, I ask you to have courage and perseverance, O, my soldiers.’

Ion L. Idriess, _The Desert Column_ Angus & Robertson, 1932, page 145
ACTIVITY 3 >>

Source 10  Photographs from the campaign

A

C

E

B

D

F

ACTIVITY 3 >>
**ACTIVITY 3 >>**

**Source 11** Feeding the horses

Their rations were composed of tibbin, a sort of crushed barley straw, with a small quantity of barley which we carried in front of the saddle. The load they carried was a big one, with bridle, halter and rope, saddle cloth and our one blanket on top of that, saddle containing a pair of wallets holding our personal gear strapped on each side, and in front and on top of this the grain sack approximately two feet [60 cm] long and nine inches [22 cm] thick full of barley. The sack of grain, or the saddle itself, was usually our pillow at night, with our greatcoat (if we had one) on top of this. On each side of the saddle was the nose bag for feeding the horse, a canvas water bag and dixie or mess tin ... Later, when we were issued with swords [in 1918] the sword was carried on the near [left] side and the rifle bucket on the off [right] side ... Added to all this, the trooper himself carried a fair load as well (with rifle, belt and bayonet and ammunition, bandoleer full of ammunition) and all this added weight to the old horse. Before going into action an extra amount of ammunition was carried around the horse’s neck, plus water bag.


**Source 12** Song of the Stable

Groom—groom—groom—groom—as long as you’re able
That—that—that—that’s—the song of the stable.

Dust—dust—dust—always in your eyes
Bomb—bomb—bomb—falling from the skies.

Flies—flies—flies—torment you all the time
But—to—stop—for—one moment is a crime.

Rake—rake—rake—manure into heaps
Dung—dung—dung—enough to give you creeps!

Shove—shove—shove—the stuff up into bags
Do—you—won—der—that every moment drags.

Lift—lift—lift—the bags into a cart
Yes—yes—yes—enough to break your heart.

Smooth—smooth—smooth—the dust out with great pain
Just—for—your—make*—to mess it up again!

Feed—feed—feed—they always want to eat
You—must—’Feed—up’—though you are dead beat!

Thus—thus—thus—you go on through the war
Yes—by—god—it’s—enough to make you roar.

Days—weeks—months—years—we’ll always do the same
Spend—our—lives—at it—and die at the game!

*make = an inferior horse*


**Source 13** Different conditions

The Light Horse fought in different conditions in different parts of the campaign. Here are the four main geographical regions in which the campaign was carried out, with their descriptions. But the descriptions do not match the region names.

**3.3** Your task is to look at the map and images in evidence 1–3 showing the different regions and appearance of the Sinai/Palestine area, and match the correct description to the region name. Draw a line between the region and its correct description.

**Evidence 1** Regional map of Palestine

- **Sinai/Negev**: Sandy shore with a narrow band (25–40 kilometres wide) of fertile land.
- **Palestine coast**: Sandstone canyons, wadis, craggy peaks, rock-strewn plateaus.
- **Central highlands**: Desert, sandy, barren, little water, hot and dry, often cold at nights.
- **Jordan Valley**: Mountainous, rocky, steep cliffs, valleys with small streams, cooler in the highlands than the lower areas.
ACTIVITY 3

Evidence 2  Aerial image of the Sinai Peninsula looking north from the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea

Evidence 3  Eastern Mediterranean Sea looking south-west from the Black Sea coast
ACTIVITY 3 >>

3.4 Here are some paintings by war artists of aspects of the campaign. Use the map on page 2 and the images above to identify in which of the four regions each is located. For example, the location and the features of Image B are clearly in the Sinai Desert region.

A. Bada Gorge, on the road to Damascus
   This is in: ____________________________

B. Near Romani
   This is in: ____________________________

C. Magdhaba
   This is in: ____________________________

D. Es Salt
   This is in: ____________________________

E. Between El Arish and Magdhaba
   This is in: ____________________________

F. Jordan Valley near Jerusalem
   This is in: ____________________________

3.5 Complete your summary table.
ACTIVITY 4

Reporting on the charge at Beersheba

One of the most famous and significant battles was in 1917 at Beersheba (see the map on page 2). It was mainly the men of the 4th (Victorian) and 12th (NSW) Regiment that were involved in the charge, but other Light Horsemen were also involved in other parts of the battle.

4.1 Imagine that you are a reporter at Beersheba. Prepare a news report about the event. Your news report needs to answer six key questions:
1. Where did the charge take place?
2. What were the Light Horsemen trying to achieve?
3. What was significant about Beersheba?
4. What was it like to be part of the charge?
5. What was the outcome of the charge?
6. Why were there far fewer casualties than expected?

You have taken notes—but they have become mixed up. You need to re-organise them to make a logical account which also answers the six key questions. You also have maps, some images and interviews to use in your report. You will find this information in pages 14–18 in this unit.

4.2 Read the notes at the side of Map 1 below and draw a line to show where each part of what the text describes would take place. For example, for text information A you might draw a line that shows the Allies attacking Gaza, but being unable to reach it. Then a line that goes down to Beersheba. In this way you will have graphically illustrated the text.

MAP 1

A Allied troops were trying to advance through Palestine and into Syria to defeat Turkey. Turkish troops, supported by Arab fighters, held a 60 km line between Gaza and Beersheba. Attempts to take the strongly defended Gaza had failed, so the aim of the Battle of Beersheba was to defeat the Turkish forces at the other end of the line, Beersheba.

B British and Australian troops moved by night over three days between the 28th and the 31st October 1917 from Tel el Farah through Esani, Khalasa, Asluj and then in an arc close to Beersheba.

C The aim was to take Beersheba with attacks from the west and south.

D By 4 o’clock on the 31 October 1917, New Zealand troops had captured Tel el Saba, but Beersheba had not fallen. The attacking army desperately needed water. If Beersheba did not fall that day their advance would be held up, and this might allow the Turkish forces time to strengthen their lines. It was vital that Beersheba be taken on that day, as the wells were needed to provide water the horses and the men.

E The Australian Light Horse were ordered to charge just before dark from the east across about 5 kilometres of open ground towards the Turkish defences. The Turks had rifles and machine gunners in trenches facing the Australians, and artillery and two aeroplanes.

MAP 2

Map of positions at Beersheba

A controversial photograph possibly showing the Charge at Beersheba. Its authenticity has been both challenged and defended. This version includes artillery smoke that was been added to the original photograph for dramatic purposes.


Now look at your notes, interviews and images on the following pages to explain what happened at Beersheba, and answer your six questions.
The Australians were not cavalry who charge the enemy on horses. They were mounted infantry. In every past fight the Australian troops had reached a certain point and then dismounted to fight as infantry.

The Australian had been helped by a trick. The British officer in charge of intelligence had prepared fake papers, including a letter from ‘home’, that suggested that the attack on Beersheba was a feint, while the real attack would be on Gaza. He had dropped these papers after going into the desert and deliberately running into a Turkish patrol, which fired at him. He put some blood from his horse on the pack, to suggest that he had been wounded, and the Turkish patrol found the papers. This meant that troops which could have been used to reinforce Beersheba were sent to Gaza. The trick worked.

But the taking of Beersheba could still have been for nothing. The Turkish commander had wired up the wells with explosives. However, the German officer in charge of destroying them was not able to blow up more than two before two Australian soldiers raced into the room and forced him to stop.

Some of the horses were watered during the march to Beersheba, many were not. Some had not drunk for 32 or even 48 hours when the charge began.

The Turks had only 4 400 men and 28 field guns against 58 500 enemy and 242 guns, but they had a great defensive site.

If the Allies did not take Beersheba that night they would have a 12 hour trip back to water.

Two German planes dropping hand bombs on them, missed because of the speed of the horses.

1500 metres from the trenches 1000 rifles and several machine guns open fire at them.

Some Turks stabbed up at the horses with their bayonets. Some surrendered, but snatched up their rifles again as the Light Horsemen dismounted.

Amazing images leapt from the dusty chaos: a man pinned to the ground by his dead horse, swapping shots with a Turk, killing him; a troop grazed by a bullet, swung off-balance by the weight of ammunition and haversack, spinning, as his mate laughed; the corpse of Regimental Sergeant-Major Alec Wilson still riding his big charger; a Waler joining the fight, rearing to lash out with its fore-hooves.

In an impossible turn of bad luck that evening a German aircraft flew over the 4th Light Horse Field Ambulance Unit scoring a direct bomb hit which killed four stretcher bearers. This was despite the unit being clearly identified by Red Cross flags.

Trooper S. Bolton single-handed chased a gun drawn by six horses, which, with three Turks on the horses and three on the limber, was being galloped out of action by a German officer. Bolton had lost his rifle, but had picked up a revolver. As the German refused to halt, Bolton fired at him at close range, but the weapon misfired. The Australian then knocked the German out of the saddle with the butt-end of the revolver, and forced the Turks to return with the gun.

When the Light Horse reached the Turkish trenches the mis-sighting of the rifles and machine guns no longer mattered—the firing was at point-blank range. Most of the casualties occurred here, at the trenches, rather than in the charge across open ground.

The casualties for the Light Horse were 31 killed and 36 wounded. 48 horses were killed. The highest proportion of deaths was among the stretcher bearers, who had four killed and eight wounded from their small group.

Some memories of the day:

- Sergeant Ted Seagher returning under fire to snatch a wounded comrade, and galloping out, leading his section and the wounded man to safety.
- John Cantwell remembering that an officer had taken a pot shot at a mangy dog as he galloped past it.
- Albert Newell recalling the squelch made when his horse trod on the stomach of a dead soldier.
- Jim Henderson finding the still warm body of a Light Horseman who had been missed by the Field Ambulance men, and had lingered on the battlefield all night, and had just died.
- One trooper remembered being irritated because his horse kept its head low, offering no cover. Another recalled glancing aside to see that his mate had an eye hanging out on one cheek, and watched helplessly as he clung to his saddle for a hundred metres, then fell to the ground.
- Trooper Bert Hutchinson of the 4th Regiment watched the tiny, winking flame of a machine-gun brightening as it came directly into line with him. Then his troop leader, Lieutenant Frank Burton, blocked the ugly sparkling and crashed into the hard ground as his horse stumbled. Galloping behind Burton, Trooper Lindsay Taylor saw the lieutenant lying dead as he flashed past, then he turned ahead, flat on his horse’s neck, watching its ears flicking as machine-gun bullets whistled around them.

Details from a grave in Beersheba War Cemetery:

Trooper Harold Thomas Bell
(enlisted as Harold Thomas Wickham)
4th Australian Light Horse
Died of Wounds at Beersheba
1 November 1917
Aged 16
Son of Thomas and Margaret Bell,
Creswick, Victoria

ACTIVITY 4 >> YOUR INTERVIEWS

A Trooper Moon was with his troop leader, Lieutenant Ben Meredith, as he dismounted. ‘He hands his reins over to me and turns with his revolver on one of these pits full of Turks. They throw up their hands at once, but as he turns away one of them picks up his rifle and shoots him in the back.’ Other Light Horsemen tell how Moon then bayonetted the Turk again and again.

B Riding with the 12th, Trooper Fowler recalled: ‘The machine gun and rifle fire became intense. As we came in closer to the trenches, some of the Turks must have forgotten to change the sights on their rifles as the bullets went overhead. I turned my horse and raced along a trench. I had a bird’s eye view of the Turks below me throwing hand grenades etc. but in a flash we were through with nothing between us and Beersheba.’

C Trooper Phil Moon of the 4th Regiment said, ‘We can feel the concussion of the fire in our faces. I got my head down on old Jerry’s neck and was doing some mighty deep thinking. Next to me, Johnson’s horse gets it through the head and Johnson takes a tumble.’

D Then came an explosion as the Turks started to destroy ammunition dumps and wells. Troopers Hudson and Bolton ‘saw a German officer who seemed to be working a switchboard. He was blowing up buildings of importance in the town (ammunition dumps, headquarters, etc.). We rode over to him and gave a yell, upon which he immediately jumped to his feet, very much surprised we were already in the town.’

E ‘It was the horses that did it; those marvellous bloody horses. Where would we have been but for them?’

F ‘It was the bravest, most awe-inspiring sight I’ve ever witnessed, and they were... yelling, swearing and shouting. There were more than 500 Aussie horsemen... As they thundered past my hair stood on end. The boys were wild-eyed and yelling their heads off’. Trooper Eric Elliot

H In one incident, Armourer Staff-Sergeant Arthur Cox of Bendigo saw a machine-gun being hurriedly dismounted from a mule by its crew. ‘In a minute it would have been in action at close range’. Cox dashed at the party alone, bluffed them into surrender, and took forty prisoners.

I A wounded trooper revealed: ‘All I could do was ride my horse, wave my bayonet round my head and yell. But we were lucky. No barbed wire and none of those horse pits too wide to jump’.

J Another wounded man said: ‘As soon as we cleared the trenches and dismounted, the Turks threw down their rifles and offered money to save their lives.’

ACTIVITY 4 >> YOUR IMAGES

A

The Charge at Beersheba

B

Grave of Lighthorsemen at Beersheba

C

Dead Light Horsemen

4.3 There has been argument over whether the photograph at the start of this activity really showed the start of the charge, or was from a re-enactment. Go to http://www.ryebuck.com.au/elearning/ and scroll down to CHARGE AT BEERSHEBA – AN INTERACTIVE LOOK AT THE AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE WEBSITE to explore this argument in an online investigative activity.
5.1 Imagine that you have been asked to design a memorial to the Light Horse for your own area.

- What are the main ideas that you want the memorial to communicate to viewers?
- How could you get these across to people? Through an image? Through words? Through symbols? Through a combination of these?

Here are some memorials that might give you ideas. Look at them and discuss the similarities and differences.

Then decide how you would represent the Light Horse in your memorial design.

Tongola, Vic

Tamworth, NSW

Capella, Qld

Desert Light Horse Memorial Canberra

Beersheva, Israel

Canberra, ACT
Watch the film *The Lighthorsemen* (1987). It is a representation of history. A representation is somebody’s version of what happened. The person, in this case the filmmaker, has decided what to show and what to leave out, how to sequence events, which people to include, what they say, and so on. Every single frame of the film has been deliberately created.

**6.1** Use this table to summarise how the filmmaker has created this representation or version of the event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of the story used</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characters selected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinematography</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**6.2** What is your final judgement about the film as a realistic and accurate representation of the event? Justify your answer.