

Centenary of WW1 - The Middle Eastern Campaign 1916-1918

Australian Curriculum, Year 9 – ACDSEH095, ACDSEH097

HISTORY – Lesson 4 Jordan Valley and the Great Ride – Jill Curry

The Jordan Valley

By the time the Allied troops had secured Jerusalem, the winter rains had set in and the troops were enduring wet, muddy days and freezing nights in their tents. In February they moved down the steep valley to the lowest place on earth and the ANZAC mounted troops were the first to reach the ancient City of Palms – Jericho. On March 21, 1918, the troops crossed the pontoon bridge over the Jordan River and headed for Amman to cut off the rail supply route running from Damascus into Saudi Arabia. After several days of fighting they were forced to retreat being defeated by the terrain, the bad weather, a shortage of supplies, high casualty rate, additional Turkish reinforcements arriving, and the promised Arab backup not arriving to assist the Allies.

A second attempt followed on April 30-May 3, which again proved unsuccessful on several fronts, not the least being that once again the Arab reinforcements did not turn up. As summer approached, General Allenby wanted to keep the Turks thinking the next attack would be on this eastern border, while actually planning to break through near the Mediterranean Sea. The ANZACs were left to sit out the hot, dry months in the breezeless Jordan Valley, which even the locals considered uninhabitable. They shared this time with deadly spiders, scorpions and malarial mosquitoes and contended with Turkish snipers and German planes. To confuse the Germans they made wooden frames and covered them with hessian to look like horses from above, so their camps were not such a target.



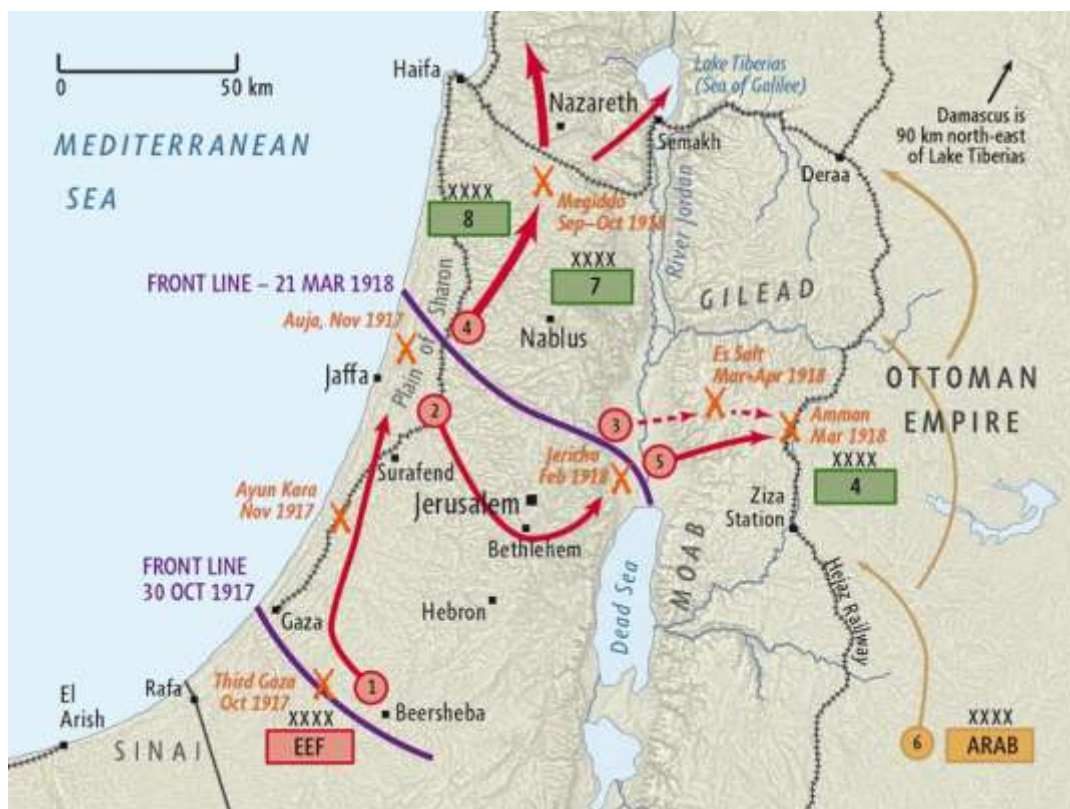
Galilee: The Great Ride – Megiddo Sweep

Over summer, some regiments were sent to the Western Front, necessitating the reorganisation of and re-training of the troops. Additional Indian reserves joined the Allies. On September 19th 1918 before dawn the artillery guns and bombing aircraft, closely followed by British & Indian infantry broke through the defence line near the Mediterranean coast. Hot on their heels were the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions which dashed through the gap of the dishevelled defence and rode for their lives towards Nazareth where the German commander of the Turkish forces, Von Sanders, had his headquarters, 110 km northeast over the Mt Carmel mountain range. The Allies knocked out the Turkish communications centres, thus sending the enemy into confusion. In a brilliantly coordinated multi-faceted attack that stretched right across modern day Israel and Jordan to Amman, soldiers from many different

countries, religions and backgrounds, worked together to defeat three Turkish armies, taking tens of thousands of prisoners. The Arab army under Emir Faisal and T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) also finally came good and played their part.



The most vicious battle of this part of the campaign took place at Semakh on the southern shores of the Sea of Galilee. This railway station and intersection was heavily fortified with machine guns, and hundreds of well-armed Turkish and German infantry, many secured behind the concrete walls of the station building. Before dawn on September 25th, two Light Horse squadrons, now including aboriginal riders, embarked on a moonlight charge. The enemy fire began before they were within 800 metres of the station, and several horses fell. Outnumbered and out-gunned, it was not until Australian machine gunners arrived following the charging horses that the tide began to turn. Having disabled the fire from the windows, the two squadrons entered the station fighting from room to room with rifles, swords and bayonets. 14 ANZACs were killed and 64 wounded, together with almost 100 horse casualties, being nearly half of the horse contingent.



Damascus

By September 29th the Allied troops arrived on the outskirts of Damascus. The city was in turmoil as internal factional fighting had broken out. The handover of Damascus was very tricky politically. Britain had made promises to both the French and the Arabs to keep them

on their side, but these were somewhat contradictory. Political correctness demanded that the 'honour' of the handover of the city be given to the Arabs. This would appease them, despite the fact that control would eventually be given to the French. The ANZAC troops were halted on the outskirts of Damascus awaiting the arrival of the Arabs and the British officials.



On October 1, Captain Arthur Olden of the 10th Light Horse Regiment was ordered to cut off the Damascus-Homs road to the north. The quickest way to get there was straight through town. They found themselves in the city square and Olden was ushered up to the office of the Governor Emir Said and handed the letter of surrender! With this in hand, he proceeded on to complete his task to block the northern exit. When the Arabs

arrived the next day, the whole formal process had to be repeated, so the records could be politically correct. After this the city was in such an uproar that the ANZACs were again called in to quell the riots, which they duly did. They were horrified to find the local hospital overwhelmed and sick and injured left in the open air with no food or care.

Disease was now rife and the exhausted troops on both sides were falling prey to this new menace. Some ANZAC regiments lost so many to illness that they could not continue. The remaining troops pursued and overcame the retreating Turks to the northern city of Aleppo where they met stiff resistance. When they captured the railway intersection just north of Aleppo, cutting off any chance of reinforcements or supplies entering the region, the Turks surrendered. The armistice was arranged for October 30 and enacted on October 31 at midday. The war in the Middle East was over. The Ottoman Empire had fallen.

Allenby's ambitious plan involving 34,000 horsemen against three Turkish armies had paid off. In only six weeks of the Megiddo sweep they covered 560 kms and took 75,000 Turks captive plus capturing 360 guns.

Pictures:

1. Dummy horses used to fool German aircraft – Australian War Memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B02667/>
2. Ziv Ophir explains about the Semakh railway station (behind) – Jill Curry
3. Map – Palestine Campaign WW1 - Map produced by Geographx with research assistance from Damien Fenton and Caroline Lord. 'Palestine campaign 1917-18 map', <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/palestine-campaign-1917-18-map>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 14-Aug-2014
4. Arab troops arriving at the Governor's residence for the surrender of Damascus – Australian War Memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J02491/>

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.

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

http://alh-research.tripod.com/Light_Horse

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

Questions and activities for older students:

1. Research the life of General Harry Chauvel or Edward Chaytor. They both played a large part in success of this campaign. Why were they good leaders? What can we learn from their example? Write 500 words of biography with special reference to their leadership skills.
2. It has been said that war is 90% boredom and 10% hell. How was this true for the ANZACs in the Jordan Valley? How do you survive the difficult times in life?
3. The first two efforts to capture Amman failed but they succeeded on the third attempt. How do you deal with failure? How would the ANZAC characteristics help you to move from failure to success in your life?
4. How did good teamwork contribute to the success of the latter part of this campaign? What can you learn from this to apply to your own life?

Questions and activities for younger children:

1. The Light Horsemen were very disappointed when the troops meant to come and help them did not turn up. Have you ever been let down like that? How did it feel? Have you ever let someone down who was relying on you? What can you do to set that relationship right again?
2. The Light Horsemen had to spend a whole summer in the hot desert with no televisions or computers. Think of some activities they could do to keep themselves amused. Remember that the Turkish soldiers were watching them.
3. How did the ANZAC characteristics of courage, endurance, sacrifice and mateship help the soldiers win the war? Make a poster with pictures to depict one or more of these characteristics.

Lesson Aims:

1. To provide a short overview of the battles in which the ANZAC Light Horse were involved in the Palestinian and Syrian campaign in Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.
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 reflect on the difficulties of life for a soldier and see how we can learn to deal with difficulties in our own lives.
4. To consider the necessity of teamwork and endurance in the tough conditions in Palestine and Syria in WW1, and encourage thankfulness for those who served.

5. To research the lives of real leaders who served and why they succeeded, in order to give the students good examples of leadership to apply in their own lives.
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 how the Allied forces won this campaign and what lessons they can learn to apply to their own lives.

Powerpoint:

1. Light Horse commemorative statue - Photo J Curry
2. Pontoon bridge over Jordan River - <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B00029>
3. Dummy horses used to fool German aircraft – Australian War Memorial
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B02667/>
4. 9th LH regiment Jordan Valley near Jericho <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B00236>
5. 9th and 10th LH regiments, Jenin <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B00259>
6. Ziv Ophir explains about the Semakh railway station (behind) – Jill Curry
7. Australian memorial at Semakh – Jill Curry
8. Map – Palestine Campaign WW1 - Map produced by Geographx with research assistance from Damien Fenton and Caroline Lord. 'Palestine campaign 1917-18 map',
<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/palestine-campaign-1917-18-map>,
(Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 14-Aug-2014
9. Turkish Prisoners of War, advance to Damascus -
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B00253B>
10. Arab troops arriving at the Governor's residence for the surrender of Damascus –
Australian War Memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J02491/>
11. Turkish prisoner of war hospital, Kaukab, Damascus
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B00364>