

Linda Reynolds

Senator for Western Australia



THE REYNOLDS REPORT

Remembrance Day 2015

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, the guns on the Western Front fell silent as the First World War came to an end.

Today, Australians across our nation paused for a minute's silence to commemorate the service of our service men and women.

For 100 years, we have said the words 'lest we forget' at the end of the ode to remembrance. It is a solemn caution not to forget the service and sacrifice of all men and women who have served and continue to serve our nation. 'Lest we forget' means not only remembering the lessons of war, but also capturing and sharing the individual stories of those who served, so their families can individually remember and honour them.

On this remembrance day I remember the bravery of the five



2015 Remembrance Day ceremony at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.



At the Be'er Sheva commemoration service with our men and women serving with UNTSO and MFO.



Bronze Commemorative Sculpture of the Australian 4th Light Horse Brigade at the

Australian Light Horse Brigades in the First World War. Their bravery is encapsulated in the famous charge of the Australian 4th Light Horse Brigade on 31 October 1917.

Park of the Australian Soldier in Be'er Sheva.

Last week, I was privileged to join an Australian delegation to Israel to participate in the Inaugural Be'er Sheva Dialogue between the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies.

This was my first visit to the Middle East and it was an extraordinary, eye opening time to be there considering the current upheaval and transition in the region. You can only learn so much from books and maps. [I was pleased to share my experience with the Senate yesterday.](#)

Fittingly, the dialogue was named in honour of the famous charge of the Australian 4th Light Horse Brigade at Be'er Sheva. This battle was one of the most decisive turning points in the First World War and and it is with great pride that I share their story with you on this remembrance day.



With ADF Personnel at the 4th Light Horse Brigade Commemorative Sculpture in Be'er Sheva.

Charge of the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade

98 years ago in October 1917, the outcome of the First World War was in no way pre-ordained. At that time, the failure of the Dardanelles campaign, a military catastrophe in Mesopotamia, and setbacks on the Western Front had greatly damaged Allied morale. The Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire and Germany were holding fast.

The Middle East theatre of war was only of peripheral importance when the First World War broke out in 1914, but by 1917 that had changed. Two Allied attempts to break the Turkish defensive line, running from Gaza on the coast to Be'er Sheva 43 kilometres inland, had failed and the town of Be'er Sheva itself remained in the hands of the Ottoman Empire.

A last desperate push was required if Be'er Sheva was to be captured, a result necessary to the success of Commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, General Allenby's, campaign. And so it was that at 1630 hours on 31 October the 4th and 12th Light Horse regiments drew up behind a ridge some four miles to the south-east of Be'er Shiva, and moved off. Following close behind were supporting forces, from the 11th Light Horse Regiment and from the 5th and 7th Mounted Brigades.

Facing sustained enemy fire, but moving fast, the mounted infantry quickly fell upon enemy lines, jumped the trenches, dismounted and then entered the trenches on foot, clearing them with both rifle and bayonet.

Though outnumbered, the momentum and audacity of the surprise attack carried them through the Turkish defences. The light horsemen took less than an hour to overrun the trenches and enter Be'er Sheva.

The city was captured by nightfall, and the Gaza-Be'er Sheva defensive line was broken. It was the success and desperation of the Charge, late in the day and by mounted infantry, not heavily-armoured cavalry, that has earned it an enduring place in Australian and First World War history.

The Light Horse success was not only due to their courage, but also their ability to take the initiative, take risks and to be disruptive. Characteristics that have continued to serve our nation well in successive generations of service men and women.



A regiment of the Australian Light Horse on the march in Jerusalem. [AWM B01619]

At the Be'er Sheva dialogue,
MAJGEN Molan (Retd.) reflected on

a question he, and many of us are often asked "Why does Australia get itself involved so often in other people's wars?" The simple fact is we get involved, as it is in our national interest to do so. Australian involvement in the Middle East continues today as it will into the foreseeable future.



With Major General Molan at the Lebanon Israeli "Blue Line" border at Metula.

At the Be'er Sheva ceremonies, I was privileged to meet defence personnel from two longstanding operations:

Firstly Operation Paladin, which supports UNTSO. UNTSO was established in 1948 to supervise the truce agreed at the conclusion of the first Arab/Israeli War. Since 1956, members of the Australian contingent have supported UNTSO, with 12 personnel currently on deployment.



In the Golan Heights looking into Syria.

Secondly Operation Mazurka, which supports the MFO, a non-UN organisation established in 1981 to oversee long-standing regional peace agreements. We currently have 25 military personnel deployed in the Sinai - an increasingly unstable region with the rise of ISIL affiliated Al Wilayat Sinai, now speculated to be responsible for the downing of the Russian Metrojet flight.



At an UNDOF observation post in the Golan Heights on the Syrian Border.

Today we remember our past and current service personnel.

Lest we forget.

Linda

Senator Linda Reynolds
26 Charles Street, South Perth, WA 6151
(08) 9368 6633

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