

KYNETON LIGHT HORSE STATUE

The following is written by Mike Garnett (S53-55) and is based on his address given at the unveiling of the statue on 31 October 2014

This magnificent statue depicts a Light Horseman at Beersheba which is appropriate because today is 97 years since the famous charge back in October 1917. Beersheba was a small outpost in the Sinai Desert manned by the Turks, but was important to the overall British offensive known as the Battle of Gaza because of the vast water supplies which were so necessary for the troops and their horses to survive. The place is now a substantial town of some 200,000 population predominantly settled in recent years by immigrants from Eastern European countries – and is a part of southern Israel.



This statue is also representative of the Kyneton volunteers who signed here at the Mechanics Institute into the newly formed volunteer units, back in the early 1860's. This resulted in two of the earliest country troops in Victoria: the Kyneton Light Horse and the Kyneton Rifles – so basically one cavalry and one infantry unit. Through many amalgamations that incorporated those volunteers from places such as Malmesbury, Castlemaine, Maldon, Maryborough and elsewhere, they received royal patronage which resulted in a name change to Prince of Wales Light Horse. They were the forerunners of those who came together and fought so heroically against

Germany and the Ottomon Empire some fifty years later and for which this statue is representative.

I want to pay tribute to the person who had this statue made for us – his name is Rob Curtin from nearby Trentham. When I approached Rob to make this statue he was clearly taken-aback, because his artisans in the Philippines were used to producing life size giraffes, elephants and lions for theme parks. These are strongly made out of reinforced fibre-glass, and very life-like. Clearly we had no hope of constructing a bronze sculpture because we did not have the funds.

I recall Rob's immediate reaction which was – well, I had a grandfather who fought at Gallipoli, so I will help all I can. Just get me an accurate model showing all the accoutrements in correct proportions, and I will take it to my people in the Philippines to see what can be done.



Getting this model for Rob was easier said than done, and it took ages to find this tiny model measuring just three inches, brilliantly made in Hong Kong for an Australian company. Somewhat sheepishly I gave it to Rob and apologized that it was so small.

To cut a long story short, Rob took this to the Philippines and gave it to his artisans who, without any fuss, proceeded to enlarge it photographically onto a huge screen. They immediately set about the moulding procedure resulting in a decent size model standing about 36" which – three months later - was shipped back to Trentham for our approval. As my background was air force, I obtained the assistance of the historian from the 4/19th Prince of Wales Light Horse, David Holloway who checked

everything - the slouch hat, emu feathers, rifle, bayonet, uniform, boots, horse saddle and accoutrements – the lot. With minor adjustments, we gave the go-ahead, and so the Philippine artisans were able to progress to a life size statue. And this is what they came up with – absolutely stunning. But if it wasn't for Rob Curtin's willing participation, and this little model, we would not be celebrating here today.

I am delighted that we have representatives from the 4/19th Prince of Wales Light Horse here today, including three former Commanding Officers.

This statue should mean a lot to those living in modern-day Kyneton. It acknowledges the early mounted rifles from the 1860's; it represents those of the Light Horse units which served on all three fronts of the Great War (Gallipoli, Western Front and Palestine), and it represents the 178 volunteers from this small town who paid the supreme sacrifice - and let's not forget the 150,000 Waler horses that never returned to Australia.

Beersheba was the last successful cavalry charge in history, it saw 800 members of the 4th and 12th Australian Light Horse win a heroic victory against an estimated 4,000 Turks. Unable to provide themselves with swords or lances at short notice, the Light Horse famously charged with their short bayonets as depicted on this statue. The liberation of Jerusalem and Hebron followed, and changed forever the face of the Middle East.

It also helped to create the legend of the Australian Light Horse.
Thank you ...

