WWI in the Middle East

Australians who served
- » **More than 416,000 Australians**
- » **enlisted during the First World War, with more than 330,000 serving overseas – many served in more than one theatre**
- » **More than 20,000 Australians served in the Middle East**

Major Units
- » **Australian Light Horse**
- » **Desert Column**
- » **Desert Mounted Corps**
- » **Australian Mounted Division**

Casualties
- » **More than 1,400 Australians died in the Middle East**

Specific Medals
- » **One VC was awarded to an Australian who fought in Palestine.**

Cemeteries
- » **Egypt—1447 Australians buried in nine cemeteries and 134 are commemorated on the Chatby Memorial**
- » **Iraq—46 Australians buried in two cemeteries and 11 are commemorated on the Basra Memorial**
- » **Lebanese Republic—24 Australians buried at Beirut War Cemetery**
- » **Syria—139 Australians buried at Damascus War Cemetery**

More information
- » **Office of Australian War Graves First and Second World War cemeteries overseas**
- » **Australians at War – www.australiansatwar.com.au**

Following the end of the Gallipoli campaign, a large part of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) transferred from Egypt to the Western Front. Those who remained, mostly members of the Light Horse, fought a mobile war against the (Ottoman) Turkish Empire in the Middle East.

Egypt

Following failed Turkish attempts to capture and destroy the Suez Canal supply route in 1915 and 1916, the Allies advanced eastwards, out of the difficult desert country of the Sinai and into Palestine.

Saudi Arabia

The Anzac Mounted Division's first significant operation against the Turks occurred on the night of 4–5 August 1916 when Turkish forces attacked Romani in a bid to reach the Suez Canal. A counter-attack by British troops and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade saw the depleted Turkish force retreat from Romani.

In late 1916, the Australian Light Horse took part in major operations at El Arish, Magdhaba and Rafah, forcing a Turkish collapse in those areas and securing the Palestinian Frontier in December 1916.

Palestine Campaign

Gaza

The first Battle of Gaza occurred on 26 March 1917 when two brigades of the Anzac Mounted Division attacked Gaza. While the Turkish position became perilous, the attack was called off when the need for water, particularly for the Australians' horses, became acute.

A second attempt was made to capture Gaza on 19 April 1917, but the formidable Turkish defences held out, denying the Allies victory.

Beersheba

Allied commanders then decided to outflank Gaza by turning the Turkish line at Beersheba. On 31 October 1917, Allied troops launched their assault and as the day drew to a close, the capture of Beersheba became critical because of the need to obtain the water in the town's wells. The battle was decided when the 4th and 12th Australian Light Horse Regiments launched a daring cavalry charge that carried them into the town. Around 12,000 Turkish soldiers were captured by British Empire forces, or surrendered following the attack.

The fall of Beersheba cracked open the Turkish defensive line. Gaza fell a week later and on 9 December 1917, the city of Jerusalem was captured.

The war continued through 1918, with the Anzac Mounted Division capturing Jericho in February and participating in an operation across Jordan in March, aimed at capturing Es Salt. An Allied withdrawal on 4 May 1918 in the face of heavy Turkish reinforcements saw that operation come to an end.

The final campaign in Palestine was launched on 19 September 1918. Allied troops won a sweeping victory, driving the Turks from Palestine's coastal areas and attacking the retreating enemy relentlessly as they attempted to cross the Jordan River. By 1 October Allied troops were in Damascus and by the end of the month the Turks signed an Armistice ending the war in the Middle East.