

## The Anzacs and Israel - a common destiny

[Kelvin Crombie](#)



Kelvin Crombie with the Australian Ambassador after the Beersheba 90th year reenactment in 2007 with Australian light horseman in background

Speak about the Anzacs to anyone in Australia and you will invariably receive a totally positive response. Conversely, however, speak about Israel to anyone in Australia and you will receive a whole range of responses, from the very positive to the very negative.

This is ironic, for the Anzacs have been one of the major contributors towards the modern day restoration of Israel, during both World Wars, and the destinies of both countries seem to be somehow linked.

### Geo-politics in the 19th century

The foundations for our Anzac involvement in the region actually began in 1798 when the French invaded Egypt, then part of the Turkish Empire, in an effort to defeat the British in India. Although the French failed in their efforts, the incursion forced Britain thereafter to closely monitor all geo-political activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, which was the half-way station to Britain's growing eastern empire of India, Australia and later New Zealand.

Also of paramount importance to Britain was the region of the Dardanelles Peninsular and Bosphorus Straits, which connected the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. Britain was concerned lest Russia gain a predominate position in that region. It was imperative therefore that the Turkish Empire remain in tact, lest rival European powers gain a strategic advantage in the Eastern Mediterranean - to the detriment of the British.

This British concern intensified when the French constructed the Suez Canal in 1869. Britain soon afterwards, in 1875, purchased the controlling interests of the Canal and then later took a controlling interest in Egypt.

It was very 'coincidental' that this strategic region was sandwiched between Britain and her Eastern Empire, which included Australia and New Zealand. The land of Israel in particular was in fact a strategic buffer zone through millennia. It was a land between Empires, in antiquity between empires to the north and south, but in the modern period between the European empires and their developing colonies in the Far East.

And it was also 'coincidental' that at the same time as these geo-political activities were taking place in the nineteenth century, there was a huge amount of interest within the upper levels of British evangelical Christian circles in the future restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. These Christians believed that Israel must be restored before Jesus would return to reign from Jerusalem. And many of these 'restorationists' were Anglican leaders - with influence in government circles.

## **The First World War and Gallipoli Campaign**

By the turn of the twentieth century Turkey was seeking a European ally, other than Britain, France or Russia. That ally was Germany. This relationship culminated in late 1914 with Turkey choosing to join with the German/Austro-Hungarian Alliance in the First World War. And this occurred at the very time that the first convoy of Anzac troops was making its way towards the Eastern Mediterranean.

This Turkish-German alliance was dangerous for the Allied cause, especially for Britain's Russian ally. By late 1914 Russian troops were encountering difficulties against these forces and sought help from their allies.

The British and French then began planning to take supplies to Russia. However to do this they first had to get through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus under the very guns of Constantinople itself. This would require a military campaign and they would need to capture those very same regions from the Turks.

By early 1915 the newly-arrived Australian and New Zealand soldiers became part of this plan, being called upon to fight alongside British, French and Indian troops, and a few Zionist soldiers from Palestine (who had been ousted by the Turks), to capture at the first instance, the Dardanelles Peninsular.

Simultaneous to these military plans, political plans too were unfolding. Russia, to whom the Allies were actually going to help, now became extremely concerned with the potential British/French capture of the Dardanelles, Bosphorous and associated regions of the Turkish Empire.

Russia coveted these regions, as they controlled the connection between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Once captured, the British and the French could actually control them, which could be a geo-political threat for Russia in the future. Consequently the Russians sent an ultimatum to their erstwhile allies in March 1915 stating very clearly, that once captured, these very same regions would then need to be handed over to the Russians.

Britain and France had no choice but to comply. They desperately needed Russia to remain within the war and thus tie up valuable enemy forces. In response, the British Government formed a committee to ascertain what was in the best interests of Britain in the region, if and when the Turkish Empire collapsed. What Britain particularly did not want was for France or any other power to be left controlling the region east of the Suez Canal and being a potential threat to her eastern empire.

Herein lies the beginning point of what culminated in October 1917 with the issuing of the Balfour Declaration and Britain's promise of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. And this beginning point was the forthcoming Gallipoli campaign - which also just happened to be the beginning of our Anzac tradition, and in the words of the Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, the beginning of Australian nationhood.

All of these political considerations, however, were far from the minds and attention of the young Anzac soldiers as they stormed the beaches of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, and as they fought for survival during the following eight months.

Such considerations, however, were closer to heart to another group of soldiers who also landed at Gallipoli. These were Jewish soldiers originally from Palestine. Some 10,000 Jewish people had been summarily expelled from their ancestral homeland soon after Turkey entered the War, and ended up as refugees in Egypt.

From these refugees a group of some 500 volunteered to serve in the British Army. The British, however, would not enlist them as front-line infantry, but as transport troops, and thus was formed

the Zion Mule Corps. These men, who were commanded by an Anglo-Irishman, John Patterson, proudly wore the Star of David emblem, and were the first distinctly Jewish fighting force for some 1700 years. One of the officers, Joseph Trumpeldor stated that Gallipoli was the road to Zion.

### **Defeat of the Turkish Empire**

The military campaign at Gallipoli was a failure. In December 1915 the Anzac troops were withdrawn back to Egypt, to be rested and then to be sent on to France. Many Turkish troops at Gallipoli were also withdrawn, and their main goal now was the capture or destruction of the Suez Canal.

From early 1916 therefore the British concern refocused from the Dardanelles to the Sinai and the Suez Canal region. A special force slowly began to develop which in time became the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) and one of the main components of this force was the Anzac Mounted Division and what later became the Australian Mounted Division. These two divisions, comprised of five Australian mounted brigades and one New Zealand mounted brigade, formed part of the Desert Mounted Corps, commanded by General Harry Chauvel.

Through 1916 these mounted troops played the foremost role in stopping the Turkish-German assault on the Suez Canal. This threat was halted at Romani in August 1916. Thereafter the EEF began pursuing the Turkish-German forces back to the boundary of Palestine. The Suez Canal was now safe.

At that stage a new prime minister, David Lloyd George and foreign minister Arthur Balfour came into power. Both were imbued with the realization that if Britain did not take control over the east bank of the Suez, and indeed all of Palestine, then at the conclusion of the war they would be confronted with a potential hostile power, be it France, Russia or Germany if they won the war. Britain, for the sake of the empire, including Australia and New Zealand, now began to seek a legitimate way of being able to have a controlling interest in this area to the east of the Suez Canal, and in particular Palestine of the time, the Biblical land of Israel.

Although the British were now beginning to support the nascent Arab nationalist movement in Arabia, this force was by no means satisfactory or tested enough to be a stable solution in the strategic buffer zone.

The only stable solution lay with a suitable geo-politically neutral force. And at that time the Jewish nationalist Zionist organization was well established and mature, and could be such a candidate. Indeed by the middle of 1917 the Jewish people were now being taken seriously as a possible solution for the future governance of the land of Israel. All of this was purely academic of course, as the land of Israel still remained under Turkish control, with a strong German and Austrian military presence also. And, it must be clearly borne in mind, while under an Islamic entity, and the Sultan was the Caliph of Islam, there would never be any opportunity of a Jewish national presence in the land of Israel.

The British, Australian and New Zealand forces were entrusted with the responsibility of now actually capturing the land of Israel. The first major battle in this conquest took place at Gaza in March 1917 - and ended in failure, as did a second battle in April. There were some 10,000 plus casualties.

If the land of Israel was to be captured, another solution needed to be found. The solution was the idea of capturing Beersheba, inland from Gaza, in a surprise assault. Through the summer months of 1917 the British and Anzac troops prepared themselves for this surprise attack, which was scheduled to begin on 31 October.

Simultaneously the political battle also heated up. Miraculously all of the opposition to a potential Jewish homeland in Palestine was overcome - including the Vatican and the French. The last obstacle

was President Wilson of the United States. Following his consent, the British Cabinet was scheduled to make their final decision at a meeting scheduled for 31 October - the same date as the scheduled attack on Beersheba.

On that crucial day British infantry attacked Beersheba from the south and west and gained their positions. Most of the casualties on this crucial day were by the British infantry. Then New Zealanders captured the strategic ancient Beersheba, Tel es Saba in the mid afternoon. Later that afternoon up to 800 Australian light horsemen of the 4th Light Horse Brigade courageously charged in from the east and completed the victory which had been set up by the rest of the EEF soldiers earlier in the day.

Meanwhile in far away London, the British War Cabinet debated the political future of the land of Israel pending its capture.<sup>[1]</sup> At almost the same time as the final victory was won on the ground at Beersheba, the War Cabinet almost unanimously agreed to the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

Was all this coincidental or was there some hand guiding, almost simultaneously, soldiers on the ground and politicians in the meeting room?

### **Capture of Jerusalem**

Following the capture of Beersheba the next objective was the capture of Jerusalem and Jaffa, the main port. New Zealanders in mid November wrapped up the capture of Jaffa, while British and Australian troops battled for Jerusalem.

The first assault on Jerusalem ended in a stalemate as the Turks held the high ground surrounding Jerusalem from the west. The EEF commander, General Edmund Allenby then planned a second assault, scheduled to begin on 8 December 1917. That evening British infantry gained many of their positions.

Only one Anzac regiment was involved in the capture of Jerusalem, the 10th Light Horse Regiment. These troops came up from the south-west, linking up British troops coming from the south and the west.

On the morning of 9 December 1917 British infantry entered the outskirts of Jerusalem to find that the Turks had withdrawn to the north of the city, to high points on the Mount of Olives (part of what is now Mount Scopus). Although fighting did take place in this area, the main city of Jerusalem was entered unmolested. Men of the 10th Light Horse entered Jerusalem later in the day.

The official surrender took place on 11 December 1917 when General Allenby entered into Jerusalem. He ascended the steps of the ancient fortress of Jerusalem, and there the official surrender was proclaimed. Opposite him were some 110 British soldiers, and 50 Anzacs, equally comprised of Australian and New Zealanders.

### **Capture of Galilee and Damascus**

The major goal thereafter was the capture of Damascus the capital of the province of Syria. The first move in this quest occurred in February 1918 when Jericho and the region close to the Jordan River were captured. In the race between the British infantry and Anzac horsemen, the Anzacs passed the post first. Jericho, of ancient Biblical renown, was captured by the men from 'down under.'

Thereafter the EEF made two unsuccessful attempts to capture Transjordan, at the cost of many Anzac and British lives. Finally it was decided to remain in the sweltering Jordan Valley during the summer of 1918 and await a new opportunity for taking those commanding heights to the east of the Jordan River, and thence moving onto Damascus. Well this is what General Allenby wanted the Turks, alongside their German and Austrian allies, to think would happen.

And wait and swelter they did. And sweltering alongside these Anzac horseman were Jewish soldiers, some from the original Zion Mule Corps of Gallipoli fame, but others who had subsequently joined the 38th and 39th Battalions Royal Fusiliers, the so-called 'Jewish Legion.' Among these soldiers were many of the future leaders of Israel, and they gained their initial fighting experience serving alongside and under the Anzacs.

Allenby, however, was drawing up another plan to reach Damascus, which would by-pass Transjordan. He would send his cavalry forces north along the coastal plain break through into the Jezreel Valley, through the Galilee and onto Damascus via the Bashan - the Golan Heights. In addition he would also make a further thrust into Transjordan.

This final offensive to capture the entire region of Syria began on 19 September 1918. In that assault the Australian Mounted Division (now cavalry) struck north along the coastal plain with British and Indian troops, while the Anzac Mounted Division and Jewish soldiers from the 'Jewish Legion' struck into Transjordan.

Some Australian horsemen passed through the area of Nazareth towards the Sea of Galilee. Others moved towards the Sea of Galilee from the south, and on 25 September men of the 4th Light Horse Brigade captured the strategic position of Semack on the southern end of the sea. The capture of this strategic position virtually heralded the end of Turkish and German opposition in the Galilee. The Sea of Galilee, famous for its association with Jesus of Nazareth, was captured by soldiers from the uttermost ends of the earth.

All the Australian troops then converged on Tiberias and the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, some camping near Medgdal, (Migdal, Magdala) and in the vicinity of Capernaum, on the way of the sea, the Via Maris, which headed towards Damascus.

By 27 September the Australian horsemen were leading the charge towards Damascus along that very road. Over the Jordan River, up into the Bashan area (Golan Heights today) and towards the real goal of the campaign - Damascus.

On 1 October 1918 men of the 10th Light Horse entered Damascus and actually received the surrender of the city - which was not according to plan.

Thereafter British, Indian and Australian troops rushed to the northern border to ensure the entire province was captured before the Turks surrendered. It was imperative that the entire province be captured so that the two official agreements with the French and the Jewish people, and the unofficial 'correspondence' with the Arab nationalists, could be fulfilled.

Meanwhile the Anzacs and other troops quickly accomplished all of their goals in the Transjordan.

Both of these assaults, to the north and to the east, ultimately accomplished the British goal.

Although there were numerous complications thereafter, the Turkish administration no longer held sway over the province of Syria. The total number of EEF deaths from Sinai to Aleppo was some 15,000 and 2,000 Anzacs.

Following the war, both Britain and France were given Mandates, in order to prepare local entities with the opportunity of governing much of that large land mass. Numerous national Arab entities thereafter resulted. One very small area was entrusted for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Anzacs played a huge role therefore in helping to bring about the possibility of a Jewish restoration to the land of Israel.

### **Between the Wars**

During the period between the two wars the land of Israel encountered numerous problems, as the Jewish people endeavoured to develop the land and an infrastructure for officially governing it,

while the mostly Muslim Arabs opposed this process. And all of that land, it has to be remembered, was legally purchased, and much of it was barren and swampy marshland.

Due to considerable political pressure some 78% of the area originally committed to the Jewish people for their homeland was severed from the agreement and given to the Arab people for another Arab nationalist entity, Transjordan. Despite this, however, the Arab leaders were still not appeased. In fact any area of Jewish sovereignty in the region classified as dar al Islam - the region of Islam, no matter how small, was anathema to the Arab leadership.

It was nothing short of a miracle that the nascent Jewish entity in Palestine was able to survive, compounded as it was with a growing opposition even from the British administration, which was, during the 1930's further renegeing upon its original commitment to the Jewish people. And, unfortunately even the Australian Government towards the end of the 1930s was supporting this British attitude.

### **The Second World War**

The beginning of the Second World War, however, saw violence end, temporarily, and the focus being placed upon the new enemy, Nazi Germany.

The Anzacs of the second AIF were also back again in the region. When the first contingent arrived in early 1940 they were royally welcomed. The New Zealanders were based in Egypt, while the Australians were based in Palestine. Thereafter these soldiers on a daily basis rubbed shoulders with the local inhabitants, and many, especially the Jewish people, thoroughly loved them.

Apart from this fraternizing, it was the exploits of the soldiers in the field which were more important. During this period up to 500,000 Jewish people lived in Palestine. It was quite clear what would happen to these people if the Nazi-German led force ever captured this strategic land.

And the land of Israel was strategic in the Second World War as it was sandwiched between the Suez Canal on one side and the oil fields of Mosul on the other, both of which were German objectives. Thankfully though the war was not directly felt in Palestine in the months after the German invasion of Poland. Yet it was indirectly felt, as a large percentage of Jewish people in the land of Israel had relatives living in Poland and adjacent countries, and there was much concern for their safety and welfare.

The Jewish community had no illusions of their fate if the Nazi German force conquered Palestine. It was already clear that many Arab leaders in the region held Nazi sympathies, so such a scenario of a German invasion held out a two-pronged danger.

### **War reaches Palestine**

The fall of France in mid 1940 however changed the dynamics completely in the Middle East.

France's fall precipitated the entrance of Italy into the war on the side of Germany. Italy soon afterwards sent its troops into nearby Greece. Also, from its colonial bastion in Libya, Italian troops headed eastwards over the border with Egypt towards the Suez Canal. Italian planes also bombed Tel Aviv and Haifa causing considerable damage. The war was now a reality, for the Jewish people, and also for the Australian soldiers who were garrisoned and doing their training in Palestine.

The British under General Wavell counter-attacked the Italians in Egypt in late 1940, and in January 1941 the Australian 6th Division joined in, capturing first Bardia, then Tobruk, Derna and other coastal towns in the province of Cyrenaica. Once Benghazi was captured, the entire province came under Allied occupation.<sup>[iii]</sup> It would have been appropriate for the Allied offensive to continued all the way to Tripoli and to have captured the province of Tripolitania as well. Events elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean, however, precipitated a dramatic change in the dynamics.

### **The Greek Campaign and Jewish ordeal**

Britain had still one ally in the region of southern Europe, Greece, while adjacent Turkey was still neutral in the conflict. It was becoming progressively clear that the German war machine would sooner or later engulf Greece as well, in order to halt any potential Allied offensive from that very area.

Although Greece had dealt the Italians a crushing defeat, they realized they were no match for the Germans if, and when, they invaded. In this setting, Churchill felt he had no choice but to send as much support as he could to his erstwhile ally. Not to have done so would have given a very negative message to all of Britain's smaller allies who might be in the German-Nazi path.

Churchill, however, had no extra forces to send - except the Australians and New Zealanders, and some British troops. The 7th and 9th Australian divisions were still at this point not ready for action, so they were brought forward to relieve the 6th Division in Cyrenaica, or held in reserve, while the 6th Division and the New Zealanders left for Greece.

Almost immediately after disembarking the second generation of Anzacs headed north to join the local Greek Army and defend the northern region of Greece from the expected German move south. Part of the area that this force was to defend was the key port of Saloniki, or Thessalonika. Some 47,000 Jewish people lived in security in this historic city.

This security was quickly lost however when in early April 1941 the Germans swept south through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria with superior land and air power and quickly overran the combined Allied and Greek Armies. These troops were sent reeling to the south - and the German Army quickly moved into Saloniki. And no sooner had they taken over control of this city, they quickly began rounding up the Jewish people. Soon afterwards this entire community was shipped off to Auschwitz and other camps. At the end of the War only some 1,090 Jewish people survived.

Here lies a very clear lesson and principle: while the Anzac forces, alongside in this instance the British and Greek forces, were in control of an area, the Jewish people were safe and secure. Once, however, the Allied forces were defeated, there was only one solution remaining for the Jewish people - death.

The Anzac and British troops managed to get to the base of the Peloponnesian Peninsular, fighting rear-guard actions as they could. At Kalamata thousands were shipped out, mostly to Crete, some back to Egypt. Many thousands however could not be taken, and were interned as POW's. Among that number were hundreds of Jewish soldiers from Palestine who were members of various auxiliary forces associated with the British Army.

Phase two of the Greek campaign occurred almost immediately afterwards, when the German army then invaded Crete. Although sustaining heavy casualties they finally defeated the combined Allied, Greek and local Cretan forces, due primarily to their aerial supremacy. Again many soldiers managed to be extricated from the island, while many thousands were taken prisoner.

### **Tobruk, the Syrian Campaign and Jewish survival**

Simultaneously to these campaigns, a new and potentially greater menace entered the fray in North Africa. General Erwin Rommel arrived with a large force including the newest Panzer tanks, as head of what became known as the Afrika Korps.

The impulsive Rommel, fresh from his victories in France, went immediately onto the offensive. By early April 1941 he had overrun the British forces on the border between the two Libyan provinces, and in the following days was steadily pushing the inexperienced garrison force, mostly men of the 9th Division, back towards the Egyptian border.

What Wavell's British and Australian forces had taken from the Italians, was now being quickly regained by this German-led force. And the inexperienced and under-equipped 9th Division,

elements of the 7th Division, as well as British artillery and armoured forces, had to stop this German juggernaut, as it motored through the North African desert.

The retreating force was instructed to head for Tobruk and dig in, and to deprive the German-led force of this key port and communication centre. For Rommel to complete his goal of reaching the Suez Canal he needed Tobruk in order to re-supply his fast moving forces.

General Leslie Morshead, commander of the 9th Division was entrusted with the responsibility of holding Tobruk at all costs. For Winston Churchill, Tobruk became the linch-pin for the survival of the British Empire, and many saw it as a symbol for the survival of western civilization.

While this garrison force at Tobruk held off the German onslaught, then Egypt remained secure, and beyond that both the Suez Canal and the land of Israel were also secure. And for the 500,000 Jewish people in Palestine, this was welcome news. Although thousands of Jewish people had enlisted in the British forces (very few as infantry, however, as the British did not want to train up too many Jewish fighters), for the vast majority, there was no adequate defence against a conquering Nazi German force.

It also needs to be stated that there were numerous Jewish soldiers in Tobruk, either serving in the Australian and British forces, but also many from Palestine itself, members of the various auxiliary units of the British Army. Their presence added to the prayers and interest of the Jewish people in Palestine for the safety of the garrison force at Tobruk.

The courageous stand at Tobruk was perhaps the only positive at this juncture in mid-1941 as the situation for the Allies grew progressively worse. A pro-German government had taken power in Iraq, and the Germans had sent supplies to Iraq via Syria to the north of Palestine, which was then governed by the Vichy French. This movement was a potential disaster for the British, for if the Vichy French would permit a fully-fledged German incursion into Syria, this force could then move south through Palestine to the Suez Canal. There was a possibility of a German pincer movement meeting at the Suez.

Thus in June 1941 the British invaded Syria and Lebanon, in what became known as the 'slouch-hat' due to the bulk of the invading force being men mostly of the 7th Division, some from the 6th Division who were extricated from Greece and Crete, alongside British, Indian and Free French troops.

This campaign was very costly in terms of casualties. It did, however, neutralize the danger from any potential German led initiative coming from the north - at least for the present. It also provided some valuable fighting and service experience for numerous Jewish men from Palestine, future leaders such as Moshe Dayan, Yigal Allon and Yitzhak Rabin, all of whom acted as guides for the invading Australian forces.

Once again the large Jewish community in Palestine was extremely grateful for the fighting and sacrifice of the Australian soldiers, as it provided them with further respite from their known fate if the Germans ever succeeded in conquering the land of Israel.

The potential German threat in Iraq was also forestalled when a British force, some coming from Palestine (including Jewish fighters) and some coming from India, toppled the pro-Nazi regime. Unfortunately this did not happen before a murderous program took place in Baghdad when Arab mobs, influenced by Nazi propaganda, ravaged the Jewish quarter, massacring some 180 innocent Jewish people.

**El Alamein - a disaster in Palestine prevented**



Despite losing ground in Syria and Iraq the Nazi-German juggernaut continued its movement, from the north through Russia, aiming for the oil fields of Mosul and elsewhere, and from the west, through Libya.

In early 1942 Rommel's forces broke through the British lines, and captured Tobruk, which was no longer garrisoned by Morshead's resolute Australian soldiers. With Tobruk no longer a thorn in his side, Rommel continued his thrust eastwards towards the Suez Canal.

This thrust was finally halted at a small place named El Alamein in July 1942. The entire region was now on tenter-hooks as the balance of power was about to change. Some hitherto neutral local leaders, now became more obvious Nazi-German sympathizers. The British made preparations to evacuate not only Egypt, but also Palestine, and to fall back further east.

In fact the British High Commissioner informed the Jewish leaders in Palestine of this, and provided them with various alternatives. The Jewish leadership decided to remain in the land of Israel and fight the invading Germans as best they could.

It was also decided to establish a fortress on Mount Carmel, and to bring the entire Jewish population there, and to hold out against the Germans as long as possible. They had no choice. For by this stage much of the Arab leadership was also strongly sympathetic to the Nazi-Germans, especially the Mufti, the Muslim spiritual leader of Jerusalem.

Initially the 9th Division was on garrison duties in Syria, still recovering from the rigours of the Tobruk siege. The 6th and 7th Divisions were back in the Pacific fighting against the Japanese, while the New Zealanders, alongside the British, South Africans, Indians, Poles and Free French were fighting to stop Rommel's thrust eastward.

The seasoned Australians, guided still by their courageous commander General Morshead, were hurriedly brought back to the front line, rejoining the Anzac brothers from New Zealand - and were quickly once again in the action. And while not fighting, they, like all the other troops, consolidated their line against the next major German led assault towards Alexandria - and beyond.

This final battle began on 23 October 1942 and thereafter ensued some ten days of solid fighting. Thousands of men from both sides fought and died. The future of the entire region depended upon the outcome of this battle.

Finally the German-led line was broken. The bulk of Rommel's forces were concentrated against the 9th Division's position at Tel el Eisa on the coast, where, subsequently the most intense fighting occurred. This in turn weakened the centre of the German line, where the break-through finally occurred. The Allied troops of the Eighth Army then streamed through and pursued Rommel back towards Libya.

The 9th Division, however, did not join in the pursuit as they were decimated by the heavy fighting. They remained for some days, buried their many dead, tended to their wounds, and recovered as best they could. Then they made their way back to base camp in Palestine, before returning to Australia to fight the Japanese.

When they returned to Palestine they were welcomed like the returning heroes they were. The degree of gratitude which the Jewish people had for these heroes, is epitomized in a gift which the Jewish leadership of Palestine, the Vaad Leumi, later presented to General Montgomery. It was a beautiful Bible, and with it was an inscription in English and Hebrew:

To Field Marshall Viscount Montgomery the gallant leader of the victorious British forces by whose hand God has placed salvation in Zion in the days of El Alamein. [\[iii\]](#)

This inscription in a sense sums up better than any, that wonderful heritage of what the Anzacs have been permitted to accomplish on behalf of the Jewish people. It is true they were not in the land of

Israel during either war for the purpose of furthering Israel's restoration, however, the end result and by-product of their efforts is that they greatly aided Israel's restoration.

### **Conclusion - our present responsibility to Israel**

It is apparent from this brief analysis that there has been an amazing dynamic between the Anzac soldiers of both world wars and the Jewish people in the land of Israel. Surely this aspect must be one of the most interesting, if not significant, of our many achievements during these conflicts.

It is perhaps incumbent in these days for our country to give due consideration to this dynamic, and to ensure we don't squander what those brave soldiers achieved, both on the battlefield and in their social interaction with the Jewish population.

Unfortunately our government has not always been supportive of Israel since it gained nationhood in 1948. Some would say that Israel often makes it difficult to support it. This may be true on occasion. However, we as a sovereign nation need to consider the incredible forces opposing the very existence of tiny Israel, forces which our country has never had to face, except in part from the Japanese threat during World War Two.

The Islamic world, for example, basically doesn't just want to see Israel pushed back to its pre-1948 borders. With a few exceptions, they refuse to recognize Israel's very right to exist. The issue therefore is not Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem. They see the very existence of Israel as a threat.

### **But how can this actually be?**

If we look at Israel's size in comparison to all of the Islamic countries, then Israel is much less than one percent compared to the size of these nations. In other words Israel could be fitted into this Islamic land mass perhaps 500 times!

And yet Islamic countries, which are not even bordering Israel, construe Israel to be a threat.

If Israel is a threat to the Muslim world, then it most certainly could not be a military threat - no matter how many nuclear weapons Israel might or might not possess.

Why then is Israel's very existence such a threat, not just to Islam, but indeed to any regime, entity or ideology which wants to see it just disappear from the map?

The same question could also be asked as to why Hitler and the Nazi system was so determined to gain European, if not world-wide, domination, and to destroy the Jewish people in the process. Why specifically the Jewish people?

Today no person in his or her right mind would agree that Hitler's 'Final Solution to the Jewish Problem' was right. We are, or should be, totally abhorred by it.

Our soldiers on the front line at Tobruk and El Alamein fought to stop this insidious evil from achieving its goal of worldwide domination. And while our brave soldiers were thus fighting ordinary German soldiers in a so-called honourable campaign, the system controlling those German forces, the Nazi system, was shooting, gassing and burning up to 6,000,000 Jewish people plus other 'non-desirables.'

Which system is now committed to the destruction of the State of Israel? Iran has made those threats of late, and others before them. If this occurred, what would happen to the 6,000,000 plus Jewish people living in Israel?

Australians (and New Zealanders) need to take heed of these issues. Our neglect to do so could have very serious consequences. We could lose everything for which our brave Anzac soldiers fought and died to preserve.

We need to be diligent, firstly on the home front, against any forces which would want to take away our treasured freedoms of speech and behaviour - and our Judeo-Christian heritage. And secondly

we need to give attention to the world front. And one of our main priorities should be the safety and integrity of Israel.

Now this does not mean that we agree with every policy of the Israeli Government. They make mistakes, just like ours does. Which of us agrees with every decision and policy of our own Government? The main difference, though, is that we are not surrounded by entities which want to destroy us. And even if we were, we have a large mass of water which protects us from such entities, and a large land mass to melt into if the need arises.

Israel does not have either. Israel could be fitted some 360 times into Australia!

So, as Hitler had a goal of world-wide domination, and within that goal to destroy the Jewish people, we today need to be mindful of other entities which may have a similar double-edged goal.

In conclusion, therefore, it could almost be said that Israel is our front line today. If Israel falls, we may very well feel the brunt of an assault similar to, and perhaps even worse than, the regimes that we fought and prevailed against during both World Wars.

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This article is will soon be in book form under the title '*The Anzacs & Israel.*' Much of it is available in a dvd, '*The Battle for Zion - the Anzacs & Israel.*' Information and copies available from: [kjcrombie09@bigpond.com](mailto:kjcrombie09@bigpond.com)

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#### Footnotes

- [\[i\]](#) Many years ago I accessed the minutes of this War Cabinet and then worked out the timing of the events on the ground in Beersheba and the debate raging in London.
- [\[ii\]](#) My uncle, John Crombie was one of those soldiers. He lost his life on the outskirts of Tobruk, and his body was buried at Sollum on the Egyptian border.
- [\[iii\]](#) Some years ago I had the pleasure to locate this Bible in Britain, alongside an Israeli friend, and then bring it to Israel where it is now permanently on display in the Christ Church Heritage Centre in the Old City of Jerusalem.

#### Kelvin Crombie Bio

Kelvin grew up in rural Western Australia, where he developed an interest in the Anzacs as a young boy, as well as developing a keen interest in Israel and the Jewish people. He is not Jewish, nor came from a practising Christian family. He went to Israel in 1979 and in 1981 came to faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. He married Lexie, a Dutch nurse in 1984, and they have four daughters.

From 1986 Kelvin worked at Christ Church, an evangelical Anglican ministry located inside Jerusalem's Old City, where he developed an educational and guiding work, utilising history as a means of ministry. His main area of focus was the period, 1798-1917, and as far as the role of Australian soldiers in the Middle East is concerned, until 1942.

Kelvin pioneered the 'In the footsteps of the Light Horse' tours, doing his first tour to Beersheba in 1988, the first of over a hundred thereafter. In 2007 he was one of the main instigators of the re-enactment of the Charge of Beersheba as was the guide for the Light Horse tour. He periodically guided or spoke to Australian diplomatic, military and trade delegations visiting Israel.

He has written five books concerning the history of the period in Israel after 1798, mostly associated with the British and Anzacs, and has co-produced several documentaries on the same subject. His main work on the Anzacs is entitled '*Anzacs, Empires and Israel's Restoration 1798-1948.*'

He is currently back in WA after serving some 24 years in Israel.