

GEN. HARRY CHAUVEL, THE LIBERATION OF JERUSALEM, AND THE INFLUENCE OF A CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

9TH December 2007.

This weekend marks the 90th anniversary of the liberation of Jerusalem by the British from four hundred years of rule by the Turkish Ottoman Empire.

The attack on Jerusalem began on 8th December 1917. By the 9th it was surrounded, at which point the Turkish forces surrendered, at midday. On the 11th, General Allenby marched into Jerusalem on foot, received at the Jaffa Gate by guards Representing England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, India, France, and Italy.

Lines of guards were assembled to join Allenby's procession through the city, on the one side the British, and on the other side the Australians and New Zealanders (ANZACs).

Australians have recently celebrated the role of the 800 Horsemen of the Australian Light Horse in the historic battle of Beersheba, which having occurred only five weeks earlier, on the 31st October, played the pivotal role in breaking a stalemate between the British and the Turks defending Gaza.

According to an article in the Jerusalem Post on 29 October 2007 "the Australian victory at Beersheba in 1917 set in train some remarkable events – the liberation of Jerusalem, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate in Palestine and ultimately the establishment of the State of Israel."

The same article highlights another "little known fact": that the timing of the charge of the Light Horse on that day, at 4.30 pm, coincided with a historic decision made in London in support of the establishment of the State of Israel.

Although it was not officially made public till 2nd November, it was on the 31st October that the crucial discussion was held by the British War Cabinet, concerning the establishment of the State of Israel, later expressed in the Balfour Declaration. In view of the time zone difference, it is not unreasonable to suppose that this decision was being made approximately at the same hour that, far away and probably unknown to them at the time, the Australian Light Horsemen were making their historic charge on Beersheba.

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The liberation of Palestine, which paved the way for the establishment of Israel as well as all the states of the modern Middle East, could be regarded as a by-product of World War One. However, it is important also to recognise that the plan of the establishment of the State of Israel was something that had captured the hearts of Jews as well as Christians for hundreds of years, and was the culmination of accumulated efforts of countless visionaries.

Typically undergirding such vision was a familiarity with the Holy Bible and its declarations concerning Israel's future restoration, and a confidence therefore of its eventual inevitability and the ultimate viability of the proposal. Advocates for the restoration of Israel and Jerusalem can be found from the 1500's onwards, increasing through the 19th century leading up to WW1.

The detail of some of the anecdotes and accounts of the Australians in the Palestine campaign demonstrates that they were no exception in regard to being apt to see seeing the liberation of the Holy Land as something ordained by God. Letters sent home by soldiers often revealed their excitement about seeing places mentioned in the Bible. References to the Crusades and Biblical events were common in the letters. Additionally, there were numerous reports of soldiers having visions and dreams, in particular of seeing angels, around the time of the liberation of Jerusalem.

What was true of the Australian soldiers was also true of their commander, Lieutenant General Harry Chauvel. Elyne (Mitchell), his daughter, who wrote the book *Chauvel Country*, was just a child at the time, but later wrote of the letters and photos being received by her mother, and recalled the atmosphere.

Chauvel sent home photos, such as Allenby marching into Jerusalem, and the ceremony of the official handing over of authority under the Tower of David, and of Chauvel's thatched hut headquarters opposite the Mount of Temptation, with the Dead Sea in the background.

He wrote in his letters of floating in the Dead Sea, of acquiring a small square piece from the salt pillar that was reputed by locals to be Lot's wife.

In Jerusalem it was raining heavily during the days of the battle and the weeks that followed. On Christmas Day, Harry Chauvel wrote to his family about the church service that had been held earlier that day at Deiran:

"We had a Church and Communion service for Corps Headquarters at 10 o'clock in a big empty building which is used for storing almonds... the jews finding the floral decorations, also the piano and violin. We thought to keep dry but the roof leaked in many places and the water simply poured in... The Jewish Mayor had provided a mat for me to kneel on... but by the time Communion started it was an inch deep in water..."

(Elyne Mitchell, 1983, *Chauvel Country*, p.56.)

And in the coming weeks and months, he wrote of the progress of the Light Horse through Palestine, town by town, mentioning the old names of the towns in Crusading times. He was "profoundly moved by the places of the Bible", wrote Elyne Mitchell.

Months later, the scene changed to Nazareth, swimming in the Sea of Galilee in the morning, then the battle with the Turks on the Plain of Esdraelon, which is ancient Armageddon, and the taking of Damascus, which occurred in September and October of 1918.

Elyne Mitchell notes also that in her father's scrapbook there is an article about Armageddon, published in 1915, and in Chauvel's own handwriting, underneath, he writes "Prophetic! - see entries of September 1918". (p.63).

Not only for Lieutenant General Harry Chauvel and his 34,000 horsemen and cameleers -- the largest body of mounted troops since the time of Alexander the Great -- but also for the British and ANZACs back home, there was an acute awareness of the spiritual significance of what was being accomplished.

Chauvel's family were staying in London at the time, and Elyne Mitchell notes that on the 11th December, as Jerusalem was handed over to the British, the bells of Westminster rang for the first time in three years.

Through the coming months, the newspaper headlines bristled with Biblical phrases with each victory. "No one seemed unmoved by the historical and Biblical significance of a largely Christian army fighting in that place", writes Mitchell (p.64).

It is fitting to pause and consider the nature of the men and women of God who played such pivotal roles in bringing about God's purpose in Israel.

Harry Chauvel as an example, was a representative of an Australian army at a time when most of them would have been brought up attending Sunday school (in 1899, more than 90% of Australian children attended Sunday School - compared with today's mere 7%).

The vitality of his own personal faith is not without evidence. He carried with him on all of his campaigns a copy of the Bible, which he regularly read and from which he drew inspiration. He was an active member of his local church in Australia and was made a lay canon of St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, in his latter years after the war.

What is also important to recognise is the degree to which the faith of a person such as Harry Chauvel is augmented by his sense of Christian heritage. Being descendants of the Huguenots (Protestants) of France, the Chauvel family have a strong sense of the need to defend the freedom that has been earned at much expense to practise the Christian faith.

One of the most descriptive features of the Huguenots faith was the veneration of the Bible as the supreme authority. The fact that these folk were willing to face death or the loss of property for the sake of it marks them as a distinctive people. The Huguenots had gained rights to worship in their own churches, after severe persecution and bloody wars of religion finally subsided in the late 1500's. However, in the late 1600's, King Louis the Fourteenth revoked the edict that had guaranteed those rights, and once again persecution resumed.

The Chauvels had lived at an estate near Blois on the River Loire for centuries. However, in the year 1685, Simon Chauvel and his wife and young son were forced to escape across the English Channel to England in an open boat, due to the anti-Huguenot hostility.

The Chauvels set up in England, and in the following generations proved to have a

great predisposition for serving in the military, although included among them was also at least one Minister of Religion. Simon Chauvel's grandson was Colonel James Chauvel of the Middlesex militia, and his great grandson, also James Chauvel, was likewise a Colonel.

In the 19th century one of the Chauvel descendants had four sons and three daughters, and of these, all four sons joined the British army in India, and two daughters married military men serving in India. One of the sons, Charles Chauvel, after retiring from the army in India, came to New South Wales in 1839, settling near Mudgee with his three children, Arthur, Lily, and Charles.

Arthur grew up to be an explorer, who, while away on expeditions, wrote to his sister of such events as his meeting with the famous explorer Ludwig Leichardt. Influenced by what Leichardt had told Arthur about the north, and Queensland, the family moved north to the Clarence River district.

Arthur's brother Charles when he grew up started up a mounted militia in the Clarence River district. In turn, his own son "Harry" served in the local Light Horse, went with them to Africa to play a role in the Boer War, and then later to the distinguished role in Palestine. The fame of Lt-General Harry Chauvel in the Middle East followed him for the rest of his life.

The first Australian ever to hold the rank of Lieutenant General, he was appointed after the war to the most senior post of the army, Inspector General, a position in which he continued until 1930.

As well as many other activities such as directorships in companies, he remained active in roles relating to and supporting the military until his death.

Another well-known Chauvel (a nephew of Harry Chauvel) was the pioneering Australian filmmaker Charles Chauvel, whose films include *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1941) and *Jedda* (1955). The Chauvel Cinema in Paddington is named after him.

The lives and accomplishments of many descendants of the Huguenots are a testimony to the blessing of God on a society that upholds the Word of God, the Bible, for what it is. It is a testimony to the truth of Deuteronomy 7:9 - "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments".

This past October 2007, a paper on the subject of "Harry Chauvel, the great Huguenot Captain", was presented to the Sydney branch of the Huguenot Society of Australia by history writer Dr Craig Wilcox.

Many other Huguenot descendants have made their mark on Australian society, just as they have perhaps in an disproportionately great way on many societies. Other well known Huguenot descendants in Australia include Charles Joseph La Trobe (1801-1875), first Lt-Governor of Victoria, Sir Richard Boyer (1891-1961), diplomat and chairman of the ABC, Charles Bonney (1813-1897) known as the Overlander,

Harold Cazneaux (1878-1953) the photographer, Lady Franklin (Jane Griffin) (1791-1875) of Tasmania (wife of Sir John Franklin, Lt-Governor of Tasmania), Sir David Rivett (1885-1961), a scientist crucial to the launch of the C.S.I.R.O.

The family history of the Chauvels is outlined in the book, *Chauvel Country*, by his daughter, Elyne Mitchell, who was the author of 33 books including the Silver Brumby series, and was a recipient of the medal of the Order of Australia.

Elyne had related to her children that her father, Harry Chauvel, was a true man of faith. He possessed a wood-bound, engraved Bible, that he had taken with him at all times during all of his military campaigns. The Bible is still kept and treasured by the family.

- H.B.