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ANZAC Day and the Road to Jerusalem

By John Subritzky

The road to Jerusalem began on the beach at Gallipoli.

Anzac Day commemorates the birth of our national sense of identity. The first anniversary of the Gallipoli landings fell on Easter in 1916. By 1917 the Anzacs would be fighting in the Holy Land. They were still fighting the Turks and still seeking a breakthrough. The military actions of the NZEF (NZ Expeditionary Forces) created the opportunity 31 years later for the birth of the state of Israel.

After Gallipoli, the NZ Division was reorganised. The **Otago Regiment** was deployed to Europe, and the **Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury Regiments** became part of the **Anzac Mounted Rifles Division**. Two Camel Companies were also formed. There was also a company of 250 **Rarotongans** attached to the Division. Horses, camels and donkeys were used throughout the campaign with enemy positions frequently charged on horseback.

In Egypt the Turks and Germans advanced, threatening to cut the **Suez Canal**. The British forces reacted and fought the Turks across the desert



sands of the Sinai Peninsula until they came to a strong defensive line at **Gaza city**. These defences extended from Gaza on the coast thirty miles to **Beersheba** in the desert. In the first battle of Gaza the British commanders Dobell and Murray snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by ordering a retreat just as success was imminent. The second Battle of Gaza was fought with western front tactics of a two-day bombardment on a small sector including gas shells. Six tanks were used in a dispersed manner which was ineffective. The Turks had plenty of time to organise defences. It was another defeat with heavy casualties. After this Dobell and Murray were replaced by **Allenby**.



The stalemate at Gaza eventually led to one of the defining battles of the campaign at Beersheba. Here the Australian light horsemen charged across the plain against artillery and machine-gun fire. They suffered remarkably light casualties. In a supporting action, the New Zealanders attacked and captured the hill Tel el Saba. The eventual taking of Gaza led to the pursuit of the Turks up the coastline, eventually leading to the port city of **Jaffa**.

On 16 November 1917 the Wellington Regiment entered Jaffa. The town was administered by the New Zealand Brigade for two weeks. The first man to enter Jaffa, **Thomas Hulton**, was awarded the military medal. His grave is at **Ohinemutu village, Rotorua**. Historically, Jaffa was the most significant seaport in the Holy Land until **Caesarea** was built. It is the place where **Simon Peter** stayed at the house of **Simon the Tanner**, then known as **Joppa**.



The New Zealanders then headed for **Jerusalem** but made slow progress in bad weather, and they were also hindered by skirmishes with the Turks. An interesting episode happened when **Lt MacKenzie**, a New Zealander, went searching for an enemy intelligence officer. He took six men and two patrol cars armed with machine guns. As they rounded a bend on the road they came face to face with a Turkish infantry column. Pressing ahead at full speed and firing the machine guns they scattered the Turks and broke through the lines. After a worrying night behind enemy lines, they drove back by another road and made their report.



Both armies had decided not to fight in Jerusalem so the battles were in adjacent areas. **Suddenly the Turks withdrew from Jerusalem. Their flight on 9th December coincided with the Festival of Hanukkah** which commemorates the recapture of the temple by **Judas Maccabeus in 165 BC**.

2082 years later Jerusalem was free once more and the Anzacs were significant participants in the liberation from the Turks.



Allenby enters Jerusalem at the Jaffa Gate.

Lieut.-Colonel C. Guy Powles wrote:

"On December 11th the Commander-in-Chief, followed by representatives of the Allies, made his formal entry into Jerusalem. The historic **Jaffa gate** was opened after years of disuse for the purpose, and he was thus enabled to pass into the Holy City without making use of the gap in the wall made for the Emperor William in 1898. The General entered the city on foot—and left it on foot.

For this occasion the Brigade sent a troop as a bodyguard to General Sir E. Allenby. The

troop was commanded by 2nd Lieutenant C. J. Harris, Canterbury Regiment, and was composed of 1 sergeant and 10 men from the Auckland Regiment, 9 men from the Canterbury Regiment, and 9 men from the Wellington Regiment, with 3 men from the Machine Gun Squadron and 1 from the Signal Troop—a total of 1 officer and 33 other ranks. After four centuries of conquest the Turk was ridding the land of his presence in the bitterness of defeat, and **a great enthusiasm arose among the Jews.** There was a running to and fro; daughters called to their fathers and brothers concealed in outhouses, cellars and attics, from the police who sought them for arrest and deportation. **'The Turks are running,' they called; 'the day of deliverance is come.'** " [Footnote 1](#)

The Brigade next moved to **Bethlehem.** They used **King Solomon's pools** as a water source. Later they moved down to **Jericho.** They saw action in crossing the **Jordan** and fighting on the other side in the land of **Moab.** Jericho was held over the summer as a strategic point and later used as a diversionary tactic to make the Turks expect an attack from that area. Jericho was incredibly dusty and hot over the summer. The local people said no European could survive the heat. The kiwis remarked that little sleep was to be had in Jericho.

In the final battle, the Turks were pursued to **Damascus** and **Amman** where they were surrounded and they surrendered. The kiwis had been through **Megiddo,** the **Jezreel Valley** and to the **Sea of Galilee.** They had been from **Dan to Beersheba!** Although just following orders they were acutely aware of the significance of their part in changing the Holy Land from Turkish to British control.

The Anzacs returned in **World War II.** They were based in Egypt and the battles were fought to the west in the North African desert. However there is still evidence of a kiwi presence on the border between **Israel and Lebanon.** Here New Zealanders and South African engineers worked together to build a bridge and rail tunnel to connect Egypt to Europe. This was in use until 1948 when Israel became independent.

New Zealand has been blessed with an abnormal period of relative peace over the last 60 years. Anzac Day commemorates the men and women who went seeking adventure in service for their country, but found hardship and distress. The decisions they made and actions they took have reflected well on New Zealand history.



As we make decisions daily, each of us is influencing tomorrow's men for better or worse. What will history say about us?

***"Think of three things -
whence you came,
where you are going,
and to whom you must give account."
- Benjamin Franklin***

References

Footnote1 Title: The New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine
Author: Lieut.-Colonel C. Guy Powles
Publication details: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1922
Online here:
<http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-WH1-Sina.html>

OTHER LINKS:

Beersheba:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Beersheba
The ANZAC services and Christ:
http://biblefocus.net/consider/v12Sacrifice/providence_in_ldquo_lest_we_forget_rdquo.html
All about ANZAC Day:
<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/anzac-day/introduction>

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Or on YouTube. 5m 26s [HERE>>](#)

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