

A Tale of Three Cities – Jill Curry

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You've heard of Charles Dickens' tale of two cities? Let me tell you about three cities that the ANZAC soldiers played a significant part in liberating in World War 1 and some of the quirky things that happened along the way.

The first is Beersheba (now called Be'er Sheva) in southern Israel which was then called Palestine. In the Middle Eastern campaign of World War 1, the Allied forces, with the ANZACs at the forefront had succeeded in pushing the Turkish forces back through the Sinai desert but they had failed twice to capture Gaza. They changed tactics and trekked inland through the desert for three nights to attack the other end of the Turkish line at Beersheba. It was vital to take the city with its plentiful water supply in one day or men and horses would likely die of thirst. On October 31, 1917, the British machine guns pounded the Turkish strongholds in the morning and the New Zealand troops captured the strongly fortified hill of Tel el Saba. By mid-afternoon, General Chauvel made a critical decision for 800 Light Horsemen to charge the Turkish trenches. Speed and surprise was their only chance to defeat 4,000 men with machine guns, artillery and German bombers overhead. Light Horsemen usually rode to near the battle then dismounted and fought on foot. This time they didn't stop but galloped, yelling and waving bayonets, so fast that the shells flew over their heads and landed behind them. They jumped the trenches and rode into town to secure the water wells, famous since the time of Abraham. They lost 31 men – a comparatively small cost for such a daring and risky assignment. Some say the parched horses smelled the water and rode their own race. Beersheba had fallen.



The Flag of Jerusalem. Russian Effendi M. Hussein, Mustafa, and the British and Australian of the 4th & 5th Divisions, Jerusalem, August, 1917.

Now the goal was to take Jerusalem by Christmas. The British fought their way up the winding Jaffa road under heavy fire but a stalemate occurred outside the city. Allenby decided to surround the city and force a surrender. This worked and on December 9, 1917, a British cook was up early searching for eggs (other sources say there were two British scouts) and met the mayor of Jerusalem and his delegation, looking for the appropriate person to surrender the city to. Word was passed from person to person until finally Brigadier General Watson from the 180th Brigade of the 60th Division of the British army met the delegation. General Chetwode, however, had decided that

General Shea, commander of the 60th Division should have this honour, so Watson had to return the keys for the 'official' surrender.

About 7 pm on December 9 the 10th Australian Light Horse regiment rode into Jerusalem to great jubilation from the local Jewish population, who were celebrating the Feast of Dedication (Hanukka), which remembers the overthrow of their Greek rulers. Another liberation was now unfolding – this time from 400 years under the Muslim Ottoman regime.



A new Turkish cordon formed across the land from the Mediterranean Sea north of Jaffa to the Jordan River. This was finally broken on September 19th, 1918, and the race was on to get to Damascus. By September 29 they reached the outskirts. On October 1, the 10th Light Horse Regiment was ordered to cut off the northern escape route to Aleppo. The shortest route to get there was straight through town. Britain had promised Damascus to both the French and the Arabs

to keep them on their side. Politics demanded that the 'honour' of the handover of the city be given to the Arabs, despite the fact that control would eventually be given to the French! Captain Arthur Olden led his troops to the city square and was ushered up to the office of the Governor Emir Said and handed the letter of surrender! With this in hand, he proceeded on to complete his task to block the northern road. When the Arabs arrived the next day, the whole formal process had to be repeated, so the records could be politically correct.

References:

Crombie, K., *Anzacs, Empires and Israel's Restoration*, Vocational Educational and Training Pub, 2000.

Gilbert, Major Vivian., *The Romance of the Last Crusade with Allenby to Jerusalem*, Appleton and Company.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Jerusalem

<http://strangeside.com/holy-citys-four-surrenders-in-wwi/>

Pictures:

1. 4th Light Horse Brigade near the railway bridge at Beersheba. Australian War Memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P02268.012>
2. <http://www.israeldailypicture.com/2011/09/surrender-of-jerusalem-to-british.html> The caption below reads: "The Mayor of Jerusalem Hussein Effendi El Hussein meeting with Srgts Sedwick and Hurcomb, 2/19th Battalion, London Regiment, under the White Flag of Surrender, December 9th at 8 a.m." Photo by Lewis Larsson. The British officials did not want this photo released but it has survived.
3. Chauvel leads his men through Damascus <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H10659/>

Powerpoint:

1. Light Horse troop - <http://clangrantaus.com/australia/australian-military-history/australian-lighthorse/>
2. Disputed picture of the charge at Beersheba (or re-enactment) – Australian War memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A02684/> It was probably taken when two regiments of the 4th Brigade, Australian Light Horse, re-enacted the charge for the official photographer Frank Hurley, at Belah on 7 February 1918.
3. Jumping the trenches – from a photograph at an exhibition in Beersheba in 2012
4. 4th Light Horse Brigade near the railway bridge at Beersheba. Australian War Memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P02268.012>
5. Watering the horses at Beersheba - <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P08548.001>
6. <http://www.israeldailypicture.com/2011/09/surrender-of-jerusalem-to-british.html> The caption below reads: "The Mayor of Jerusalem Hussein Effendi El Hussein meeting with Srgts Sedwick and Hurcomb, 2/19th Battalion, London Regiment, under the White Flag of Surrender, December 9th at 8 a.m." Photo by Lewis Larsson. The British officials did not want this photo released but it has survived.
7. Light Horse marching to Jerusalem - <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B01619> Photo by Frank Hurley
8. The official surrender of Jerusalem - <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H10708>
9. Chauvel leads his men through Damascus <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H10659/>
10. Arabs arrive for the official surrender of Damascus <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J02491>