Memorialising Beersheba

Susan Balderstone
Abstract

For Australians Beersheba represents a powerful symbol of their daring and military success in the Palestine Campaign of the First World War. But is this adequately memorialised by the bronze sculpture of a Light Horseman and interpretative panels forming part of a children’s park in the outer suburbs of the new town, and the sad remembrance of lives lost as presented by the Commonwealth War Cemetery?

Beersheba today is a thriving Israeli city, capital of the Negev region of Israel where little remains of the original dusty Ottoman town that existed at the time its destiny was influenced by the great Charge of the 4th and 12th Australian Light Horse Regiments on 31 October 1917. Visitors to the city would be hard put to find in the centre of the Old Town anything about this key event that some say was key to the success of the Palestine campaign, which in turn brought about the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent foundation of the State of Israel.

This paper explores how the story might still be told by the buildings and garden remaining in the old town of Beersheba from the time of its conquest by Australian troops. These together with the trail followed by the light horsemen from the vicinity of Gaza over three nights in a great loop to the south-east to reach the starting point for attack enable understanding of the enormity of their achievement.

Introduction

Australian author Frank Dalby Davison described the famous First World War Charge of the 4th and 12th Australian Light Horse regiments, in a short story entitled ‘Wells of Beersheba’ (Davison 1985). He began by explaining that the Imperial Mounted Division under the command of Australian-born Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Chauvel was instrumental in winning a series of brilliant battles for the British, starting with the attack on Beersheba on 31 October 1917, followed by the long pursuit of Turkish and German forces up the Palestinian plain and ending finally with the surrender of Turkish and German arms at Damascus. Over a period of almost two years the Australians rode their horses in battle.

Davison gave much attention to the horses; the hardships they endured and the stamina that enabled them to carry their riders in what he described as one of the greatest cavalry exploits in the history of warfare. The success of the Charge at Beersheba, clearing the small Turkish town of enemy troops and gaining access to the vital water supply meant that the British were able to go on and take Gaza, a key enemy stronghold that had to be taken before the British could move on to Jerusalem.
Twice the British forces had failed at Gaza before the newly appointed General Sir Edmund Allenby adopted the canny strategy of approaching from the desert to the east, requiring the Beersheba outpost and its wells to be taken first. The success of this strategy was said to be key to the success of the whole Palestine campaign (Perry 2009: 505-6); without it the British may never have succeeded in forcing the enemy north, far away from Britain’s major asset and gateway to India: the Suez Canal.

Jean Bou disputes the significance of the taking of Beersheba, arguing that it was the taking of Gaza that had the major impact on the campaign (Bou 2010: 175). In fact, Bou is at pains to deflate claims that Beersheba was a ‘turning point’ in the campaign. However, having failed twice to take Gaza, it can hardly be denied that it was the Beersheba strategy that enabled Gaza to be taken by the British on the third attempt, allowing thereby the ultimate success of the Campaign. As stated by Elyne Mitchell (1978: 64), the capture of Beersheba and its wells was the start of the defeat of the whole Turkish line at Gaza. Perhaps the greatest significance of the Charge lies in its impact on Turkish morale as described by Wavell (1931: 126) and Gullett recorded that the Charge had a far-reaching effect on the whole campaign…. Without the success of the Australian horsemen, the whole story of the next month would probably have been different, and the vast and careful preparations of the summer months might easily have ended in another stalemate engagement…. Allenby’s scheme was working precisely to plan (Gullett 1923: 403-4).

But even more important according to Gullett, was the ‘shining precedent’ it set to every divisional, brigade and regimental leader on the shock value of charging horsemen. He quoted an intercepted wireless message, sent by a Turkish commander as he fled in the night from Beersheba that his troops were ‘terrified of the Australian cavalry’ and noted that from then to the end of the war this tactic was used several times by the British with great success: ‘The charge had dealt a heavy wound to the enemy morale, from the High Command down to the men in the ranks’ (Gullett 1923: 403-4).

**Significance of the Palestine campaign**

The significance of the Palestine campaign was recognised by Professor Stephen Garton in his address given in 2012 to mark the 95th anniversary of the battle:

> [T]he world historical significance of the Middle East campaign should not be underestimated. It represented not only the defeat but also complete disintegration of one of the great empires of the world. The Ottoman Empire had spanned much of the Middle East, Greece, the Balkans and parts of Eastern Europe and much of North Africa for at least five centuries. Its defeat, rapid dismantling and the consequent emergence of modern nation states such as Turkey, Greece, Arabia, Iraq, Armenia and so on remains a major influence on the course of world history (Garton 2012).

The success of the Campaign and consequent collapse of the Ottoman Empire also allowed the eventual setting up of an Israeli State in Palestine, a fact that should lead to Israeli recognition of the great significance of the Charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba. This battle for Beersheba has been described by Kelvin Crombie (1998: 177-181) as ‘The Battle Which Determined Israel’s Future’. He noted that the battle coincided with the War Cabinet meeting in London at which Lord Arthur Balfour, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, finally got authorisation to make the declaration of sympathy on behalf of the British government with Zionist aspirations—known ever after as the Balfour Declaration. Had the Charge at Beersheba and subsequent attack on Gaza failed, the British government may never have held its governing Mandate over Palestine from 1922-1948, out of which emerged the independent Israeli State. Equally the Arabs of Palestine may not have been deprived of their land, and the subsequent Israeli settlement on it and consequent continuing turmoil in the region may not have occurred.
Beersheba today

Today Beersheba is a large city—the fourth largest in Israel; capital of the Negev region and home to Ben Gurion University of the Negev. It has expanded largely to accommodate new settlers including from Russia and Ethiopia as well as Israelis and Arabs and has a population of over 170,000. One might expect in today’s climate of heritage recognition by national governments that the significance of the Battle of Beersheba to Israeli destiny would have ensured that the various sites associated with the battle are protected as heritage places. However, until relatively recently, it seems that the role played by horsemen from the other side of the world in the creation of the Israeli State was not widely known. Crombie (1998: 8) quoted a letter in the Jerusalem Post on Armistice Sunday 1994 in support of his view that Israelis were not aware of the deeper significance of those battles in the East Mediterranean region in which young men from far-flung nations fought and died during the First and Second world wars. Twenty years on it is still not clear how widely or well this is recognised.

Certainly, the places recommended on travel and Wiki web sites for a visit during a stay in Beersheba include the British First World War Military Cemetery located next to the Old Town, noting that it is the resting place of British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fought against the Turks in the First World War, but the wider significance of this story is not explained. No doubt consideration of Arab sensibilities may play a part in that. Today highrise apartment buildings line the road that borders and provides access to the cemetery.

Other sites recommended to the visitor include Tel Beer Sheba Archaeological Park located on the eastern edge of the expanded city, World Heritage listed as part of ‘Biblical Tels, Megiddo, Hazor, Beer Sheba’. This was a key high point occupied by the Turkish forces in the First World War known as Tel el Saba, which had to be taken before the assault on the town could be made. Here though, an information board inside the entrance to the Tel Beer Sheba site carries information in Hebrew about the battle for Beersheba. The observation tower in the centre of the site gives an excellent view of the field of the Charge, including the other high point, Hill 1070 to the south west, which similarly had to be taken before the assault on the town, and was captured by the British Infantry 60th Division. This site is now in a military area inaccessible to the public.

Within the Old Town, the Negev Museum, located in the former residence of the Turkish Governor of the Old Town is recommended for its art collection and changing exhibits. Originally a typical Turkish konak dating from 1906, the building has been transformed internally and shows no evidence of its former function.

Figure 1: The Mosque with the minaret which was the Light Horsemen’s landmark for the Charge.
The Turkish mosque is also mentioned. It was restored and opened by the Municipality as a Museum of City History in 2012. This proved controversial and it is now closed (Navon 2013). As reported in Al Akbar the mosque has not been used as a place of worship since 1948 despite the many Muslims living in the area. A legal battle to revive the mosque as a place of worship failed to achieve that aim and ended with a ruling that it should become a museum of Islamic culture (Silver 2012). However, according to Ishay Avital, Head of International Relations at the City of Beersheba (2014), the ruling was that it should become a museum of Abraham’s sons, presenting the history of both Jews and Muslims. The minaret of the mosque was the landmark that guided the Light Horsemen in their Charge.

‘Abraham’s Well’ located at the edge of the Old Town on Wadi Beer Sheva (Wadi Saba as known to the Australians) is recommended for a visit as the place traditionally held to be where Abraham made the oath with Abimelech as recorded in the Old Testament (Genesis Ch. 21, 22 – 32). Seventeen wells were recorded by the Australian forces mostly in the vicinity of Wadi Saba.

Due to the efforts of Australian philanthropist Richard Pratt at the instigation of his childhood friend and Patron of the Australian Light Horse Association Major-General William (‘Digger’) James, a ‘Park of the Australian Soldier’ has been created within the new part of Beersheba, northwest of the Old Town. This contains a bronze statue by Australian sculptor Peter Corlett of a mounted Australian Light Horseman with bayonet extended in the act of leaping at the enemy. A plaque states: ‘Popularly recalled as one of the last great cavalry charges in history… the capture of Beersheba opened the way for the start of the Palestine campaign which resulted in affecting history in the Middle East in 1918’.

But the Park, funded by the Pratt Foundation, is a long way from any of the places in the town that the Australian Light Horsemens would have known: indeed, its site would have been outside the town and in the desert at that time.

Surely a more appropriate location, given the significance of the event commemorated, would have been in or near the central garden, now the ‘Allenby Garden’ within the Old Town? This is right next to the building (the old Serai or Turkish administration headquarters) in which Australian Light Horsemen, one of whom was my father, Ray Hudson (Smith 2013 & 1993: 126-7;

Figure 2: The sculpture of a mounted Light Horseman in the ‘Park of the Australian Soldier’.

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Rees 2012: 198-9; Kelly 2008; Jones 2007: 102), apprehended the German officer who was about to blow up the wells. Had that demolition succeeded, the Australians would not have been able to water themselves and their horses and go on to take Gaza.

The literature on ‘battlefields tourism’ is considerable (Lloyd 1998; McLachlan 2007; Ryan 2007). Referring to the description of Australian military history as our secular religion McLachlan (2007) acknowledged the meaning that the battlefield sites have for those with family connections. While his description applies to this author, in this case the author is also a cultural heritage professional; one who would argue that the significance of the Beersheba battle goes beyond family connections. The Beersheba battle was instrumental in the downfall of the 500-year old Ottoman Empire. And yet, this particular memorial landscape is yet to be fully recognised and interpreted, unlike those of the Western Front.

Issues relating to the interpretation of memorial landscapes have also been discussed in the large amount of literature on the subject as listed by Dwyer & Alderman (2008) in their bibliography. There is little doubt that geographical location is all important in bringing the mind’s eye to the historical event. This does not mean that other stories cannot be told within the same geographical space. When queried about the location of the Park, Avital (2014) pointed out that it is located at what is now a central area of the City, where a special children’s park was needed. Today the ANZAC Day ceremony starts there and proceeds to the Commonwealth War Cemetery, in the opposite direction to that of the Charge.

Heritage protection in Israel

Apart from these considerations, there is the question of whether the legislative structure in Israel can enable heritage protection of the battle sites themselves. The path of the Charge of the Light Horsemen is not protected, and the kibbutz Beit Eshel has been allowed to be built at the location of the Turkish trenches. However, some buildings in the Old Town are protected, including the former Governor’s residence. This is in accordance with town planning legislation that superceded but essentially follows that of the British Mandate period. Israel followed British policy in that all buildings built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are listed. After 1700 the later the building the more selection is exercised. Since Beersheba was not built as a town by the Turks until 1900, it could be expected that few buildings would be listed (Koren 2013).
The First World War battle sites could be protected under existing Israeli legislation through Article 4 of the 1965 Planning and Building Law which allows for the preparation of Detailed Schemes for any land within the local planning area. Under Section 69, a Detailed Scheme may make provisions for the protection of places, structures and other things of national, religious, historical, archaeological, scientific or aesthetic importance. They could also be protected at the national level by the State Council for Restoration of Historic Sites (CRHS), which in the early 1990s compiled a list of some 8,000 places identified as being of historical significance (Fenster 2004) including the site of the Battle of Hattin (Hittim), where the Muslim armies under Salah-ad-Din defeated the Crusader Christians in 1187 CE. According to Fenster (2004: 408) the CRHS can prepare plans for site preservation if the local council fails to do so.

The old Turkish town of Beersheba

The Turkish town of Beersheba was built as a means to obtain formal control by the Ottoman government over the Bedouin in the area because of an increase in tribal feuding. It was built where the Bedouin pitched their tents at the point where the steep sides of Wadi Saba could be crossed. The town plan is a grid-pattern of blocks, sixty metres square (Berman 1965). This arrangement was generally thought to be an efficient layout for observation and control. The large mosque was built in 1906-7 by the Ottoman government and was the only mosque in the town. A geometrically planned public garden (now the ‘Allenby Garden’) was provided nearby. The grid pattern was used by the Turks on German advice for other towns in Palestine including for the development of Acre in the north during the first decade of the 20th century. During the British mandate period town planner Clifford Holliday advocated preservation of old town centres in line with picturesque townscape ideals (Yacobi 2010: 86-7). In the 1940s, the British encouraged the local municipality to initiate a new plan for the city, but it is notable that the Old Town was retained, presumably for its picturesque quality.

The still existing viaduct that carried the railway over the wadi was a landmark for the Light Horse and is shown in photographs of them in Beersheba. Today there is a new structure behind it.

The town came under British military rule following its defeat in 1917, and then the British Mandate government in 1922. It continued as a small military garrison but functioned primarily as the seat of Bedouin affairs, with a major market attracting merchants and craftsmen from Jaffa, Gaza and Hebron, as well as Bedouin from Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Figure 4: The railway viaduct in 2014.
Existing commemorative sites within the old town

the Turkish garden known to the Australians as the German beer garden was renamed the ‘Allenby Garden’ and the stone podium and column in its centre were modified by the British Municipality with a monument to Allenby; a sculpted bust by Abraham Melnikov set on top of the 15-metre high Turkish column was unveiled by the British High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel in 1923. In 1938 during the Arab revolt, this monument was toppled and was replaced with a stone podium carrying the inscription ‘Allenby, 1917-1918’ in English and Arabic, but not in Hebrew as a gesture to the town’s Arab residents. This was eventually given a new bust of Allenby by the Israeli municipality in 2005 (Navon 2013). This bust has since been vandalised by local Arabs who consider that ‘because of his actions the land was stolen and given to the Jews’ (Daley 2009: 199).

The British Military Cemetery was inaugurated in 1923 by Sir Herbert Samuel on Municipal land as the final resting place for soldiers of the British Empire who fought and fell in the Beersheba region. At the end of the First World War, the remains of soldiers were brought for burial from other temporary war cemeteries and are cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The cemetery is laid out with individual grave stones in regular rows on a central cross plan with the main axis leading to a Stone of Remembrance and Cross of Sacrifice. Eucalypts and grevillea referencing the homeland of the fallen line the perimeter and other plants mark individual graves.

Paul Daley wrote in 2009 that the Turkish soldiers who fell at Beersheba had not received such honour and claimed that many bodies still lie deep beneath the ploughed earth between the first line of Turkish trenches (the site of the Beit Eshel settlement today) and the railway viaduct (Daley 2009: 141; Daley and Bowers 2011: 79, 82). He described an obelisk monument to their memory located a few hundred metres from the British Military Cemetery near the old railway station. The obelisk has now been incorporated into a Turkish commemorative site as a monument to the Turkish fallen with a bust of Ataturk nearby.

According to Avital and Reisner at the Office of International Relations (2014) the authorities are unaware that there may still be Turkish soldiers’ bodies in the path of the Charge.

Figure 5: The obelisk monument to the Turkish fallen soldiers...
The ANZAC Trail

The route the Light Horsemen took with three long night marches to get into position to make the Charge, now known as the ‘ANZAC Trail’, began near Shellal south of Gaza at Tel el Fara, approximately 32 kilometres west of Beersheba.

From there it led south to the ancient wells that had been made accessible by the Royal Engineers in order to provide water for men and horses first at Khalasa and then at Asluj. From Asluj they looped round on the third night to Hill 1280 (now also known as ‘Chauvel’s Hill’) south-east of Beersheba where they waited until 4pm when Tel el Saba finally fell. By that time the only way Beersheba could be taken by nightfall and men and horses watered that night, was to ride straight in, charging over the Turkish trenches and fighting as they went.

The 4th and 12th Light Horse regiments were directed to make a Mounted Frontal attack. They lined up in squadrons of four, lead by A Squadron and set off, quickening their pace until they were at full gallop, bayonets outstretched as the Turks fired with machine guns and then rifles. Horses and men fell but most got through because the Turks failed to adjust their range to keep up with the long lines of charging horsemen as they thundered in. Horsemen dismounted and attacked the Turks in their trenches. Others charged on over the top to take the town. Allenby had taken measures to ensure that the enemy thought that his troops were merely undertaking a reconnaissance at Beersheba prior to major assault on Gaza. The route and the watering places are a key part of this story. The route is recognised as the ‘ANZAC Trail’ due to the efforts of the Israeli World War I Society and is gradually being marked with signs carrying information and maps as funds become available (Navon 2013). It runs from near Kibbutz Be’eri, passing Tel el Jamah and Tel Fara, both of which can be visited and onto the park around the Asluj wells which can also be visited. It is planned to convert the former pump house there to an ANZAC Interpretation Centre. The well of Khalasa is not accessible as that part of the route is in a military zone which is closed to the public.

Political sensitivities

The Municipality of Beersheba is today focused on progressing development in the region. The short-lived Museum of City History in the Mosque told a story of progress, depicting:

- a linear march toward modernity, portraying the transitions from Ottoman to British to Israeli control as seamless. The main subject of this exhibit is the city—its buildings and institutions—portrayed as an eternal hero. Its inhabitants are inconsequential, if
not inhibitors of the city’s progress. What has developed in Beersheba since 1900 are buildings, restaurants, governmental, and cultural institutions. This is a progress whose roots supplanted those of the indigenous people (Silver 2012).

An account of municipal activities describes projects including the Old City Renovation Program, the aim of which is stated as to bring about fundamental change, transforming the Old City into a locus for tourism and commerce, serving as a cultural and recreational centre attracting both younger and older populations, while retaining the city’s unique historic characteristics.

The City of Beersheba has clearly harnessed funds from many donors and partners, including the Pratt Foundation as set out in the lavish publication *My Negev* produced by the Municipality. In stating that it intends to renew and develop the old city ‘while preserving its historic characteristics’ it apparently means ‘developing attractive recreation and culture centres, creating a tradition of events and festivals and developing tourism centres to be integrated in and among the old buildings’ (Aloush c.2012: 138). There is no description of the ‘historic characteristics’ or the story they tell—not only the ANZAC story but also the Arab history of the town remains to be told.

It is clear that the Pratt Foundation has been working hard to promote the ANZAC story in Beersheba and the Mayor is said to be very interested in the ANZAC history. At the time of my visit I was told by Ishay Avital (2014) that Mayor Danilovich wanted to build ANZAC House in the old town as a Visitor Centre for tourists in conjunction with the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Government of Australia because: ‘the ANZAC story is a very important part of our history’ and is ‘one of the best potentials for history for the 100th Centenary in 2017’. The hope is of course that it will increase tourism to Beersheba. As part of this programme, the Pratt Foundation was discussing funding a project to mark the path of the Charge of the Light Horsemen from Beit Eshel to the Turkish bridge. Beit Eshel is the kibbutz which was unfortunately allowed to be settled right in the path of the Charge between Chauvel’s Hill and the town, meaning that re-enactments of the Charge now must begin there.
Meanwhile the *Jerusalem Post* reported that a ‘manufactured controversy over a wine festival is part of increasingly chauvinistic power politics sweeping the Negev’s Bedouin community’ (Frantzman 2012). The festival was to take place near the Mosque and this was the reason given for the community’s opposition, although the festival had taken place there in previous years apparently without complaint. Beth Adalah, a legal aid centre for Arabs and the southern branch of the Islamic Movement, petitioned courts to stop the festival. In the end the municipality moved the festival slightly to accommodate the protesters. According to Frantzman (2012), the controversy should be seen as part of ‘a struggle to re-Islamify unused sites in Israel’ and that this is actually part of ‘a global struggle by Muslims to re-assert their claims to former places of worship that were once in the Dar al-Islam, or the ‘domain of Islam’.’ He sees it also as part of a growing attempt to uproot Israeli control of the Negev.

In such a political climate it seems insensitive to be promoting commemoration of the very events that enabled this unhappy situation to develop. It explains perhaps why Paul Daley found the British Military Cemetery at Beersheba deserted on ANZAC Day 2008 when Gallipoli was crowded out with Australians (Daley 2009: 222).

**Conclusion**

The significance of the action at Beersheba is now well-understood by Australians as key to the success of the Palestine Campaign, which in turn is recognised as of major significance to the formation of the modern Middle East. However, our memorialisation has tended to be romantic in character. Apart from the painting by George Lambert which hangs in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, Davison’s short story, Gullet’s official history of 1923 and *Australia in Palestine* a collection of stories and poems put together by the light horsemen themselves and published in 1919, there was the film produced by Sir Harry Chauvel’s nephew Charles, *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, released in 1940 and instrumental as propaganda for enlistment in the Second World War. In 1978 the illustrated account by Chauvel’s daughter Elyne Mitchell, already famous herself as the author of children’s books about the wild horses of the snow country in New South Wales coincided with the publication of *The Anzacs* by Patsy Adam-Smith, a former Second World War servicewoman. Adam-Smith’s book was later made into a 13-part television series. Ian Jones’ *The Australian Light Horse* in 1987 (later revised and republished as *A Thousand Miles of Battles* in 2007) was followed by Neil Smith’s *Men of Beersheba* in 1993. These all emphasised the undeniable valour of the Australian Light Horsemen in battle. More analytical coverage appeared in the later 1990s as World War topics became the subject of post-graduate theses. Some later accounts have focussed on the less admirable side of the soldiers’ behaviour—although this was never hidden in the official history or earlier stories.

Israel’s memorialisation is much more recent and seems to be due largely to the efforts of the Australian Light Horse Association and the Pratt Foundation. A set of commemorative postage stamps was issued jointly by Israel and Australia in May 2013. The accompanying information briefly described the Charge and stated that: ‘the capture of Beersheba allowed British Empire forces to break the Ottoman line near Gaza and then advance into Palestine’.

The wider significance of Beersheba to the creation of the State of Israel is still perhaps not well understood by Israelis. It is clear that acknowledgement of this by State and Municipal authorities could be seen as insensitive in relation to the local Arab population, although when questioned on this Avital and Reisner (2014) stated that the ‘Allenby issue is not relevant now’. Another factor may be that as Paul Daley was told by two former Israeli career soldiers (Daley 2010: 232), in their view the critical point in the formation of the State of Israel was the 1948 War of Independence. However, it is hard to see how that would have come about without the preceding events.

It is to be hoped that the Israeli authorities will recognise the national significance of the battle sites of Beersheba in their own right—beyond their tourism potential—and that the CRHS will work with the City to protect all the places which together tell the story. These should include the path of the Charge itself and any remains of trenches at Beit Eshel, as well as the route
of the three-night trek: ‘the ANZAC Trail’. It is important to protect also the view lines from Chauvel’s Hill to the town and from Tel Beer Sheba and Hill 1070 to each other and between Chauvel’s Hill and the town—which are all currently clear—in order to enable the famous battle strategy to always be understood.

At the time of my visit in 2014 the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) occupied the former Turkish Serai where two Australian Light Horsemen including my father prevented explosion of the wells. The IDF have now vacated the building under the government’s policy to move army bases out of built-up areas. According to the web site of Beersheba municipality, it is now planned to convert this 4,000 m² site in the heart of the Old City, which it notes ‘includes landmark buildings’ to a ‘center for Be’er-Sheva culture art and ambiance’. Also shown on the web site is the ANZAC House project, which has morphed into an ‘ANZAC Museum’, apparently built within the Commonwealth War Cemetery and intended to be complete in time for the 100th anniversary of the Charge on 31st October 2017. It therefore seems that the obvious opportunity to use the former Serai for that purpose has been lost. While focusing the ANZAC story at the Commonwealth War Cemetery may have also seemed an obvious memorialising action to those who have implemented it, such action results in the failure to tell the whole story of the Charge within the geographical space of its happening. It is necessary to do that in order for the significance of the Charge and the extraordinary valour of the horsemen to be understood. It is only when one stands on top of Chauvel’s Hill and looks across the rough terrain to the Beersheba skyline, imagining the sound of thundering hooves and bursting shells, that one can appreciate what a truly wild ride it was.

It is still possible to follow most of the ANZAC trail, view the field of the Charge from the top of Chauvel’s Hill and from Tel Saba, and then, after passing by the railway viaduct visit the relevant Ottoman period sites within the old town that were known to the ANZACs and part of the story, including the Serai, the Allenby Garden, the Mosque, the former Governor’s house, the old station building (now with the nearby monument to the Turkish fallen), and ‘Abraham’s Well’. Provided all these places are adequately explained as part of the story of the Charge and the Palestine Campaign, the pilgrim/visitor could understand the geography of the event. Most visitors would need a guide map at the very least to follow the route through the Old City, and a four-wheel drive vehicle to follow the ANZAC trail. The concept of recognising a theme or story within a city or landscape and communicating it by marking relevant places is not new. Examples are the Civil Rights Movement in the USA (Fenster 2004: 411); Cyprus Island of Saints (Cyprus Tourism Organisation 2008) and The Golden Mile in Melbourne, Australia (Museum of Victoria 2002). However the experience within the Old City of Beersheba is in danger of being
lost in the City’s desire to develop itself as ‘The Opportunity Capital of Israel’, with the old
Ottoman buildings being recycled for various cultural purposes and given no reference to the
historical event which was such a major factor in the city’s history. This could be rectified with
appropriate information panels at the relevant places and a guide book with map—surely another
‘opportunity’ for tourism. Ironically, it was capitalisation on one extraordinary opportunity\(^1\) on
31 October 1917 that began the evolution of Beersheba into the city of today.

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Endnotes

1 Military historians do not consider the Light Horse to be cavalry, as they were not armoured and carried only rifles with fixed bayonets.

2 According to Elyne Mitchell (1978: 64) and Jean Bou (2010: 171) this strategy was first drafted by Lieutenant-General Sir Phillip Chetwode a few months earlier.

2 Joe Hockey, whose paternal grandfather became deputy administrator of the town under the British Mandate used the Charge as a metaphor for seizing opportunity in his maiden speech to the Australian Parliament in 1996 (Daley 2008: 17).