



# THE BULLETIN

Journal of  
The Legacy Club of Melbourne Inc.

ABN 54 533 219 557

No 3123 5<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2006

## EDITORIAL

*A little known side of the Founder of Legacy*  
**Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Savige, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., E.D.**

While unveiling a memorial to Sir Stanley Savige at his birth place in Morwell, I discovered that there was more to this great man than many people, including many Legatees realised. I learned that he was a man who was held in awe by the Assyrian community, so much so that he has been credited with saving the entire Assyrian race and culture from extermination. Many know of his service during World War One, where he was commissioned at Lone Pine and commanded one of his battalion's rearguard parties during the famous evacuation.

Whilst serving in France he was awarded the Military Cross. It is the service of Captain Stanley Savige during 1918 in the Middle East on which I want to focus.

Early in 1918 he was selected to join a small band of Officers and NCO's from the British and Dominion Forces - these soldiers were most carefully selected for individual courage and proven qualities of leadership. They were to be sent to Persia, under the command of Major General Dunsterville. Known as "Dunsterforce," their role was to assist and mobilise the friendly tribes with a view to protecting the road to India, the Assyrians being one of those tribes.

The Assyrian defenders were being attacked on both the North and the South West, it was arranged that the northern front should be held firmly by the Urmia battalion. All was going well; however the Assyrians were running out of ammunition and were being over run by the Turks.

At the same time a detachment under the command of Captain Savige was carrying 45,000 pounds in Persian silver, twelve Lewis Guns and 100,000 rounds of ammunition. Savige's party was escorted by the Royal 14<sup>th</sup> Hussars, under Colonel Bridges. The detachment was ordered to halt 100 miles south of Urmia at Sain Kala. At Sain Kala there was no word of the Assyrians. Two days later, still no word. Colonel Bridges, complaining that his horses were running low on grain, decided to withdraw. To Captain Savige's party, this decision caused intense disappointment, and its officers mostly Australian and New Zealanders, volunteered to the last man to get through, take Urmia and meet the Assyrians.

They suggested that Colonel Bridges need not accompany them. Savige later wrote, "I thought we were not giving them a chance". The proposal was not approved. They were ordered to withdraw. Colonel Bridges was content with leaving the Assyrians to their fate. Captain Savige it seems was of a different calibre, he was determined to reach them. After several attempts he secured permission to halt his unit fifty miles to the rear of Takan Tepe, with the intention of raising a local force and riding to Urmia.

Meanwhile, the Assyrians at Urmia were now out of ammunition, the front began to waiver. The Turks seized the opportunity and attacked in force driving the Assyrians south towards the British lines. They retreated with all their families and livestock. The heat in late summer was unbearable; the procession had barely started when they were attacked on all sides by the Turks, Persians and Kurds.

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**GUEST SPEAKER – TUESDAY MR BOB SOLLY  
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
"DVA TODAY – THE CHANGES"**

**EDITORIAL (cont.)**

Captain Savige pushed on to meet up with the Assyrian Army and re-supply them with much needed ammunition and supplies. To his surprise, instead of finding an army to re-supply he found a huge contingent of refugees fleeing the Turkish Army.

What Savige was supposed to do was to return – he had the ammunition and money and was ordered not to let this fall into enemy hands. But he made an extraordinary decision at this time; and it is believed that only Captain Savige could have done it. The Assyrians weren't surprised to find that Captain Savige was an Australian and an ANZAC; he decided that all that ammunition and that money he was carrying wasn't worth the lives of those refugees. He decided, on his own initiative, to protect them.

There were only about twelve men. He left half guarding supplies and took six with him, and from that time he defended the refugees. He actually saved them. They were out of ammunition. Their rifles were useless. They had nowhere to go. They were starving, attacked mercilessly from every side; men, women and children, they were leaving none alive. It was a whole-sale massacre. Savige supplied them with the ammunition they needed; he made sure they had the food, he sent riders back to the British line informing them of the situation; he showed them which direction to go, plus he took up a defensive position at the rear of the refugees. This column was fifteen miles long; he rode with his six men all the way to the rear; he waited until the last possible moment, when he was practically surrounded, before he pulled out and then took up another defensive position.

He delayed the enemy in this way for about six weeks, until most of the refugees came down to the British lines.

In doing this Captain Savige risked his reputation and risked his life. Savige said in his memoirs that he placed himself between the Turks and the refugees. He offered himself as a target so the Turkish commander would concentrate his men on trying to kill him before the refugees. For this action Captain Savige was awarded a Distinguished Service Order some seven months later. The official citation for his DSO reads:

*“For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during the retirement of refugees from Sain Keleh to Tikkan Tappah between 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1918; also at Chalkaman on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> August 1918. He was in command of a small party sent to protect the rear of the column of refugees who were being hard-pressed by the enemy.*

*By his energy, resource, and able disposition, the hostile troops, many of whom were mounted, were kept at a distance, although in greatly superior force. He hung on to position after position until nearly surrounded, but on each occasion extricated his command most skillfully.*

*His cool determination and fine example under fire inspired his men and put heart into the almost panic-stricken refugees, thereby averting what might have been a very serious situation.”*

The Assyrian community continues to hold the memory of Sir Stanley Savige in such high esteem to this day. It is interesting to draw parallels between the action of Captain Stanley Savige in 1918 and our current servicemen and women currently serving in Iraq. *a alqamustaw*

Savige as a member of Dunsterforce, was protecting the lives of the Assyrians in an area just north of Baghdad. He provided them with supplies and protection at great risk to both himself and his men.

Some eighty five years later saw the commencement of Operation Catalyst, an Australian Defence Force, (ADF) contribution to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Iraq. This operation currently comprises up to 1400 Australian Defence Force Personnel. Our men and women of the ADF offer a different form of protection from the enemy, an enemy that is not easily identified, and an unseen enemy that uses a multitude of hidden explosive devices. The type of combat may be different to that endured by Savige and his men but nevertheless lives are at risk.

*I would like to thank Assyrian Levies President, Mr. Gaby Kiwarkis for providing much of the information and introducing me to a very special man. Legatee Stan Savige.*

**Bill Rogers**  
President