

ORDE WINGATE: "HAYEDID"

Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

God used a number of Gentiles during the twentieth century who played a crucial role in the founding of the modern state of Israel, but probably none greater than Major General Orde Wingate of the British Army. Wingate is viewed as a founder of the IDF (Israel Defense Force) and is said in Israel to be HaYedid, "the friend," because of his devotion to the Jewish People and Zionism.ⁱ Why was Wingate so different from the other British officers assigned to Palestine in the 1930's?

WINGATE'S BACKGROUND

Orde Wingate was born into a strict and devout Plymouth Brethren home on February 26, 1903 in Northern India. Orde's grandfather on his father's side of the family, William, was "a well-known minister and committed missionary to the Jews, first in Pest in Hungary and then in London."ⁱⁱ One day "when walking down Vincent Street, thinking of the various missions he assisted, it occurred to him that he did nothing for the Jews." As a result, William "decided to devote his life to the conversion of the chosen people to Christianity."ⁱⁱⁱ It was into this ministry and home that Orde's father was born and raised. However, it was in India as a British military officer that George Wingate "underwent a religious conversion which impelled him to join the recently founded Plymouth Brethren, a Calvinistic faith whose members interpret the Bible quite literally and believe in the second coming of Christ."^{iv} George married Ethel Orde-Browne, who was from a very strong Brethren family whose father was a well-respected teacher in their circles. Later in his career, George was given a direct order while in India to march his men to a specific location in preparation for a battle. He "refused to break the Sabbath by moving his men on a Sunday."^v "George Wingate's high-handed and rebellious scrupulousness was perfectly understood by the General, and the younger man not only went unrebuked but received the campaign medal with clasp and was mentioned in dispatches."^{vi}

Orde's parents were both devout Christians and he grew up within the Plymouth Brethren movement. His mother was a well-educated woman who provided a rigorous and excellent education. His father was often the one teaching the Bible in their Assembly, as well as running an evangelistic mission during the week. The family of seven children usually spent Sunday afternoons being taught the Bible by their father. One of Orde's sisters Sybil wrote of their childhood: "We were reared on a diet of porridge, bread and dripping, and 'the sincere milk of the Word.'"^{vii} Sybil described the atmosphere in which they grew up as "somewhat apocalyptic." She said, "the children were taught to believe that Christ would return to earth in their own lifetime, ushering in a reign of peace, truth, justice, and mercy."^{viii} Orde was not an outstanding student as a child, but after his formal schooling, he excelled at academics. He decided to follow his father and grandfather into the life of a British military officer and entered the Royal Military College, Sandhurst at age 17.^{ix}

A YOUNG MILITARY OFFICER

The first few years of his career as a young officer, most of which was spent in schools and training, he did not distinguish himself in any way and was proceeding at an average pace. Wingate became more serious about his career in the autumn of 1926

when he applied for and was permitted “to attend a War Office course in Arabic conducted by the School of Oriental Studies.”^x In “March 1927 he graduated with an 85 percent examination mark.”^{xi} Upon graduation he was sent to the Sudan in North Africa for five years. In 1935 he married his wife Lorna and also was chosen to serve in Palestine. He was assigned as a staff intelligence officer at their headquarters in Haifa, Israel.^{xii} It would be in Palestine (as the British called it) or Israel (its biblical name) that he would begin to rise to fame.

In September 1936 when Wingate arrived in Haifa, Palestine was in the midst of a struggle between the Jews and the Arabs with the British in between. “Palestine was in turmoil and its British rulers, struggling to retain control, were realizing to the full what a bed of nails they had made for themselves by attempting to pursue mutually contradictory policies in the Middle East.”^{xiii} Violence had spiked to a new high in 1936, partly due to Jewish immigration, when Wingate arrived.^{xiv}

The British “foreign policy establishment was dominated by Orientalists who felt a romantic affinity for Arabic culture.” “Wingate as an Arabist by training and one who had thoroughly mastered the language and with it, absorbed much of the culture of the Arabs, might have been expected to share the majority sentiment of Palestine’s British rulers.”^{xv} Shortly after arriving in Palestine, Wingate told a fellow officer, “Everyone’s against the Jews, so I’m for them.”^{xvi} It was within this hostile context that Wingate argued politically to British policy makers that the Jews should be given Palestine as their own homeland. Wingate became close friends with Chaim Weizmann, the head of the Zionist movement, as Wingate himself became an ardent Zionist, most likely because of his biblical upbringing. Wingate learned to speak Hebrew fluently and said, “it is a great pleasure to me to read the Old Testament in the original.”^{xvii}

GIDEON’S MEN

Wingate was in Israel until 1939 and he began clandestinely helping various Jewish communities defend themselves from night raids by the Arabs. “In many places bands of Arab peasants used to set out by night to destroy the crops and orange-groves of the Jewish settlers.”^{xviii} In the 1930s the Jews “organized a clandestine and illegal force known as ‘Hagana.’” However, the Hagana attempted to defend themselves from the Arab raids, but “never went over to the attack, not even in the smallest way.”^{xix} They never went on the offensive until Wingate got involved with the Hagana and formed them into a very effective fighting force. Wingate is said to have always carried a small, leather-bound Bible wherever he went.^{xx}

Armed with a letter of introduction from Chaim Weizmann, Wingate traveled to Northern Israel to the community of Eliahu Golomb to meet the head of the Hagana and propose his plan for training the Jews to defend themselves by conducting night raids upon the Arabs. They set up training headquarters in Ein Harod, the exact place in the Bible “that Gideon had chosen his 300 men at God’s behest . . . and Gideon himself used unorthodox methods to defeat the Midianites.”^{xxi} “Wingate’s strategy, later used in several important World War II battles, was to ‘carry the offensive to the enemy,’ ambushing Arab saboteurs behind Arab lines and raiding border villages used as bases by the Mufti’s men. His methods and missions were generally crowned with success.”^{xxii} “His plan was to penetrate rebel territory by night, stop the smuggling of weapons across the Lebanese border, and rout the elusive Arab gangs that were causing both the British and the Jewish settlers so much trouble.”^{xxiii}

“Wingate’s personality and military genius made a profound impact on the Jewish defense forces in the 1930’s, and these in turn became the basis for today’s Israel

Defense Forces. His contribution to Jewish defense in the Land of Israel is considered enormous.^{xxiv} Wingate introduced the tradition that the modern IDF maintains to this day of having the officers lead their troops into battle, since this is the way it was done in the Old Testament. Wingate worked tirelessly to help the newly forming state of Israel, often at great personal risk to his own career. In May 1939, with World War II approaching, Wingate was reassigned to London. Wingate offered to resign his Royal commission and stay illegally in Israel, but the leadership of the Hagana would hear none of it. When he left the country, his passport was stamped, "No Entry to Palestine."^{xxv}

CONCLUSION

Orde Wingate went on to become a three-star general and one of England's greatest generals of World War II. He was killed in an airplane crash in Burma on March 24, 1944. Wingate was known as a genius planner of military strategy and was in the forefront of developing key doctrine still used by modern militaries relating to offensive warfare. "General William Slim, who commanded the British 14th Army, wrote that Wingate was a "man of genius . . . a truly dynamic leader who combined vision and action, one of the few men in this war who was irreplaceable, who designed, raised, trained, and inspired his force, and placed it in the enemy's vitals." Wingate was ultimately buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington. A memorial was erected to him in Britain, and The Wingate Institute in Netanya, Israel's National Center for Physical Education and Sport, is named for him. In addition, the Israeli youth village Yemin Orde was named for Wingate; founded in 1953 to accommodate Holocaust orphans and immigrant children, it is today home to more than 500 children from around the world."^{xxvi} Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Hillel Fendel, "Wingate "The Friend" is Remembered, 65 Years Later," Arutz Sheva (March 24, 2009) www.israelnationalnews.com).

ⁱⁱ Trevor Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), p. 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Christopher Sykes, *Orde Wingate* (London: Collins, 1959), p. 22.

^{iv} Royle, *Wingate*, p. 7.

^v Royle, *Wingate*, p. 8.

^{vi} Sykes, *Wingate*, p. 24.

^{vii} John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Fire In The Night: Wingate of Burma, Ethiopia, and Zion* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 10.

^{viii} Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, p. 12.

^{ix} Sykes, *Wingate*, p. 37.

^x Sykes, *Wingate*, p. 53.

^{xi} Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, p. 29.

^{xii} Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, pp. 51–55.

^{xiii} Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, p. 59.

^{xiv} Sykes, *Wingate*, pp. 107–09.

^{xv} Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, pp. 62–63.

^{xvi} Cited in Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, p. 63.

^{xvii} Cited in Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, p. 69.

^{xviii} Sykes, *Wingate*, pp. 107.

^{xix} Sykes, *Wingate*, pp. 108.

^{xx} Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, p. 77.

^{xxi} Royle, *Wingate*, p. 127.

^{xxii} Fendel, "Wingate "The Friend."

^{xxiii} Bierman and Smith, *Fire In The Night*, p. 78.

^{xxiv} Fendel, "Wingate "The Friend."

^{xxv} Fendel, "Wingate "The Friend."

^{xxvi} Fendel, "Wingate "The Friend."