

BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN — GIFT OF GRATITUDE

Statement by Member for Southern River

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [2.52 pm]: In early 1942, as the Afrika Korps of Field Marshall Rommel continued its relentless push eastwards towards the Suez Canal and the oilfields of Iraq, the 700 000 Jewish people living in Egypt, British-mandated Palestine, Syria and Iraq feared for their lives.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, can I have some silence so that the member for Southern River can read out his 90-second statement?

Mr P. ABETZ: If Rommel's forces defeated the British-led Eighth Army, the fate of these Jewish people would be sealed, as Einsatzkommandos would follow to annihilate them. Rommel's forces were finally halted at El Alamein on 1 July 1942. The 9th Australian Division, also known as the Rats of Tobruk, and the 2nd New Zealand Division played a major role in halting the German advance. An intense campaign was fought at El Alamein, which ended on 4 November 1942 with the defeat of Rommel's forces. It marked the turning point in the North African war, and the Jewish communities were spared the impending holocaust.

The Jewish leadership in the British protectorate of Palestine at the time presented General Montgomery with an official gift of gratitude in the form of an ornate Hebrew Bible, the cover of which was inlaid with mother of pearl. Accompanying this gift was a parchment with the words, "Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery, the gallant leader of the victorious British forces, by whose hand God has placed salvation in Zion in the days of El Alamein," written in Hebrew and English. Through the efforts of Mr Kelvin Crombie, this Bible is going to be on display here in the Parliament. Members are invited by the Speaker and the President to view the Bible on Tuesday, 25 June between 6.00 pm and 7.00 pm in the Centenary Room.