

District of Columbia Supplement

Sir Knight Kevin S. Matthews

Right Eminent Grand Commander

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From the Grand Commander's Apartment

Sir Knights,
"Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them" - Santayana

The 4th of July is not far off... and for most of us, it is a day of remembrance and gratitude to those who paid for our freedom and way of life.

However, for a smaller segment of us, it is a date of some historical note. Over 834 years ago, on the July 4, 1187, the Muslim forces under Saladin, marched on the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and at the Battle of Hattin, (aka "the Horns of Hattin"), destroyed the Knights Templar, and took control of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Two years later, as a result, the 3rd Crusade ensued. How did this happen?

This was due in short, to the petty infighting among at least six factions vying for control of "the Holy Land". These factions included several leading Christian fiefdoms and the Templars. This infighting became so locally centric that the Templars failed to recognize the threat of Saladin, the Vizier of Egypt, who after 1170 gradually consolidated power as Sultan. His growing Muslim army took much land unopposed and took Christian strongholds at Damascus in 1174 and Aleppo and Mosul in 1183. Jerusalem was now surrounded on three sides by a unified force under the undisputed Sultan.

Guy de Lusignan became King of Jerusalem in 1186 and was able to secure a truce with Saladin and put a stop to the Christian infighting. Peace did not last as raiding parties from both sides could not stay apart. Saladin assembled a formidable army of some 30,000 soldiers, including some 12,000 cavalry, in Galilee to the north of Jerusalem, many without experience. The Crusader army of about 20,000 strong assembled composed of Knights from Jerusalem, Tripoli, and Antioch including most of the available Knights Templars and seasoned Knights and experienced leaders. Still heavily outnumbered, the Bishop of Acre carried with him The relic of the True Cross providing inspiration.

King Guy's army marched to engage Saladin, who moved east and lured Guy into a dangerous tactical location on a dry plain. Saladin took the town of Tiberius and outflanked the Crusaders and blocked any chance of retreat. Guy boldly but disastrously pushed towards Hattin to attack the Muslim forces at Tiberius and prevent encirclement. Saladin's forces cut off Guy's army from supplies and water, and set fire to the nearby forests, choking the Christians while Muslim archers fired several waves of arrows down upon them. A valiant defense led by the Templars produced numerous deeds of heroism but could not prevent the destruction of most of the Crusader army and the capture of King Guy, the Relic of the True Cross, and Templar Grand Master Gerard de Ridefort.

The Battle of Hattin was a disaster for the Knights Templar. Several hundred knights died in battle and over 100 by execution in the aftermath. Three months later, the city of Jerusalem fell to Saladin's forces. The numbers of the Knights of the Temple in the Holy Land were nearly gone. However, many their chaplains and sergeants survived, and their training and logistics backbone across the Mediterranean and Europe remained. The Knights Templar were then instrumental in the leadership, planning, organization, logistics, and financing of the 3rd Crusade that began in 1189 led by Richard I of England and Philip II of France, that witnessed a large and successful Christian counterattack against Saladin's forces.

We are in a time of despair... surrounded, trapped, cut off. We have suffered a devastating defeat by our current Chinese covid-19 pandemic. We have endured this for more than a year, and it is often hard to extrapolate beyond next week. Despair is all too easy to come by, but, like those trapped Knights, we must fight until we can't, and then prepare to rebuild - our lives, our health, our strength and our minds. While it does not seem like it today, this too shall pass, and we will pick up the pieces, lick our wounds, rebuild, and rebound stronger.

GOD bless our families, doctors and health care workers, law enforcement, and this great country.

In the Service of Christ,

JK Doug Cohen

Deputy Grand Commander - Elect 2021 – 2022
Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the
District of Columbia

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