

letters

FROM THE FRONT

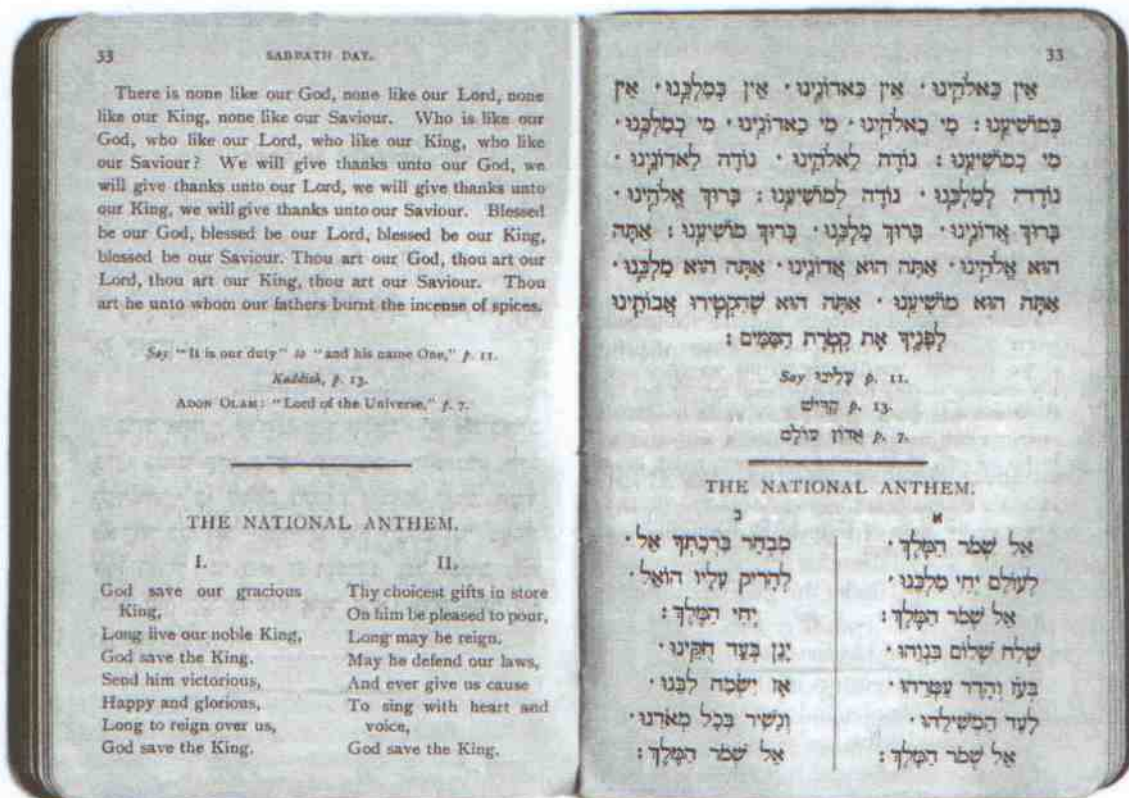
Jonathan Fishburn on the books Anglo-Jewish soldiers took into battle

There is something delicious about the idea of a Rabbi Dayan Gollop as Senior Jewish Chaplain to His Majesty's Forces during the Second World War. Providing spiritual sustenance to the battalions of soldiers with their galloping horses, Rabbi Gollop no doubt used his copy of *Readings from the Holy Scriptures for Jewish Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen*, selected by the then Chief Rabbi Hertz and published by his London Office in 1940.

It seems that when Jewish soldiers go into battle, their religious needs and yearning for community are far greater than when they are at home. During the First and Second World Wars, the religious establishment went into full swing in order to cater to these needs, and

much of the ephemeral material is a poignant reminder of the vulnerability felt by many of the soldiers and their chaplains. For example, the 1916 *Prayer Book for Jewish Sailors and Soldiers*, compiled by Reverend Michael Adler, includes a specially written 'Prayer for Sailors and Soldiers on Active Service'. Distributed to 16,000 soldiers, it also has an unusual rendition of 'God Save the King' in Hebrew.

The Agudas Israel Organisation of Great Britain took particular interest in the Armed Services. In their spring 1945 *Jewish Forces Booklet*, the Festival of Passover is the main topic, with the customs, laws and history of the festival discussed. It includes a note from the War Office by the Chaplain-General, F.L. Hughes:



May all you do for the welfare of the Jewish men fighting with the United Nations be richly blessed. The mark of a citizen of Zion is to honour them that fear the Lord. May the Star of David shine upon all such efforts of men who care for men.

Chaplain's were integral to the wellbeing of soldiers and it appears that they were well regarded. In a 'Talk to Jewish Service Men' on the BBC General Forces Programme, transcribed in the *Jewish Forces Booklet*, Lieutenant-Colonel I. Brodie, Senior Jewish Chaplain to HM Forces, explained the role of the chaplain:

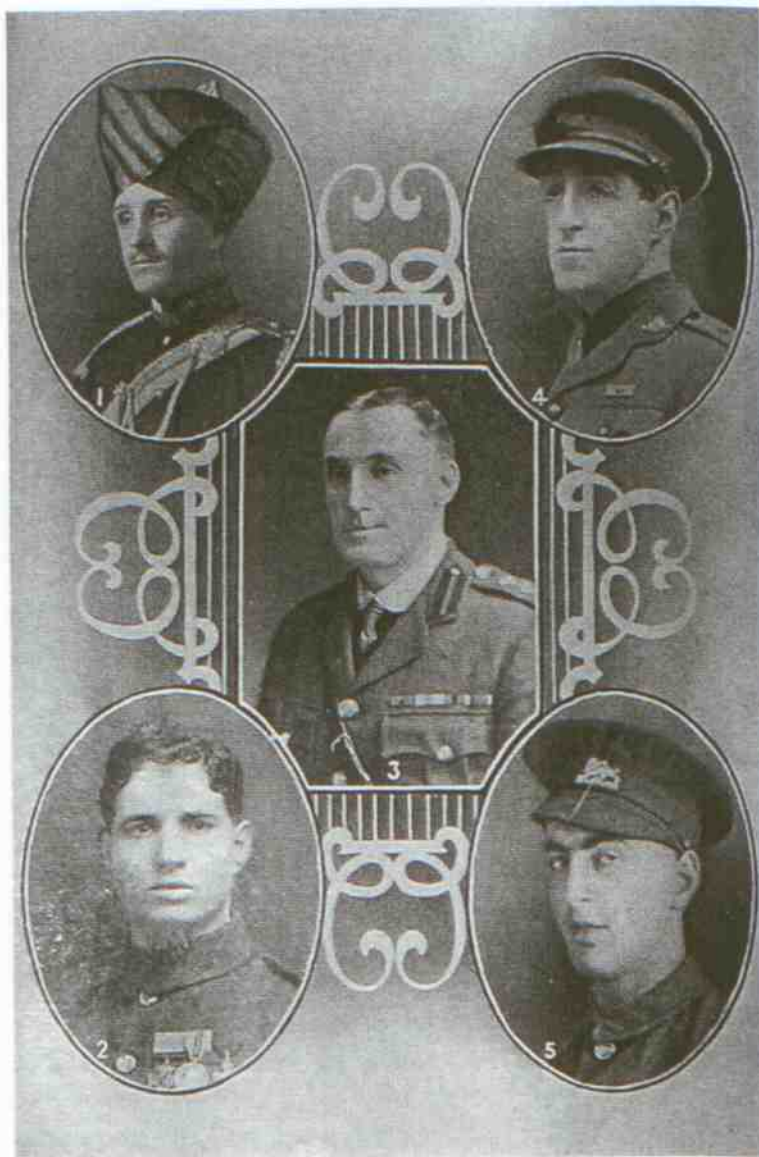
To seek their brethren is the perennial task of our Chaplains. They compass much land to contact their brethren in the Services to bring them the message and hope of our age-long faith. They seek to deepen their loyalty and devotion to duty in the cause of righteousness and freedom... I know and have heard that many of you take every opportunity of seeking out your co-religionists in the towns and villages wrested from the enemy by our victorious armies. Alas, that in some places there are but few surviving remnants of what were once flourishing communities. On the other hand, what great joy, tearful joy, is yours when you have discovered a fellow Jew or Jewess, and particularly a child - plucked out of the fire... What it means to them and to you when you greet one another with the traditional salutation of Shalom Aleichem, peace be unto you.

Another very interesting feature of the same *Booklet* is the letters from soldiers abroad. Lieutenant A. H. Samek, for example, writes:

When I first wandered around the decks, I saw two or three Jewish boys, so I thought it would be a good idea to organize a service on board the troopship. Anyway, I had a service for Friday night and Saturday morning published in Ships Routine Orders. Guess my amazement when at the Friday night service there were about twenty-five boys and four or five officers. On Saturday morning there were even more. The services were pretty impressive. Since we had no Sefer, we read from a Chumesh I had, and everybody was happy. We did the 'calling up' as if it were a proper Sefer Torah. After the service they wanted to know if I was a chaplain, and I replied, 'No, only an Agudist.' Fifty percent did not know what Aguda stood for, so I delivered a sermon-cum-lecture on that subject. What amazed me most was the sincerity of it all. I am sure they paid more attention to those services than they ever did before in any synagogue. Seven or eight even had talleitim.

More mundane was the letter from Corporal Septimus, who wrote from Belgium: 'your package of cake was gladly received by yours truly'.

The Jewish community also had to fight the propaganda battle, provoked by accusations that they did not fully participate in the war against the enemy. A powerful brochure, *What the Jews of the British Empire did in*



the Great War: Read and Learn the True Facts, distributed by the Board of Deputies in the 1930s, begins with the words:

All British men and women,

Read the true answer to this question - which affords conclusive proof that the British Jews fully did their duty as loyal citizens and stood side by side with all the other subjects of the King in the hour of crisis. As lovers of freedom and democracy they upheld the cause of England against her enemies in the same spirit of loyalty and self-sacrifice as they are always ready to do to-day. They bore their full share in the World War in every quarter of the globe, in the operations on sea, on land and in the air... These facts completely demolish the lies so assiduously spread by British Fascists as to British Jewry's part in the war.

SPRING, 1945/5705.



Jewish Forces Booklet

Issued by the
AGUDAS ISRAEL ORGANISATION OF GREAT BRITAIN
(FORCES WELFARE COMMITTEE)
53, Queens Drive, London, N.4
Telephone: STAmford Hill 6688/9



סבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותנו, ונקודים בדרך הוא פועלנו סיום.
At every time enemies rise Against us, to annihilate us: but the Most Holy,
blessed be He, hath delivered us out of their hands.

In a grander fashion, *The British Jewry Book of Honour* (1922) is a large gilt-edged volume that Chief Rabbi Herz suggested will be

[a] permanent written record of the part played by Anglo-Jewry in the Great War . . . will help lovers of the Truth in their warfare against the malicious slander that the Jew shrinks from the sacrifices demanded of every loyal citizen in the hour of national danger.

It has several chapters discussing the involvement of Jews in the Army, a listing of the service records of the fifty thousand British Jews who served in the Great War and 365 pages of evocative photos of soldiers and their regiments. Imagine the *naches* of the parents of the five Jewish soldiers who won the Victoria Cross. One of these men was Sergeant Issy Smith (Shmulevitch), the son of immigrants from Eastern Europe. Other such immigrant sons included Captain Robert Gee, Lieutenant Frank Alexander de Pass, Private J. White (Weiss) and Leonard Keysor. Fifty Jewish soldiers received the Distinguished Service Order.

Field Marshal Earl Haig appeared within its pages to express his sense of the book's importance:

The British Jewry Book of Honour is a striking testimony to a fact which every soldier will gladly recognize – namely, the loyalty with which British Jews of every class came forward to fight for the country of their adoption and for the great human ideals which they shared with their Christian comrades in arms.

Similarly, as Secretary of State, Winston Churchill supported the Book:

I can truthfully say that this record is a great one, and British Jews can look back with pride on the honourable part they played in winning the Great War.

Preserving the memory of war is a challenge that archivists, historians and philosophers grapple with. AJEX, the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women (www.ajex.org.uk), maintains the Jewish Military Museum and Memorial Room, a little treasure nestled in the Hendon hinterland that holds memorabilia, artefacts, medals, letters, documents, pictures and uniforms relating to Jews in the British Army. While it inevitably focuses on the two world wars, it includes details of those who fought in the Spanish Civil War or who served in Korea, Kenya, Malaya and Cyprus. The museum can also help veterans' families find out about their military past.

If Rabbi Gollop's descendants are reading this, a quick gallop to the museum is likely to unearth some fascinating stories about him and his contemporaries, and perhaps even a picture of a horse or two. **10**

Jonathan Fishburn is an antiquarian bookseller specializing in Judaica (www.fishburnbooks.com). His latest catalogue has 1,000 items relating to Zionism.

JEWISH EX-SERVICE MEN'S NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE SERVICE SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5th, 1933,

at the
HORSE GUARDS' PARADE, WHITEHALL, LONDON, S.W.1.

Assemble 2.15 p.m.

**Short Religious Service
at the
The Horse Guards' Parade.
March to the Cenotaph.**

The Parade will be inspected by
Admiral of the Fleet Sir ROGER REVEL, K.C.B., C.C.B., C.B.

The Service will be conducted by the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Dr. J. H. HERTZ, and
DATAN M. GOLLOP, B.A., Senior Jewish Chaplain to H.M. Forces.

DRESS—Civilian Dress (no uniforms with medals and decorations).

It is requested that all J. H. LEVET, B.A., G.B.E.

The Committee ask that Jewish ex-Service Men and ex-Service Women of ALL RANKS should
make a special effort to attend the parade THIS YEAR. No tickets are required. The public
is cordially invited to witness the ceremony on the Horse Guards' Parade Ground.

Re-Union Tea 5.0 p.m.

ROYAL ALBERT HALL, KENSINGTON, LONDON, S.W.7.

Major J. H. MURPHY, COMMOD. I.P., will preside.

Tickets 2/- each. Immediate application necessary.

All enquiries and applications for Re-Union Tea Tickets to
WILLIAM BIRNWHITE, Esq., The Organiser, 3, St. Pancras Gardens, Hampstead, London, N.W.1.