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200 years of migration to England

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of a square of a destroyed village (Achicourt) near Arras. Many a time I would visit a group of men, however small, in some out-of-the-way place, much to their gratification, and a friendly chat and smoke always concluded with a brief religious service in which the men earnestly joined. Sometimes the orderly room would be clearly for my visit to the Jewish men of the unit, and, on one occasion, an adjutant who did not know what was happening walked suddenly into his orderly room to find, much to his astonishment, a Jewish Chaplain and twelve men engaged in prayer! I once met a party of fifty newly-arrived Jewish soldiers belonging to the 1/1st Bucks. Battalion—to which Lieut. D. Fallon, M.C., was attached—near a village called Bouzincourt, outside Albert. As the place was being bombarded, all troops were ordered into the open, and we found a vacant space in a cornfield where a square was formed and a brief service held. It was a very solemn occasion as it was the first time these men had seen and heard a shell explode, and they were due to begin their work in the trenches that same evening.

I well remember the surprise of the Mother Superior of the Hospice at Locre—famous for its battles in 1918 and for the grave of Major Willie Redmond being there—when I asked permission to use the central hall for a Jewish service after the Church of England and the Roman Catholics had already held meetings there, and we saw the nuns peeping at our gatherings as the Jewish boys lustily sang *Adon Olam* and the National Anthem.

Each soldier I met, whether singly or at a gathering, gave me his details and the address of his family, and a letter was written to his home, which led to a most interesting correspondence. My heavy post-bag at times was the standing joke of the local Army Post Office and of my Mess, and many hours were spent at the desk in keeping in touch by letter, both with the soldiers and their anxious relatives. The address, "Jewish Chaplain, France," was sufficient to find me, and one intelligent youth directed his letter to the "Commander-in-Chief of the Jewish Army in France!" I was also given the title of "O.C. Jews."

The Army authorities were of the utmost assistance in arranging our services, and from time to time I received letters from Christian Chaplains and from Officers Commanding Units in which Jewish soldiers were found asking me to arrange services for their men. I had often to travel long distances for these meetings, but all labour in connection with their organisation was more than amply repaid by the large number of men thus being

enabled to meet other Jewish lads and to take part in some form of Jewish religious service under the peculiar conditions in which they lived.

It soon became evident that a second Chaplain was required, and it was with great pleasure that I learnt that, on the suggestion of the late Mr. Albert Jessel, K.C., the Rev. V. G. Simmons, of the West London Synagogue, had agreed to join me, and in August, 1915, he came to France and began his work in Boulogne. Later on, when I removed in April, 1916, to the Third Army, Mr. Simmons took my place at Mont-des-Cats, and his work at the Base was carried on by the third Chaplain, the Rev. Arthur Barnett, who ultimately in 1918 succeeded me as Senior Chaplain at the Front.

Everyone who has been on active service knows how precious the word "leave" was to the man longing to return home if only for a few days. This desire was emphasised on the part of the Jewish soldiers at the approach of the Sacred Festivals, and I therefore had an interview with the Assistant Adjutant General at G.H.Q. to consider if an order could be published to allow Jews to go home to observe at least the Day of Atonement. It soon became evident that there were insuperable obstacles in the way, but G.H.Q. issued a letter upon the subject to the B.E.F. in August, 1915, to the following effect: "The Jewish Chaplain has put forward a request that any Jewish soldier who in the ordinary course be granted leave of absence during the next two months may be permitted to select days including 17th and 18th September (the Jewish 'Day of Atonement'). I should be glad if you will give this matter such consideration as may be possible."

A similar letter was issued for Passover, 1916, but the results were far from satisfactory as there were so many difficulties in making suitable arrangements to set the Jewish soldiers free, and no further action was taken except to grant facilities to organise services in the field on all sacred days.

As I was alone in the Front areas during the New Year and Day of Atonement of 1915 and desired to arrange as many services as possible for the men in the lines, on the first day of the New Year I had a large gathering in a Soldiers' Club in St. Omer, and on the second day I met a crowd of Canadian soldiers and men from English divisions of the Second Army in a tent belonging to the 3rd Canadian Field Ambulance in "Aldershot" Camp close to Neuve Eglise, a short distance from "Plugstreet" Wood. The Padre of the unit made all preparations for our meeting, the officers' mess tent being cleared for the occasion. After the service, a Canadian staff-

sergeant provided lunch for all the worshippers, many of whom had come from long distances. One man in the Belgian Armoured Cars had motored from Dunkirk, 40 miles away. I remember a Canadian soldier saying to me after the service how delighted he was to see a Jewish Chaplain so close to the line conducting religious services for the men, as he was under the impression that we lived at the Base, where alone Jewish soldiers received our ministrations. To these services I took a Scroll of the Law in a small box which served as an Ark, lent to me by my French friends from the Boulogne Synagogue. My orderly, Cpl. R. Friedlander, who was with me throughout the whole of my work and rendered invaluable service, made a white curtain for the Ark, with a Hebrew inscription upon it, and the ceremony of the Reading of the Law was made doubly impressive in the special circumstances in which the services were held.

Having thus allotted the days of the New Year to the areas of General Headquarters and the Second Army, I was anxious to meet the men of the First Army round Bethune for the Day of Atonement. I learnt that the 47th London Division, containing some 200 Jews, were in the line in this sector, and I was also aware that within a few days after the Day of Atonement (the 18th September) a great battle was to be fought. I therefore journeyed south to the Bethune area and decided to hold this service in the mining village of Nœux-les-Mines, which would enable all local troops in the front lines, some four miles away, to attend. This visit to Nœux-les-Mines to arrange the service with Divisional Headquarters will always be impressed upon my memory because it was on this occasion that I paid a visit with the Colonel of the 19th London Regiment to the front line trenches, opposite the Double Crassier of Loos, where the battle took place a week later. It was a very thrilling experience, especially to one who had not been through it before. The enemy's artillery was disagreeably active that night as we passed through the ruined village of Maroc and inspected the trenches of the London men, and I was greatly relieved when, at about two in the morning, I reached my billet in the forward village of Les Brebis and went to bed in a miner's cottage.

My first service on Yom Kippur in the Mairie of Nœux-les Mines was most inspiring. Men marched in fully-equipped straight from the lines, special orders having been issued to set them free, and we numbered about 200 congregants. Many of the officers and men who were present at this