

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

CONDUCTED BY "THE ADJUTANT"

All Communications to be Addressed to P.O. Box 2000.

We would remind readers of the Record of Jewish War Services which is being compiled by the S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies. Information is required as to regimental number, rank, full name, and unit of Jews serving in the Forces as well as home address.

Palestinians in Desert Victory.

I have just been reading in the Tel-Aviv monthly "Palestine and Middle East," an article by Major L. Rabinowitz, late Senior Jewish Chaplain, Eighth Army. It tells the story of the part played by Jewish troops in the desert victory. It is a saga of service by Palestine Jewish volunteers who formed the pioneer units and who did exceptional work throughout the Western Desert and North African campaigns. When the history of the Eighth Army is written it will be seen how much was contributed to the great victory by these Jewish units—Water Tank Company, Artisan Works Company, Port Operating Company, Camouflage Company, Transport Company, etc. The history of the exploits of the Eighth will include the "pre-Monty" Eighth, for, as Major Rabinowitz points out, the Eighth Army was not born with General Montgomery. There was the Eighth Army of Cunningham and Ritchie, of November, 1941, to July, 1942, of which the Jewish units were part. These units played a big part in the advance from Sidi Barrani to El-Agheile and the retreat in stages to Gazala and El-Alamein. After the victorious breakthrough, Winston Churchill attributed the victory partly to a "brilliant system of camouflage," and in making his observation he referred to the 1st Camouflage Company R.E.—a Palestinian unit.

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Test of Stamina and Grit.

Referring to the "pre-Monty" Eighth Army, Major Rabinowitz writes: "Without for one moment attempting any foolish disparaging comparison with the 'later' Eighth Army, it is necessary to emphasize that desert warfare as such was much more characteristic of this Force than of its successor. Sollum, Halfaya Pass and Bardia were strongly held by the Germans until the middle of January, 1942, and an attack along the coastal road was impracticable. At any point between mile 62 after Mersah Matruh and Sidi Barrani one plunged south into the desert and the road was seen no more. Over desert wastes, trackless except for the multitudinous and confusing tracks made by the thousands of vehicles, one proceeded 'into the blue.' Compass navigation was the only sure guide—provided one was an experienced navigator! A railway line was as a beacon of light to a ship-wrecked mariner, a telegraph wire—the equivalent of the king's highway. Even then, after the raising of the siege of Tobruk and the subsequent fall of Halfaya Pass the road was opened, the burden of traffic and the continual if unsuccessful attempt to outflank and cut off the enemy drove the Eighth Army into the desert in wide moves of encirclement. Water was scarce, food confined mostly to bully and biscuits, drinks non-existent, eggs a dream of bygone days and vitamin tablets the substitute for green vegetables. It was a testing time of stamina and grit, of that higher courage which 'grins and bears it' in the face of unimaginable hardships and difficulties, and that test the Jewish units passed with flying colours."

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Supplies Got Through.

Then as to "Monty's" desert victory, Major Rabinowitz writes, inter alia, "... it was a battle of supply and of supplies, and, as is a fact, for not one single day during that long pursuit did our advanced elements lose contact with the enemy rearguards no greater tribute to our supply and line of communication organisation need be paid. That

was the task of the Palestinian Units. Weary yet unwearingly, exhausted but inexhaustible, grimly and tenaciously they rushed up the supplies. Through sandstorms and dust, through mud and rain, by road and by desert track, day and night they forged forward, their time schedules, their turnabouts continually pared and whittled down as the need became more pressing. Despite the immense air superiority of the R.A.F., attention from the Luftwaffe was not wanting. Every unit had its casualties, fatal and otherwise from bombing attacks, from land mines, from booby traps, from accidents and that long road, as the military cemeteries on it, is dotted with Mogen Dovids but 'our march goes on for ever though we fall out one by one.' It was not spectacular work. It was marked by no outstanding, heartwarming acts of gallantry. It was soul and body destroying, unceasing toil which demanded grit and endurance in the highest degree.

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First to Reach Tripoli.

The distinction of being the first Palestinian unit to reach Tripoli (January 24th, 1943) fell to the 1039 Port Operating Coy., R.E., the morrow of its capture by the victorious Eighth Army. Three months later seven members of this Company were mentioned in the Eighth Army Orders, signed by General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery, K.C.B., D.S.O., for acts of gallantry when they received the alarm that a transport ship was afire and performed incredible acts of bravery aboard the burning vessel.

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Joined up at 18.

When Ovadia Rechtman, whose mother is Mrs. Sonia Rechtman, of Menorah, Woodburn Crescent, Oranjezicht, joined up in September, 1940, he was not eighteen. On Sunday, 3rd January, he celebrates his twenty-first birthday, the fourth he has had away from home. Ovadia was a brilliant boy at school. After S.A.C.S. he went to the University of Cape Town to study civil engineering. When war broke out, despite his mother's wish that he should first finish his studies before joining up, he had his own way and enlisted in the S.A.A.F. He is now an Air-Corporal with the 3rd Squadron in North Africa and is very keen on his job. Having taken the new oath he hopes to go further afield. He has probably left his base camp by now, although his departure was delayed through a spell in hospital with a bad dose of sand-fly fever and a septic throat. "All in all I was in bed just over three weeks," he writes, "and I thought my posting to the desert would be cancelled, but I have been told by my chief that I will be



A/Cpl. O. Rechtman, S.A.A.F.

going, and expect to be on my way in the near future." So the chances are that he will celebrate his twenty-first among the sands of the Western Desert.

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Rechtman's Resolve.

Writing about the new oath, the Corporal says: "I do not want to leave the army until the war is over. My duty will not be done until then. I've given up so much already for certain ideals. Now that the German threat to South Africa is no more it does not mean that we can stop working. The things I have seen in the towns all over Africa and what the Germans have done to the Jews have made me decide that, especially as a Jew, I want to pull my weight in exterminating the German menace from the world. As I have taken the new oath may be I will get home leave—may be not." If anyone deserves a spot of leave it is the Corporal. Nearly forty months is a long spell away from home—but he has no complaints. I wish the Corporal, whose photograph I reproduce below, a happy birthday wherever he may be, and hope that his twenty-second will be spent in the Union which he left so long ago.

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Jaffa or Clanwilliam?

Does Jaffa produce finer oranges than does Clanwilliam? That the distinction goes to Jaffa was claimed by a young Palestinian A.T.S. girl in a heated argument with my correspondent L/Bdr. B. Gordon, from whom I have just received another welcome letter ex North. He does not tell me the result of the argument, but he says he soon quietened her down when grapes were mentioned! Anyway I am not going to be drawn into any controversy about the relative merits of Palestine and South African fruit. I'll leave it to the experts to decide. Many of my correspondents have been to Palestine: I would like to hear from them on the subject.

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Sarie Marais in Hebrew.

In his previous letter, from which I quoted, Bdr. Gordon told me that at the Rosh Hashona celebrations in Alexandria, the Palestinians who attended sang Sarie Marais in Hebrew. "I noticed that several South African newspapers 'picked up' the paragraph you had in your 'Lines of Communication,'" he now writes. "The Sunday Times, the Natal Mercury, the Cape Times, etc., all had something to say about it. Even the Middle East newspaper for the South African Forces—The Springbok—quoted it. I have forwarded you a copy of this publication, which, incidentally affords some very interesting reading. So it was a surprise for South Africans at home to learn that Sarie Marais could be sung in Hebrew!" Below I reproduce a photograph of Bdr. Gordon.

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Major M. S. Comay.

Major M. S. Comay has arrived in Cape Town to take up a position with Coastal Command. The Major came down with the First Division mean early in the year and after a short leave returned to the Middle East, where he was attached to the Sixth South



L/Bdr. B. Gordon, S.A.A.

African Armoured Division as D.I.O. Previously he was with the First Division under the late General Pienaar. His energy, ability and outstanding initiative made him a valuable member of the Staffs to which he belonged and he was Mentioned in Dispatches on two occasions. He was very popular with his brother officers and the men with whom he came into contact. I have often heard it said by soldiers who met him up north: "Mike has done a good job off work" and "Mike is a jolly good fellow."

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Escaped from Italy.

Several members of the Zionist Youth Movement were among those who managed to escape from Italy after the Allied landing there. The first two P.O.W. to get away were the brothers Bernard and Issy Koseff, of Durban. Arnold Kalk, a former member of the Germiston Zionist Youth Society, who was taken prisoner at Sidi Rezegh, managed to get away to Switzerland, and it is hoped that he will soon be returning to the Union. Sam Caplan, who made one of the most daring escapes of the war, the story of which has received much prominence in the daily press, is at present at Muizenberg on his honeymoon. Sam joined up in the Signal Corps in July, 1940. After a year's training in the Union he went north. He was taken

prisoner shortly after the fall of Tobruk, on 24th June, 1942. He made a miraculous escape from a German-bound train and travelled 700 miles to safety. Caplan was a member of the Merkaz of the Young Mizrachi Movement and played a big part in the building up of that movement. His wife, (née Miriam Ratner) is the Secretary of the Transvaal Zionist Youth Executive and for many years a prominent member of the South African Young Mizrachi and of the Zionist Youth Movement.

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P.O.W. in Germany.

Mrs. J. Jacob, of Maynard Street, Cape Town, has received two post-cards from her son, Private Louis ("Nipper") Jacob, who is a prisoner of war in Germany, where he was taken from Italy. "I suppose you are as disappointed as I am in being in Germany, but that is fate," he writes. "We could not trust the Italians; they had let us down badly. Here where we are is not bad at all and the food is quite O.K. I thought I would be seeing you soon, but don't worry, wars do not last forever. I am in good health and hope to keep so. All I ask of you is not to fret and worry." In his second card Nipper writes, "Winter and the cold weather is just about to start, but luckily I have enough warm clothing, so I am O.K. Shall be seeing

you soon. Tried to get away in Italy but got caught."

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Palestinian Jewish Corporal Liberates Sister.

A Palestinian Jewish corporal in one of the five Jewish companies serving in Italy had the thrilling experience of helping to liberate his sister from an ex-enemy concentration camp. The joy of the 1,400 prisoners upon seeing Jewish officers and men drive up to the camp in a lorry bearing the Shield of David was described in a letter from the corporal which also referred to the relief measures organised by the soldiers and the eagerness of the liberated Jews to proceed to Palestine. An American Jewish soldier met his father and there were many meetings between the inmates of the camp and Jewish soldiers serving with all United Nations' armies.

This was told by Mr. Shertok, head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, at a national recruiting conference held at Tel-Aviv. He called for increased recruiting, mentioning that there were now 280 commissioned Jewish army officers and 40 women, besides numerous commissioned medical officers. Ten Palestinian Jews obtained commissions in the Navy, and the first commission in the R.A.F. has now been given to a Palestinian Jew promoted from the ranks. There would soon be 500 commissioned Palestinian Jewish officers.

DYSPEPSIA?

Watch your GALL-BLADDER!



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