

FROM COMPANIES TO BATTALIONS

Mr. Shertok on Palestine Regiment

Urging that it was up to the Jews of this country to provide men for more and more Jewish battalions for the defence of Palestine and for the war on its borders, the Head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, Mr. M. Shertok, in a statement at a press conference in Tel Aviv yesterday referred to the appreciative message by Mr. Winston Churchill to the demonstration by New York Jews about three weeks ago and several pronouncements made prior to it.

"Mr. Churchill in his message placed the Jewish people in the front rank of the sufferers from Nazi aggression," said Mr. Shertok. "He spoke in appreciative terms of the part played by the Jews on all fronts in the struggle against Hitler. He emphasized in particular the enlistment of the Jews of Palestine in the fighting and defence forces."

"His appreciation of the Yishuv's military effort brings out the wider significance of that effort for the Jewish people as a whole."

"In all other countries Jews are fighting as part of the armies of their respective countries, undistinguished from the rest. It is only in Palestine that they appear as a distinct national entity representing the Jewish people as such."

A New Stage

"The announcement about the formation of Jewish battalions was made in response to prolonged efforts and continuous representations. Now that this has been conceded, let us not be satisfied with what has so far been done in the matter of recruiting. We have to enlarge its scope considerably," Mr. Shertok said.

"The fact that only the infantry companies have received this promotion justifies the special importance we have always attached to enlistment in that force. It is a reward and a justification of the hard work put in by the soldiers of these companies who day and night did guard duty."

Isolated Service Over

Mr. Shertok continued that the formation of the companies into battalions meant that this condition of isolated service had come to an end, that there was going to be higher training, more up-to-date equipment, more effective preparation for actual fighting, a wider scope for all military activity, and a greater measure of fellowship between the soldiers.

"The Jewish units in the other Services had lost none of their importance, and were asking for more recruits."

The speaker then went on to speak of local Jewish defence organizations — the temporary additional police and more particularly, the Jewish Settlement Police.

Larger Reserves

Whilst awaiting further particulars of the Secretary for War's latest statement concerning this force, Mr. Shertok repeated the urgent plea that the JISP be strengthened and that it be trained and equipped to render home guard duties should a major emergency arise.

Mr. Shertok declared that infantry battalions and the comprehensive organization of an effective Home Guard were the essential frameworks for the cooperation of Palestine Jews in the country's defence.

"It is for the authorities to create these frameworks. It is for the Yishuv to fill them."

Mr. Shertok also discussed Sir James Grigg's statement on the Jewish Army.

Mr. Shertok later replied to questions and announced that each battalion might comprise five companies. The garrison guards company of the Buffs were being formed for the purpose of relieving the infantry formations for training.

Asked about the absence of special badges, Mr. Shertok expressed the opinion that the fact that Palestinian Jews would be able to reach the rank of commanding officer of a battalion constituted a more vital privilege. He observed that the 137 commissioned officers, aside from 80 medical officers and some chaplains, included six Majors commanding 4 RASC, and two R.E. companies, as well as 27 Captains in various formations and on special duties. There were 10 Jewish officers in the ATS.

Concentrated recruiting for the infantry was now essential, he declared, revealing that less than one quarter of the recruits in recent months had enlisted for the Buffs. Not all recruits could meet the physical standard of the infantry while tradesmen had either preferred or had been transferred to technical units.

Some 1,000 men had volunteered for the Auxiliary Police in the past few months, he said. As new airports and other bases would be established more men would be needed to guard them. In an emergency these formations would become combatant.

Listener's Corner

Mr. M. Shertok, in addressing a New Year's message to the Jewish members of H.M. Forces, said that their numbers had grown during the past year by over 7,000. Jewish troops had suffered casualties during the year and many of them had fallen into the hands of the enemy, yet they were undaunted and would increase their efforts until victory was won.

Greetings for the New Year were broadcast over the P.B.S. last night by the Head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, Mr. M. Shertok, to Jewish servicemen and women now in the Middle East Forces.

Declaring that their number had been increased by over 7,000 since his last New Year's message, and that a new arm of the Service had been added by the 1,800 A.T.S. women, Mr. Shertok recalled the sacrifices on the battlefield which honoured the name of Israel by their blood.

They also remembered at this time their brethren who were prisoners of war and who would be restored to their people after victory.

A precious charge had been placed in the hands of the soldiers — the national honour. He urged the scattered Jewish units to maintain their integrity.

Right of Jews to An Army of Their Own

DEMAND HAS NOT BEEN RELINQUISHED

In a statement published in the August issue of "Palestine and Middle East," the Tel Aviv economic monthly magazine, which has just appeared, Mr. M. Shertok, head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, affirmed that the demand for a Jewish Army had not been relinquished.

After reviewing the developments which have led to the formation of the Palestine Regiment with Jewish battalions, Mr. Shertok recalled that the Secretary for War had recognized the claim of Palestine Jewry to play their part in the defence of the country. He had rejected, however, the demand of the Jewish people for an Army of its own. Mr. Shertok added:

"The demand for a Jewish Army can, like any other demand, be rejected by those in authority. The right of the Jews to have an army of their own, on the other hand, cannot be denied. That right is rooted in the fact that there is a Jewish people in the world which is the object of aggression by the enemy."

The Jewish people will not cease to stress that right and to plead for its recognition. Until this is conceded, the Jews of Palestine will not cease to do their duty in the war against the enemy, within the framework of such opportunities as are given to them, and which are constantly expanded.

The novel development in the announcement by the Secretary for War is not its rejection of the claim for a Jewish Army. It is the fact that Jewish battalions are now to be formed.

Mr. Willkie left Jerusalem on Saturday morning. While in Palestine, he met Mr. M. Shertok, Head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency; Ruhi Bey Abdul Hadi, of the Secretariat; Auni Bey Abdul Hadi; Dr. A. Altman, of the New Zionist (Revisionist) Organization; and others. He also called on Miss Henrietta Szold.

RECRUITING, MANPOWER REVIEWED

MR. SHERTOK'S SURVEY TO ZIONIST COUNCIL

Recruiting and the proper distribution of Palestine Jewry's manpower were reviewed by the Head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, Mr. M. Shertok, in a political survey given to a session of the Inner Zionist General Council held in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

Mr. H. Farbstein was in the chair. Dr. B.Z. Mossinson, memorialized the late Dr J.M. Landau, Chief Rabbi of South Africa; Mr. Joseph Baran Meyuhah; and Mr. S.T. Rosenfeld, a settler of Menahemia.

An exchange of views, in which most members of the Inner Council took part, developed after Mr. Shertok's review and lasted until the evening. The discussion was not concluded and another session next week will reach decisions on various proposals submitted by the Executive and several members of the Council.

Departure in Recruiting

Emphasizing the departure in Palestine Jewish recruiting provided by the formation of infantry battalions, Mr. Shertok in his survey said that this innovation might be regarded as another in the chain of achievements leading eventually to the full participation of Palestine Jewry in the war. These achievements had come about as a result of continued political representations, but they would never have materialized without the fact of thousands of Jewish volunteers in Palestine who had responded to the calls on each occasion and provided a basis for further progress.

"We must draw conclusions for the future from this development," went on the speaker. "It is only by large-scale volunteering that we may be enabled to overcome the obstacles still in our path until the battalions are made fully ready for battle action. We must increase the recruiting to the infantry battalions by all the means at our disposal."

Turning to the question of manpower and the best possible distribution for the war effort, Mr. Shertok stressed that even with the present numbers available the Yishuv was able by proper regulation to give many more thousands to the armed Services.

But it should none the less be clear that the problem of manpower was becoming more acute as the requirements of the Army for recruits and also labour needs were growing rapidly. The centre of gravity at present was not so much the proper distribution of manpower for intensified production but the production of manpower for proper distribution.

The speaker reviewed Zionist political work in America and gave details of the efforts of Dr. Weizman, Mr. D. Ben Gurion, Dr. N. Goldman, and American Zionist leaders.

165 "Solel Boneh" Volunteers