

CONFIDENTIAL

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Eliezer Kaplan
Dr. Nahum Goldmann

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FROM: Eliahu Epstein

1. SHERTOK'S JOURNEY TO ITALY AND GREECE.

JEWISH BRIGADE.

During his two weeks' stay in Italy, Shertok had an opportunity to visit the Jewish Brigade and most of the sections of Jewish soldiers scattered all over Italy. He brought back with him the best impressions as to the morale of our soldiers and the attitude of their British and American superiors which was expressed through their attitude to Shertok himself and also what he heard from our soldiers. Shertok had the impression that the expedition of the Jewish Brigade to the battle line was done intentionally in order to give the Brigade a chance to participate actively in this war. At first our soldiers were tried out on a small sector of the front and, after they proved their responsibility and capacity to execute the assignments given to them, they were sent to one of the most difficult parts of the front. The Brigade has already suffered casualties. There is a Jewish cemetery in Ravenna with more than 24 graves. Some of the soldiers buried there were killed in action and some died of wounds. More than one hundred wounded are in hospitals.

There is an urgent need for a special fund to support those who suffered in this war either through battle wounds which made them invalids or from other causes. This fund should have a general Jewish character and not specifically Palestinian, and it should be supported not only by the Sochnuth. There is already a donation of Pal. £ 8,000. from the Argentine. This work should be continued all over the world.

Brigadier Benjamin proved to be a success. He is a good Jew and a good commander. Field Marshall Alexander and General Mark Clark praised our soldiers for their sense of responsibility and discipline. Field Marshall Alexander also said that each soldier individually is a responsible person and does not lose his senses under circumstances in which the soldier has to find his own way.

The feeling among our soldiers is that they are getting all the necessary aid as far as the Brigade is concerned, tanks, best equipment, etc. The relationship between the Brigade and other allied soldiers is excellent.

Within the Brigade the relations between the Jews and the 300 British soldiers, serving in the artillery sector of the Brigade, are also excellent. There is a definite tendency on the part of the headquarters to keep these British soldiers in the Brigade.

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In the Brigade are also more than 200 Jewish soldiers who came from England. Their devotion to the Brigade and its Jewish character is very deep and sincere. Field Marshall Alexander promised Shertok to transfer the ATS Jewesses, who are serving in military hospitals, to those hospitals which contain mainly wounded soldiers from the Brigade.

At this moment the essential questions concerning the Brigade are the following:

- a) Reinforcement. In case we do not have more Jewish volunteers from Palestine, the percentage of non-Jews will inevitably increase.
- b) The future of our soldiers as far as reinforcements are concerned. 150 Jewish volunteers who are now in training in Egypt will soon be transferred to Italy and join the Brigade. More work, as far as recruiting of volunteers in Palestine is concerned, will have to be done.

The interesting fact which Shertok came across was that even our soldiers, who are not a part of the Brigade, have the feeling that they are serving the Brigade. F.i. the maps which are used in the front line by the Brigade are mainly printed by a Jewish group in the map department of the headquarters. This feeling has done a lot of good for many of our soldiers who were disappointed about their inability to become part of the Brigade.

Apart from other factors, the British commanders particularly mentioned the good behaviour of our soldiers. There is practically no drunkenness, practically no cases where Jewish soldiers are involved in scandals, disturbance of public order, etc., something that is very common in other sections of the army.

The greatest impression of Shertok was that when he was speaking to our officers and other soldiers he felt that they are already living in a world of complete Jewish freedom and equality. It may be a great danger when these people come back to Palestine and find a different political atmosphere from that in which they are living now. Some of these soldiers suggested to Shertok to call a Congress of Jewish soldiers serving in the various allied armies. This congress should be held in Nuremberg and from that city a declaration of "Aam Yisrael Chai" should be proclaimed and the demand for a Jewish state should be expressed with all possible determination and vigor. ■

Shertok found many ~~orphans~~ ^{orphans}, especially those who came from the settlements, nostalgic for their farms and homes. By no means is this feeling disturbing the effective execution of their duties.

There was great importance in the visit of Gurion to Italy. This visit gave the soldiers the feeling that they are not orphans and that somebody cared for their future.

Shertok succeeded in arranging for the Jewish soldiers, serving in the British and American armies, a possibility of studying Hebrew. The necessary arrangements will soon be made and will be given official support. A readiness exists also to arrange for the soldiers in the Brigade lessons in various professions.

On his way back to Palestine Shertok saw General Paget in Cairo. The conversation was very tense. Paget was very outspoken in his negative attitude towards everything connected with our cause. Shertok's impression was that he is a bitter anti-semitic and is influencing in this way the staff serving under him. Our soldiers are feeling this in many respects.

2. SHERTOK'S VISIT WITH THE POPE.

There was no difficulty for Shertok to obtain an audience with the Pope. It was very short and lasted only 7½ minutes. Shertok thanked the Pope for the attitude of the Catholic church in saving Jews and especially Jewish children. Shertok demanded that the Jewish children, who were saved, should be returned to the Jewish people from where they came. The Pope's reply was rather vague and he did not show any intention to continue the conversation of this particular point. Shertok also mentioned that there are no contradictions between our cause and the Vatican. He asked for the help of the Catholic church in establishing a Jewish Palestine. On this point the Pope made the following remark: "But there are Arabs in Palestine", and asked how many there are. He did not say anything about the matter itself in his reply to Shertok. After the conversation with the Pope Mr. Shertok was sorry that he did not also ask for an interview with the Secretary of State of the Vatican.

3. THE SITUATION OF THE JEWS IN ITALY.

There are now in allied occupied Italy 15,000 Italian Jews and 7,000 refugees. (This was before the beginning of the new drive northward by the allied troops). 1300 Jews came to Palestine as immigrants. 917 were taken to America and kept in a camp there. There exists a Hechalutz group in this camp.

The situation of the Jewish refugees in Italy has improved. Many entered business and are taking an active part in the black market. Economically they are better off than most of the Italian Jews.

Dr. Nahon, the Jewish Agency representative in Italy, is making great efforts for the Aliyah of 1000 Jews among them 300 Italian. The work of youth hachsharah is mainly carried on through the initiative and active participation of our soldiers. One of the handicaps for the Aliyah of Italian Jews is the present separation of families, in some cases one part of the family is still in Northern Italy under German domination.

Even under the existing new conditions there is a constant conversion of Jews into christianity. During the last two years 4000 Jews were converted. In many Jewish communities 70% of the Jews entered mixed marriages. There is a definite tendency of either following the line of complete assimilation by all available means and in the shortest possible time or by becoming expressively Jewish and joining the Zionist ranks. This tendency for a radical solution puts great responsibilities on our shoulders in facilitating the Zionist solution.

There is a great demand for Hebrew teachers and instructors from Palestine for the training of youth, opening of Hebrew schools, etc.

Our soldiers are doing great work in saving Jews who are still in Northern Italy under German occupation. They are also collecting Jewish children scattered over many monasteries and Catholic religious institutions. 50 Jewish children have been saved in this way by our soldiers. 100 children have been lost as it was too late to do anything to save them and they became Christians. Only last Easter many Jewish children were converted by their protectors.

Dr. Nahon is doing excellent work. One of his achievements was the conversion of Haggerton Smith who from an anti-Zionist became recently a most enthusiastic supporter of refugee transfers to Palestine. He is doing his utmost to facilitate their Aliyah from Yugoslavia and Italy. He asked Shertok for available certificates and even insisted that these should be given on account of certificates assigned to refugees in Maritius. Under his pressure Shertok had to promise 100 certificates which had a very good effect on the morale of the refugees when they learned of this matter.

4. VISIT TO GREECE.

Only ten percent of the Jews have been saved in Greece. Others perished either in Greece or by deportation. Greece occupies the second place after Poland as far as the destruction of Jewish communities is concerned. Only 8,000 Jews remained in Greece. In Salonica, of a population of 60,000 Jews, only 700 remained. In Athens the law of confiscation of Jewish property was cancelled. In Salonica not yet.

In Athens many Christians helped their Jewish neighbors, and especially the present Regent Patriarch Damaskinos. The situation of the remaining Jews is very difficult. Shertok visited many of the places where the Jews are living. Their material conditions are terrible. Many are sick and invalid.

Shertok saw Prime Minister Volgaris. He spoke to him about questions of Aliyah and cooperation between Palestine and Greece. Volgaris expressed his sympathy with Zionism and Jewish Palestine and promised help in questions of Aliyah. Shertok was very much impressed by his conversation with Regent Patriarch Damaskinos. The Regent mentioned the help he had given to the Jews during the German occupation despite the warnings and threats he received from the Germans. While speaking about the sympathy of the Greek Orthodox Church with the Jews he mentioned the difficulties this church has with the Arabs in Palestine.

Shertok had several meetings with the Jewish leaders in Athens and spoke before a large Jewish audience and also before the Hechalutz. Although a tired and physically weak people, most of them will be excellent material for all categories of Aliyah.

Shertok also saw the British Ambassador in Athens, who promised help to the leaders of the Jewish community in arranging their affairs. Shertok noticed that nothing can be done without British support and there is a de facto British rule over all affairs in Greece.

One of the matters which the Jewish leaders in Athens put before Shertok was the following:-