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Religiosity in the Jewish Legion and Reverend Leib Aisack Falk

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Jewish chaplaincy in the British Armed Forces was initiated in 1892 by Reverend Francis Lyon Cohen. On his own initiative and as a civilian he arranged religious services for Jewish soldiers in the garrison at Aldershot. During the South African War of 1899–1902 he initiated and maintained contact with soldiers by corresponding with them and their families, which became a regular feature of Jewish chaplaincy. He inaugurated increasingly high-profile annual military services at Hanukkah, a festival with military associations, to showcase the Jewish military contribution, especially in the South African wars. Cohen left for a position in Australia in 1905 and was succeeded by Reverend Michael Adler (who was not related to the father and son Chief Rabbis Nathan and Hermann Adler). In 1909 Adler was commissioned into the Territorial Force, becoming the first commissioned Jewish chaplain. In 1914 at the age of 46 Adler pressed to serve on the Western Front and did so for some three and a half years, being awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). Other Jewish chaplains were gradually appointed. By the end of the First World War there were nineteen British Jewish chaplains and three Australian Jewish chaplains serving effectively under British Jewish chaplaincy command. All but one of them ministered to Jewish soldiers widely scattered throughout the ranks.

The role of Reverend (later Rabbi) Leib Aisack Falk (1889–1957) was different. At the age of twenty-nine it fell to him to serve as a chaplain to a nearly all-Jewish fighting force within the British Army, reputedly the first to exist since the days of the Bible and the first to soldier in the Land of Israel. The Jewish Legion, as it became known, comprised three infantry battalions of the Royal Fusiliers. Falk ministered to the 38th Battalion, serving under Lieutenant-Colonel John Patterson, an Irish Protestant philosemite who aspired to lead a Jewish army to liberate the Holy Land.

Unlike the other Jewish chaplains, Falk did not need to locate and maintain contact with individual widely-dispersed Jewish soldiers. Yet, as well as the issues faced by all military chaplains, Falk encountered

unique challenges, including those relating to Zionism. Over his three years of service from January 1918 until January 1921 he had to find his own solutions – pragmatic, religious, and ideological – and his own way. He was also caught up in dramatic wider events in Palestine in 1920. In 1922 he settled in Australia, where he served as a chaplain in the Second World War. The other battalions of the Jewish Legion had their own religious experiences, whose evidence is gathered together here; on the evening of Yom Kippur in 1918 the 40th had an open-air service under the stars and the 39th a forced march singing the *Kol Nidrei* prayer under enemy fire. This forms a discrete and little-known segment in the history of British Jewish military chaplaincy.

The literature on British Jewish military chaplaincy is limited. After the First World War, Michael Adler compiled the monumental *British Jewry Book of Honour* (1922), memorializing the Jewish military contribution to the war and included a section on his chaplaincy experiences. After the Second World War, two British chaplains published memoirs of their experiences: Isaac Levy, *Now I Can Tell: Middle Eastern Memories* (1978) and *Witness to Evil: Bergen-Belsen, 1945* (1995), and Leslie H. Hardman and Cecily Goodman, *The Survivors: The Story of the Belsen Remnant* (1958). So also did the three chaplains who had served with the Jewish Brigade in Italy and Europe: Bernard Moses Casper, *With the Jewish Brigade* (1947); Yaakov (Jacob) Lipschitz, *Sefer Habrigada Hayehudit* (A History of the Jewish Infantry Brigade Group; 1947); Moshe Yaffe, *A Volunteer for the Nation* (in Hebrew, details unrecorded). In his ground-breaking work *Jews and the Military, A History* (2013), Derek Penslar says of chaplaincy only that in any country Jewish military chaplains were a bellwether of Jewish acceptance within the army as a whole, a conclusion which in relation to Britain my research has confirmed.¹

1 Michael Adler, "Experiences of a Jewish Chaplain on the Western Front (1915–1918)", in *British Jewry Book of Honour* (hereafter BJBH), ed. Michael Adler (London: Caxton, 1922), 33–58; Isaac Levy, *Now I can tell: Middle Eastern Memories* (Kettering: Dalkeith Press, 1978); Levy, *Witness to Evil: Bergen-Belsen, 1945* (London: Peter Halban with European Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Leslie H. Hardman and Cecily Goodman, *The Survivors: The Story of the Belsen Remnant* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1958); Bernard Moses Casper, *With the Jewish Brigade* (London: Edward Gildston, 1947); Yaakov (Jacob) Lipschitz, *Sefer Habrigada Hayehudit* (A History of the Jewish Infantry Brigade Group; Tel Aviv: Yavne, 1947); Moshe Yaffe, 'A Volunteer for the Nation' (Hebrew, details unrecorded); see also Ze'ev Yaffe, "The Major": *The Life and Actions of Rabbi Dr Moshe Avraham (Morris) Yaffe* (Hebrew, privately printed, 2013); Morris Beckman, *The Jewish Brigade: An Army with Two Masters 1944–1945* (New York: Sarpedon, 1998). Derek Penslar, *Jews and the Military, A History* (Princeton: Princeton

Jewish units and the Jewish Legion

When, early in the First World War, the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers, Zionist leaders, notably Vladimir (later Ze'ev) Jabotinsky and Joseph Trumpeldor, realized that active Jewish support for the Allies would become an important factor in obtaining recognition of national Jewish status after the war. Their pressure led to the formation of the Zion Mule Corps, an officially non-combatant service unit comprising principally Jews who had been exiled by the Ottomans from Palestine to Alexandria. Its commanding officer was Lt. Col. John Henry Patterson, DSO (10 November 1867–18 June 1947), a fiery Irish Protestant, veteran of the South African War, big-game hunter, disciplinarian, philosemite, and Zionist.² In 1915 the Corps with its mules served with distinction at Gallipoli, becoming for all practical purposes a combatant unit. Trumpeldor served as an officer in the Corps and as Patterson's deputy at Gallipoli. Shortly after the Gallipoli campaign the Corps was disbanded.³

The Jewish Legion was created in August 1917 and came to comprise three battalions of the Royal Fusiliers ("Jewish Legion" was never in fact an official term).⁴ The 38th Battalion comprised essentially British volunteers, former members of the Zion Mule Corps, and Russian Jews living in Britain, some of whom were forced into service by the Military Service Convention between Britain and Russia of July 1917; the 39th comprised essentially Jews from the United States, Canada, and Argentina; and the 40th comprised more than a thousand Palestinian Jews, together with ninety-two Turkish Jews who had been captured while fighting for the Ottoman Empire and had applied and been allowed to enlist.

The Legionnaires wore a cap badge with the emblem of a *menorah* and the word "Kadima" meaning "forward". They also wore a Star of David

University Press, 2013), 64. For the first survey of the subject see my *Jewish Chaplaincy in the British Armed Forces: Captains of the Souls of Men, 1892–2021* (London and Chicago: Vallentine Mitchell, 2022).

2 Patrick Streeter, *Mad for Zion: A Biography of Colonel J. H. Patterson* (Harlow: Matching Press, 2004); Denis Brian, *The Seven Lives of Colonel Patterson: How an Irish Lion Hunter led the Jewish Legion to Victory* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

3 Michael Keren and Shlomit Keren, *We are Coming, Unafraid: The Jewish Legions and the Promised Land in the First World War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010; hereafter Keren 2010), 5, 73, 113, 150.

4 Casper, *With the Jewish Brigade*, 15–18. For its formation see *The Times*, 8 Aug. 1917, repr. on its centenary, 8 Aug. 2017, 24 as "The Jewish Corps".

insignia on their left sleeve, coloured red for the 38th Battalion, blue for the 39th, and purple for the 40th. There was also a 42nd holding and training battalion based at Plymouth. The Jewish Legion also became known as the Jewish Battalion and the Judeans, and colloquially as The King's Own Schneiders (meaning "tailors", as many men of the 38th were tailors) and the Jewsiliers. In total it comprised some seven thousand men. The 38th was commanded by the same John Patterson who had commanded the Zion Mule Corps; the 39th by Lt. Col. Eliezar Margolin (1875–1944, who, born in Bielgorod in Russia, had lived a rough outdoor life from 1892 in Rehovot, Palestine, and then from 1902 in Australia, served with Australian forces at Gallipoli where he was awarded the DSO, Egypt, and Palestine and then settled in Australia); and the 40th successively by Lt. Cols. Frederick D. Samuels, M. F. Scott, and Margolin.⁵ The Legion did not arrive in the Middle East until after General Allenby had taken Jerusalem in December 1917. It acquitted itself well in the battles for the Jordan Valley in 1918. However, it was repeatedly sidelined and given inconsequential and laborious tasks, which was attributed by Patterson to prejudice against it within the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and to its being a sole regiment unintegrated into and so politically unshielded within the larger formation of a brigade.⁶ The Legion was disbanded in 1921. There are various accounts and memoirs of its activities; Penslar concludes that it achieved little but was a source of pride to Zionists and a contribution to Zionist influence.⁷

It fell to Reverend Leib Aisack Falk at the age of twenty-nine to serve as the sole chaplain to what, albeit within the British Army, was essentially a Jewish fighting force. It was reputedly the first Jewish fighting force to exist in more than 1,700 years since the Bar-Kochba revolt in 135 CE, and the first to participate in the liberation of the Holy Land and to soldier on its soil since the days of the Bible.⁸

5 Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The Story of the Jewish Legion* (New York: Bernard Ackerman, 1945), 151–6. On Margolin see Rodney Gouttman, "I saw it my Way: Rabbi L. A. Falk and the 'Jewish Legion' of World War One", *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 23:2 (June 2017): 271–2; Mark Dapin, *Jewish Anzacs: Jews in the Australian Military* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2017), 64, 66–7, 89, 92, 121–2, 150–51; *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter JC), 23 June 1944, 13.

6 Christopher Smith, "'The March of the Judeans': The London Recruits of the Jewish Battalion in the First World War", in *The Jewish Experience of the First World War*, ed. Edward Madigan and Gideon Reuveni (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 207–29.

7 Penslar, *Jews and the Military*, 196–200.

8 Streeter, *Mad for Zion*, 89 n. 22; Brian, *Seven Lives*, 85. In 1794 Berek Yoselovich is said

The duties of military chaplains are diverse. In wartime they include arranging and conducting religious services, visiting the wounded in hospital, conducting funerals, correspondence with soldiers and sometimes their families, functioning outside the chain of command as a confidant and quasi-social worker to whom soldiers can safely entrust their fears and confidences on almost anything, and generally maintaining morale and serving as a force for good in troubled and sometimes traumatic times. Normally, a chaplain is appointed to a military unit or a hospital and ministers to those whom he finds there. For Jewish chaplains, by contrast, the particular difficulty is the dispersion of Jewish soldiers, especially in wartime. So the first challenge to Jewish chaplains has always been to locate their Jewish soldiers and then to contact and if possible visit them. In the First World War, Jewish chaplains would arrange religious services, post date, time, and location details on unit noticeboards, and complete preprinted postcards with details of the service and send them to the Jewish soldiers. Maintaining contact with small numbers of Jewish soldiers in numerous different units often on the move was difficult. Mobility over sometimes vast areas was always a challenge. In the First World War only Michael Adler was provided with a car, while the other chaplains had to hitch rides on passing lorries, ride horses, or trudge through the mud, though in the Second World War transport was more frequently available.

After the war Falk published his wartime memoirs in a series of articles in the Australian journal *The Maccabean*.⁹ Beyond this, the only literature on Falk is one chapter in the book by Michael and Shlomit Keren.¹⁰ That apart, we know little about religious life and experiences in the Jewish Legion. Parts of the Legion had memorable religious experiences, and this study gathers together widely scattered material about them.

to have organized a Jewish regiment in Poland as part of General Tadeusz Kosciuszko's army in the Polish War to throw off the oppressive overlordship of the Russian Tsar; the regiment fought valiantly, but most of its soldiers fell in battle against the superior Russian onslaughts. The Zion Mule Corps served at Gallipoli in 1915.

9 Rev. L. A. Falk, "With the Jewish Battalions in Palestine: Memoirs of a Jewish Chaplain", *The Maccabean*, 15, 22 Feb., 1, 8, 22 March, 5 April, 3, 17 May, 7, 21 June, 5 July, 2 Aug., 4 Oct., 1 Nov. 1929 (hereafter "Falk Memoirs"); see also L. A. Falk, "Jewish Legion Reminiscences", [unidentified publication] (n.d. [1948–57]): 11–14.

10 Keren 2010, ch. 7; see notes on 176–8 re private papers of Falk in the Israel Defence Force Archive. See also Louise Rosenberg, "Rabbi Falk's Four Years as Jewish Legion Chaplain", *Journal of the Sydney Great Synagogue* (Sept. 1977): 14; Jewish Museum, London (hereafter JM), photographs and documents, boxes 201, 202.

Leib Aisack Falk

Leib Aisack Falk was born on 31 January 1889 in Bauska, Latvia. His father, Abraham Falk, was a bootmaker and studied in *yeshivah*; his mother was Hannah Hillkovitz. Falk was the youngest of their two daughters and three sons. He attended *yeshivot* in Lithuania including those in Kaunas (Kovno) and Telsiai (Telz). His teachers included Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook, who later became Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem.¹¹

Fearing that he would be conscripted into the army, Falk's mother sent him alone to Britain. In March 1911 he was ordained as a minister, serving the small Scottish Jewish communities of Ayr, then Inverness, and then in 1912–15 Dundee. He must have devoted himself to studying English. On Sunday 2 May 1915 he married Fanny Rosen, née Schlesinger, of Dundee, the daughter of the president of the congregation, who was a pawnbroker. At the wedding reception he was presented with an illuminated address (a popular way of thanking individuals for their contribution to an organization, utilizing artistry – the “illuminated” element – ranging from simplistic to sophisticated) and a handsome tray.¹² The couple moved to Plymouth where in May 1915 on the first day of the festival of Shavuot Falk was inducted as the minister. He served there until January 1918. Two sons were born, David Ben-Zion in 1916 and Gerald Yedidyah in 1918. From March 1917 Falk served in Plymouth as an officiating clergyman (the term used for civilian ministers) in Southern Command to Jewish troops in Devon, Cornwall, and Somerset, conducting services for them in Plymouth and elsewhere.¹³

In 1917 the 38th Battalion was training at the regimental depot at Crown Hill Barracks near Plymouth Harbour. Its commanding officer, Lt. Col. Patterson approached Falk on 30 August to become the battalion chaplain.¹⁴ Falk later wrote of his concerns: “This nerve-racking thought darkened my enhanced dream of seeing Jewish soldiers redeeming Palestine in the glorious position of the Maccabeans of old. When Colonel

11 Dovid Gluck, “A Tribute to my Great Grandfather”, Ms., private collection, 2004, 4–6.

12 JC, 28 May 1915; *Jewish World*, 12 May 1915, 25; 2 June 1915, 13; Gluck, “Tribute”.

13 National Archives, Nationality and Naturalisation File, HO 144/1485/351707; Naturalisation Certificate A2978, HO 334/81/2978; War Office Officer's File, WO 374/23512; Medal Card WO/372/7/12700; Shlomit Keren and Michael Keren, “Chaplain with a Star of David: Reverend Leib Isaac Falk and the Jewish Legions” (hereafter Keren 2008), *Israel Affairs* 14:2 (April 2008): 186.

14 University of Southampton, Special Collections MS 185, AJ 320 1/1, Papers of M. J. Landa.

Patterson called on me at Plymouth in August, 1917, with the suggestions that I be the Chaplain of the forces, I asked him what guarantee he could offer that "Germany, as a counter-stroke to the policy of Great Britain, would not also form Jewish units to fight in Palestine on the side of the Turks. Think of it! Such an experiment could be charged with the gravest consequences for the unity of the Jewish people." Patterson disposed of this argument: "Germany will not form Jewish units because Germany is quite aware of the fact that every Jew realises that the possibility of a Jewish national home could only be affected [sic] by liberating Palestine from its masters, the Turks, and not by consolidating their power. Where is the Jew who would willingly be party to the destruction of every vestige of chance, every glimmer of hope of strengthening Jewish interests in Palestine? Germany must realise the impracticability of forming Jewish units."¹⁵ Patterson's logic may be doubtful bearing in mind the virtual race among the powers in 1917 to affirm Zionism, but Patterson probably did not know this, and Falk seems to have been satisfied by his argument.

A number of ministers, including Rev. C. Davies of Stoke Newington Synagogue of the United Synagogue in London, volunteered to serve as a chaplain to the new unit. The day after seeing Falk, Patterson wrote to M. J. Landa, the Honorary Secretary to the Jewish Regiment Committee – Care and Comforts Fund: "He seems a very keen man, earnest and willing to do everything possible for the good of the Regiment."¹⁶

Falk acceded to Patterson's request. In *With the Judaeans in the Palestine Campaign* (1922) Patterson wrote of Falk:

I had for some time been making strenuous efforts to obtain the services of the Rev. L. A. Falk, the Acting Jewish Chaplain at Plymouth, as our spiritual guide, and luckily I was successful, for, at the last moment all difficulties were surmounted, and he joined us as we embarked. I had had many warnings from people who ought to have known better that he was not a suitable man for the post, but I had seen him and judged for myself, and I felt sure that he would suit my Jews from Russia much better than a Rabbi chosen because he was a Jew from England. His work and his example to others, during the whole time he served with us, were beyond all praise, and I often felt very glad, when he was put to the test of his manhood, that I had not listened to the voice of the croaker in England.¹⁷

Doubtless to enable him to accept the proffered chaplaincy role,

¹⁵ "Falk Memoirs", 15 Feb. 1929.

¹⁶ University of Southampton, Papers of M. J. Landa.

¹⁷ J.H. Patterson, *With the Judaeans in the Palestine Campaign* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 35.

Falk submitted an application for naturalization as a British subject, which reached the Home Office on 7 November 1917.¹⁸ In a letter to the Home Office of 21 November, Jabotinsky asked for the naturalization of Falk as the proposed chaplain to the Jewish Regiment to be hastened.¹⁹ The application was granted, and on 27 December 1917 Falk became a naturalized British subject.

On 7 December 1917 Patterson formally requested the army to appoint Falk as the chaplain to the Jewish Legion. On 4 January 1918 Falk submitted his application for appointment as a temporary chaplain to the forces. It stated that he was Russian by birth, had been a rabbi in Russia in 1909 and 1910, had been ordained in England in March 1911, had been an officiating clergyman since March 1917, was an ardent Zionist worker, and spoke English, Yiddish, other European languages, and Hebrew, which was essential for the large number of Hebrew-speaking troops in the 38th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. On 24 or 25 January 1918 Falk reported for duty at Crown Hill. On 25 January he signed the formal offer to serve as a temporary chaplain fourth class in the rank of captain for twenty-four months. He named as his next of kin his wife and his son David.²⁰

Falk wrote: "The glorious sunshine of Devon with its fogless atmosphere was conducive to change the pale and sunken-chested 'schneiders' into robust looking fellows with expanded chests and hardened muscles... . To see these men who only a month or two ago were sitting bent over their machines, now standing erect with their chests thrown toward 'forming fours' and responding with military precision to the yelling commands of the Non Commissioned Officer and to the thundering admonitions of the all-important Sergeant Major, appeared indeed to be an achievement of the impossible."²¹

Falk identified some among the men, especially those who had served in the Zion Mule Corps and "went through the furnace of Moloch at Gallipoli" in 1915, who had an interest in the ideals for which the battalion stood. "They were the Kaleb's and Joshua's of the battalion. Unfortunately these few were not able to exercise a marked influence over

18 National Archives, Nationality and Naturalisation File, HO 144/1485/351707. University of Cambridge, Special Collection ADD 8171, esp. Box 4, Letters of Redcliffe Salaman, letter to his wife, 7 Oct. 1917.

19 Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, en.jabotinsky.org, A1-2/7, 2712.

20 See National Archives, Nationality and Naturalisation File, HO 144/1485/351707; Naturalisation Certificate A2978, HO 334/81/2978; War Office Officer's File, WO 374/23512; Medal Card WO/372/7/12700.

21 Keren 2008, 191; Keren 2010, 114; "Falk Memoirs", 5 April 1929.

the preponderous majority. They were like widely scattered palms in a desert, not affording shelter to the weary travellers but merely breaking the monotony of the endless sandy waste.”²² They contrasted with the majority, mainly Russian-born Jews from the “great industrial cities” of Britain, who were not motivated by patriotism, and with the “happy-go-lucky” English types who performed their military duties as efficiently as they could but knew nothing of Jewish history, literature, and Zionism. To try to serve as spiritual mentor to them all, Falk stressed the consistency between the goal of Jewish national revival and England’s war aims, which included the conquest of Palestine. He defined both tasks as providential: “It was ... a curious coincidence that Plymouth from whence the Pilgrim Fathers, a heroic band of idealists, sailed in 1620 in quest of a new home, where they could live in conformity with their moral precepts, should also be the training ground of the Jewish Battalion which also aimed at striking a blow for Israel’s spiritual freedom and the laying of the foundation of a new life dedicated to the ideals of peace and righteousness as preached by the Jewish prophets.”²³

Revolted by bayonet practice, from which the “struggle within me was intense”, Falk could not bring himself to preach to the men of their duties in time of war in the name of religion.²⁴ Rather, he constantly reminded them of their mission: “In the remote past the Law went forth from Zion; happy are you that take it unto Zion, to establish in the Sacred Land the glories of our future. Be strong and of good courage, quit yourselves like men.”²⁵

The 38th Battalion included some Christian officers and NCOs (non-commissioned officers) and a few men, including two Lutherans.²⁶ Kosher meat was supplied, the Sabbath was the day of rest, and Sabbath services were held attended by the colonel and all the officers. Hanukah 1917 was celebrated in the euphoria of the capture of Jerusalem by General Allenby’s army. Chief Rabbi Dr. Joseph Hertz visited the battalion.²⁷ So, on Wednesday 5 December 1917, did Falk’s mentor from Latvia, Rabbi Kook, who had found himself stranded in Britain during much of the

22 “Falk Memoirs”, 22 March 1929.

23 Keren 2008, 191; Keren 2010, 113; “Falk Memoirs”, 5 April 1929.

24 “Falk Memoirs”, 5 April 1929.

25 Keren 2008, 192; Keren 2010, 115, citing Falk Private Papers, Israel Defence Force Archive; see also “Falk Memoirs”, 17 May 1929, citing Senior Jewish Chaplain Home Forces, Rev. Solomon Lipson.

26 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 23, 72.

27 “Falk Memoirs”, 5 April 1929.

war.²⁸ He knew some of the men from the Zion Mule Corps and spoke with them in Hebrew. He investigated the state of *kashrut* and was promised improvement. He spoke to the men, giving them, Patterson wrote, a strong address on their duties as Jewish soldiers. Kook believed that the war was a gigantic struggle between nations whose outcome would bring about the redemption of the Jewish People and of the whole world.²⁹

In this spirit Falk drew on biblical history in his sermons to inspire the soldiers. For him the identity of the Legion as descendants of ancient Hebrew warriors was to be linked to their identity as residents of England and the other countries in which they found refuge. The war was an opportunity for them to be the vanguard of Jewish people reasserting their religious and national roots and gaining a place in the community of nations. The soldiers were departing Plymouth, he told them, “to add a glorious chapter to our unequal history and the history of this noble country under whose wings we have found protection”.³⁰

Opposition to a Jewish unit

In 1914 at the start of the war there had been a proposal to form an all-Jewish unit within the British Army. It had proved highly controversial within the established Jewish community and had not succeeded. One of the principal opponents had been the then sole Jewish chaplain, Michael Adler, who believed that English Jews should participate in His Majesty’s Army as full patriots. In 1917 the proposal to form a Jewish Legion was equally controversial. Again, one of the principal opponents was Adler, who at a banquet in London in 1919 referred to the Jewish Legion by the demeaning name of the “Jordan Highlanders”, causing great resentment among the men of the Legion, who were still at war.

In his memoirs published in 1929 Falk referred bitterly to Adler, commenting that “Like a gallant soldier he went forth to give battle to the protagonists of the Battalion. He sent a letter to the War Office where in strong terms he protested against the formation of the Jewish Units and even labelled the whole idea as ‘irresponsible’.”³¹ In *The Jewish Legion: Fiftieth Anniversary of the Jewish Battalions 1917–1967*, Dr Joseph Schechtman wrote:

The number of volunteers would have been considerably larger since the

28 Letters of Redcliffe Salaman, letters to his wife, 3 and 28 Nov. 1917.

29 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 25; Keren 2008, 194–5; JC, 14 Dec. 1917, 12–13.

30 Keren 2008, 195–6.

31 “Falk Memoirs”, 15 Feb. 1929.

Adjutant General had granted permission to Jews serving in other units, even at the front, to apply for transfer to the Jewish Regiment. Several thousand such applications were made, but only a few hundred men actually transferred. This discrepancy could be ascribed largely to the influence of the Army rabbis on the European continent who, apparently under the instructions of the Chief Chaplain, the Reverend Michael Adler himself, had been preaching that it was shameful for a “true Britisher” to be banded with “a lot of dirty foreign Jews”. A memorandum “re Jewish Legion” submitted by Dr Weitzmann [sic] implies that the military authorities were lax in implementing the transfers, fearing a delay in the military employment of the transferees. The fact is that the Jewish unit profited only slightly from this opportunity.³²

Jabotinsky, who is discussed later in this article, also criticized Adler for instructing all the Jewish chaplains in France to “preach that it was a shameful act to Jews to serve in our regiment”, with the result that instead of thousands of transfers there were only several hundred, and it took more than four months, rather than the few weeks it should have taken, to form even one battalion.³³

A strong supporter of a Jewish regiment, Falk considered an all-Jewish fighting force part of the revival of an ancient Hebrew warrior as well as the best way to show loyalty to England. He also felt that a distinct Jewish unit would allow Jewish welfare systems to be harnessed to support the needs of Jewish soldiers. He wrote: “The safeguard of the religious requirement of the Jewish soldier proved to be a most essential factor in bracing up his spirit, driving out gloom and despair and making them forget for a short while the miseries of War conditions.”³⁴

On Monday 4 February 1918, before their departure for the Holy Land, four hundred men of the 38th Battalion (about half its strength) marched through the City of London. Three days before, the *Jewish Chronicle* had written: “It will be the first time that a Regiment consisting entirely of Jews will have tramped the streets of England, and the march of the Judeans will be a picturesque reminder of how history is being made in these days,

32 Joseph Schechtman, *The Jewish Legion: Fiftieth Anniversary of the Jewish Battalions 1917–1967*, available at Jabotinsky Institute, K1-28, p. 3.

33 Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 101; Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 25; Elias Gilner, *War and Hope: A History of the Jewish Legion* (New York: Herzl Press, 1969), 111–12; Martin Watts, *The Jewish Legion and the First World War* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 117, 259.

34 “Falk Memoirs”, 15 Feb. 1929; Keren 2008, 187–8; Keren 2010, 109–10.

here and in Palestine.”³⁵ Headed by the band of the Coldstream Guards, the battalion marched with fixed bayonets under the blue and white Jewish flag and the Union Jack.³⁶ For the City of London to have granted this honour to any British regiment was a rare privilege. Reverend David Hirsch, a chaplain on leave from the Western Front, witnessed the march with Jewish pride.³⁷ Although he was not present, Falk felt that same pride: “This march through London undoubtedly filled the hearts of every Jew with joy. Even those who were unfriendly to the Battalion must have felt a certain satisfaction in witnessing the ceremony of the Lord Mayor taking the salute at the Mansion House. The old popular prejudice that the Jew cannot be a soldier was effectively killed.”³⁸

Inevitably, Falk’s task was rendered more difficult by opposition to the Jewish Legion. He attempted to obtain a Sefer Torah for the Legion from the congregation in Plymouth. The congregation had many which were not in use, and Falk offered to make himself responsible for its safe return. To his deep regret the community with “their narrow provincial outlook” refused the request: “I had the utmost faith that the great London Jewish Community with all its great traditions and high prestige would surely not fail to rise to the occasion, and with ceremonial dignity and solemnity, would present the Battalion with a Sepher-Torah. I even pictured in my imagination a keen and animated rivalry between Synagogues of having the distinctive honour of presenting a Sepher-Torah to the first Jewish battalion that was leaving England to fight on the fields and mountains of Palestine.”³⁹ But his endeavours to obtain a Sefer Torah seemed to have come to nought.

The 38th Battalion departs

The 38th Battalion embarked at Southampton on the S.S. Antrim at 5.00 p.m. on Tuesday 5 February 1918 bound for Taranto in southern Italy on route to Alexandria.⁴⁰ The soldiers were already boarding the ship when providence intervened, as Falk narrated:

35 JC, 1 Feb. 1918, 5.

36 Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 20, 103–4; Patterson, *With the Judeans*, 33; *The Times*, 5 Feb. 1918, repr. on its centenary 5 Feb. 2018, 28; Smith, “March of the Judeans”, 207–29.

37 Reverend David Hirsch, diary, private collection.

38 Keren 2010, 114.

39 Keren 2008, 189; see also Keren 2010, 111; “Falk Memoirs”, 3 May 1929.

40 Patterson, *With the Judeans*, 34–42.

Whilst I was engaged with the arrangement of my kit, a L/Cpl. walked up to me and saluting me smartly – to which I was not fully accustomed and hence felt shy – he said: “Sir! The Adjutant wishes to see you.” The Adjutant, whom I knew at Crown Hill, was a Major E. Neil, D.S.O., a friendly good humoured Scotchman and a great believer in diplomacy which [is] called “tact”.

On my way toward a group of officers where I was told the Adjutant was to be found, I passed a group of men who were squatting near their equipment. One man, who must have really been a gifted humourist, said to his comrades: “Abe! Better say now, ‘Vidui’ (Confession) before it is too late.” To my amusement the fellow really commenced in a true Jewish traditional plaintive tune to recite the “[A]shamnu” [literally, “We have transgressed”]. I rather liked the joke, which was typically Jewish. I would have liked to make friends with these two fellows, but my errand was rather pressing and so I had to give up this pleasure for the sake of duty.

“There is the Adjutant”, said the Orderly to me and with a click of his heels he left me. I walked up to a group of officers who were all very busy. “Can I speak to the Adjutant”, said I. “Yes”, came the reply in a deep sonorous voice from an officer who appeared to me a veritable giant of splendid physique well-groomed looking every inch a soldier. “I am the new Adjutant, Captain Ledley [sic]”, he introduced himself to me. “I sent for you”, he continued, “to take over the ‘Holy Book of Moses’, which was placed in my keeping when in London.”

I was astounded; a Sepher Torah in the keeping of a non-Jewish officer! It sounded so strange. “Where is it?” I said. “You will find it somewhere on the docks”, was his laconic reply; but when realising my bewilderment he added with a smile “Do not worry, Padre! I placed a sentry over it.” In full haste I departed to take possession of the Sepher Torah, which I found lying on a blanket amidst a pile of soldiers’ kit. An N.C.O., who happened to be a non-Jew was standing guard over it with fixed bayonet and with all solemnity of a well-disciplined English soldier.⁴¹

The Sefer Torah had been privately donated by Captain Israel Friedman and presented that day at Waterloo Station in London to the battalion before it entrained for Southampton. Falk had been with the other half of the battalion, which had travelled from Plymouth to Southampton. So, expecting to meet his predecessor, whom he knew, he had not until then met Patterson’s newly appointed adjutant, Captain Leadley (of whom Patterson spoke highly throughout the Palestine campaign). The Sefer Torah was first put into a small wicker basket hastily acquired by Falk in Southampton. It accompanied the soldiers throughout their endeavours

41 Keren 2010, 111–12; “Falk Memoirs”, 3 May 1929.

at sea and on land and was thought of as something of a good luck charm.⁴²

The battalion disembarked at Cherbourg, and then after rest periods journeyed by train across France and Italy. Falk suspended a blue and white Zionist flag from the window of his compartment on the train, which caused a German Jewish soldier in a nearby prisoner of war camp who saw it to call out in German, “You are going to Palestine. I am also a Jew.”⁴³

The battalion reached Taranto on 16 February and remained there for a week until they could sail to Alexandria. Falk and Patterson went into the town in search of a cabinetmaker and ordered an Ark of the finest wood for the Sefer Torah. At the Sabbath Parade the Sefer Torah was duly placed in the Ark with much ceremony. Patterson wrote: “At the close of the last Sabbath service they had in Taranto, before they embarked on the *Leasoe Castle* for a three-day journey to Alexandria, I addressed the men and, pointing to the Ark, told them that while it was with us we need have no fear, that neither submarine nor storm would trouble us, and, therefore, that their minds might be easy on board ship.”⁴⁴

At 9.00 a.m. on 25 February the *Leasoe Castle* left Taranto harbour escorted by three Japanese destroyers for the three day voyage to Alexandria. Purim was celebrated aboard ship. No submarine was encountered, and the ship arrived safely at Alexandria at dusk on 28 February. One soldier recorded that on her very next voyage the *Leasoe Castle* was torpedoed and sunk.⁴⁵

The 38th Battalion in the Middle East

The following day a service of welcome was held in the synagogue in the Street of the Prophet Daniel in Alexandria. Chief Rabbi Raffaello Della Pergola, who three years earlier had acted as chaplain to Patterson’s Zion Mule Corps, officiated and numerous notables attended. The local Jewish chaplain, Reverend Yitzchak Frankenthal, gave an address of welcome. It

42 Keren 2008, 189; Keren 2010, III–12.

43 “Falk Memoirs”, 10 May 1929. See also Watts, *Jewish Legion*, 151–2, 262 n. 39; Martin Sugarman, “The March of the 38th Royal Fusiliers: When the Spirit of Judah Macabee hovered over the Whitechapel Road”, *Jewish Virtual Library* (hereafter JVL).

44 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 39; see also Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 107; Rosenberg, “Rabbi Falk’s Four Years”, 15; JC, 30 July 1943, 12. “Falk Memoirs”, 17 May 1929 states that the Ark was constructed by soldiers of the battalion.

45 Keren 2008, 190; “Falk Memoirs”, 17 May 1929.

was declaimed that “The Zion Mule Corps was our son, the Jewish Legion is our grandson”.⁴⁶

The battalion travelled on to Cairo, where a service was held, followed by a reception. Rabbi Shimon Bashi of Cairo composed an order of service to mark the moment at which the 38th Royal Fusiliers would set foot in the Holy Land, which Falk slightly adjusted: “And now Thou hast again graciously shown thy kindness to Thy people Israel. Our remembrance came before Thee for our wellbeing, to bring our sufferings and troubles to an end. And through the decree of Thy Providence, Thou didst put a Spirit of wisdom, and understanding, justice, and righteousness into the heart of our Gracious King George, and his counsellors, to cause to return Thy People Israel to the land of their inheritance.”⁴⁷

On 11 March 1918 Falk wrote to Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz in London. He reported on the journey, the receptions at Alexandria and Cairo and the services which had been held there. There were now weekly services in the camp, with voluntary services each day, Hebrew classes, lectures, and a dramatic section in Hebrew. Words of command were given in Hebrew. Copies of the books *Jewish Thoughts* and *History of the Jews* had been distributed and were greatly appreciated. Falk appealed for books in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. The letter bears the stamp of “Rev. L. A. Falk C.F. [Chaplain to the Forces] 38 Royal Fusiliers”, with a Magen David emblem.⁴⁸ After protracted bureaucracy, ultimately involving a request from the Chief Rabbi, a large number of Jewish books were sent to Falk.⁴⁹

Back in Britain, the Jewish War Services Committee, which had been established by the Jewish community in 1915 to liaise with the authorities on matters affecting Jewish soldiers and sailors, appointed the Jewish Chaplain to the Home Command, Reverend Solomon Lipson, to keep in contact with the Jewish Legion there.⁵⁰ He had already visited Crown Hill in November 1917.⁵¹ In March 1918 he and Reverend H. Shandel of Ramsgate, the officiating clergyman for the Eastern Command, Kent, Sussex, and Surrey, visited another battalion of the Jewish Legion. They stayed for some days, over the Sabbath and the festival of Purim, watching

46 Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 107; “Falk Memoirs”, 7 June 1929.

47 Keren 2008, 192; “Falk Memoirs”, 21 June 1929.

48 London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/2805/04/04/001 (correspondence of Chief Rabbi Hertz).

49 University of Southampton, Papers of M. J. Landa, AJ320 1/2.

50 Ibid.

51 Letters of Redcliffe Salaman, letter his wife, 12 November 1917.

a Yiddish musical comedy performed in the spirit of Purim. They left with the strains of the men singing *Hatikvah*, the Jewish national anthem, ringing in their ears.⁵² Later at Passover some five hundred men of the 39th and 42nd Battalions, including Redcliffe Salaman, attended the Seder service at Crown Hill, at which a Sergeant Reuben chanted beautifully.⁵³

In Egypt the 38th Battalion encamped at Helmieh, a village near Cairo. Falk concerned himself with the men's welfare, assembling a library of books in various languages and forming a choir.⁵⁴ The battalion spent its first Passover there, managing to obtain food, wine, matzot, and Haggadahs (books for the Seder service held in the home on Passover evening). After a service in a marquee large enough for the whole battalion which had been provided by the YMCA, each company held a Seder service in its own dining hut, led by a Jewish officer assisted by NCOs, with a whole staff of waiters from the Jewish hotel in Cairo in attendance. During the week of Passover the password was "Matzo" and the answer "Passover". Falk also took a party of men to visit the Great Pyramid at Giza.⁵⁵

On 5 June the battalion left for Palestine. Patterson wrote: "The Battalion entrained smoothly and quickly at the railway siding close to our camp and we were soon rolling onward to realize our ideals and aspirations in the Promised Land. Our Chaplain, who was a man of insight and vision, arranged that our trumpets should sound, and that a short prayer should be said by the troops as they entered, for the first time, the ancient land of their Fathers."⁵⁶

The battalion crossed the Sinai Desert by train in open trucks at night. Patterson observed that the funnel of the engine was belching forth a pillar of flame, which as dawn broke turned into a cloud of smoke, and noted the resonance with the biblical narrative of the journey of the Children of Israel, led through the desert by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. The battalion passed Gaza and Ludd, detrained, and marched to Sarafand, a village between Ludd and Jaffa where the British had established a large army camp. It spent its first Sabbath, 8 June, in Palestine in Sarafand, where Falk arranged a formal service for the battalion. Joyous at their

52 JC, 8 March 1918, 6, 13.

53 Letters of Redcliffe Salaman, letter his wife, 27 March 1918.

54 University of Southampton, Special Collection MS 116/115, Egyptian Expeditionary Force Photographs 1918–1919, photograph of choir, perhaps including Falk, Cairo, May 1918.

55 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 52; Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 108; "Falk Memoirs", 5 July, 2 Aug. 1929.

56 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 58.

arrival, many Jews from Jaffa and the neighbouring colonies, dressed in festive garb and some carrying banners, arrived to join them. Falk spoke of the historic significance of the moment:

Sovereign of the Universe . . . We, the soldiers of this regiment, serving our country, Great Britain, are standing now on the soil of our Holy Land with the object of bringing peace to Israel and to free our land from the hands of the Oppressor. And this day, when we are standing in the land of our forefathers and our faces are turned towards Jerusalem, we pour out our supplications before Thee. . . . Crown our arms with victory! Give wisdom of leadership to our beloved leader and his officers; guard us all against pain and suffering. Oh, may not evil come near unto us from this henceforth and for ever and ever.⁵⁷

Falk's chaplaincy duties

Within the 38th Battalion, Falk's responsibilities as the sole chaplain were numerous and onerous. He had much correspondence with public and private Jewish agencies in England, Egypt, and elsewhere, ordering kosher food, urging them to cater to soldiers' wellbeing, and making enquiries about the condition of soldiers' families at home:

Falk performed Sabbath and holiday prayers, cared for the supply of Kosher food, ordered from Jewish merchants in Alexandria and elsewhere religious artefacts such as candles on Hannuka and Matzot on Passover, saw to it that Hebrew speaking nurses be available to care for the wounded, established a library in Hebrew, Yiddish and English, served as guide to the soldiers when they visited the pyramids in Egypt, the city of Jerusalem, and other locations, composed letters for soldiers, contacted their families and communities when they did not receive notice from home, and took care of a variety of other spiritual and religious needs.⁵⁸

He was the censor for soldiers' letters written in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian. On occasion it fell to him to try to put into perspective events which were causing the soldiers anxiety. Aware that were they killed or wounded some of the Russian-born soldiers would have nobody to care for their families, he assured them that in deserving and urgent cases he would communicate with the Care Committee which had been established in London for soldiers' families. He wrote to London enquiring about the wife and child of a Private Levison, and received a reply of 14 January 1919

⁵⁷ Ibid., 58–60; see also "Falk Memoirs", 1 Nov. 1929.

⁵⁸ Keren 2010, 111.

from the War Refugees Committee in London that the wife had died on 1 January and the child was being looked after by a man in London.⁵⁹

The Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky was serving with the Judaeans. Falk became a close friend of Jabotinsky and came to support the Revisionist movement which he founded in 1925. However, as an admirer of Great Britain Falk differed from the Revisionists in hoping until 1948 that Palestine would become its seventh dominion, an aspiration with influential supporters who included Josiah Wedgwood MP (who in 1928 published a book entitled *The Seventh Dominion*). Jabotinsky wrote:

Our padre was the Rev M. [sic] Falk, an enthusiastic “Mizrachi”, and himself a brave soldier under fire; and Colonel Patterson was compelled to learn all the laws and details of the shochet’s ritual, negotiating with the War Office and Portsmouth butchers about kosher meat, about veins and sinews and – I must stop, for while he knows the laws, I do not. . . .

The Reverend Mr. Falk would deliver a sermon, with consistent brilliance, for the young Rabbi was highly educated, learned in the voluminous Jewish traditional literature, and had an outstanding knowledge of history. He drew freely on the party rivalry of the Pharisees and the Saducees for his analogies, was a strong admirer of the Essenes, bitterly attacked the Hellenes, energetically praised the Zealots, and attacked the theories of Wellhausen and his pupil, Dr. Benzion Mossinsohn of the Tel-Aviv Gymnasium. . . . The Jews of Sydney are to be congratulated on their present Rabbi. . . .

The padre, Reverend Mr. Falk, held out bravely against the general attack of a whole regiment of skeptical [sic] lieutenants, who pleaded that being a Zionist had nothing to do with eating Kosher food. He stood like a rock by his principle. “It isn’t a question of eating. It is a principle that the Jew must always fight against all temptation, control and discipline himself at every step, and build a Zion of purity in his heart before building a Zion for his people”.⁶⁰

One of these “skeptical lieutenants” was Horace Samuel, an officer in the 38th Battalion. Initially a Zionist, he became disillusioned with the Zionist project. In his *Unholy Memories of the Holy Land*, published “after a discreet interval” in 1930, he mocked what he termed the theatrical piety of Falk, who produced the Jewish national flag on every possible occasion and ostentatiously observed the dietary laws of Judaism. Despite

59 “Falk Memoirs”, 8 March, 4 Oct. 1929; Keren 2008, 188–9; Keren 2010, 109, 111; Jabotinsky Institute, at KI-14; JM, boxes 201, 202.

60 Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 98–9, 106–7, 106, respectively.

Patterson's efforts to ensure that the men had kosher food, Samuel recalled Jewish lines littered with bacon tins.⁶¹

Jabotinsky described how three officers and eighteen Jewish soldiers escorted 900 Turkish and 200 German prisoners, who could easily have overwhelmed them, for twelve miles to Jericho. "Our padre accompanied us – to see that we should treat the enemy humanely in his misfortune." Falk and Jabotinsky were in the rear of the column. One Turkish prisoner could not go on and was threatened with being shot. Falk made four stronger looking German prisoners carry him. Later another shot was heard from much further up the column:

The padre raises his foot to mount his donkey; I [Jabotinsky] tug him unceremoniously by the leg and tell him: "Don't meddle. It is in front. [Lieutenant] Barnes [in command of the column] is there, let him manage."

The padre whispers, and his voice shakes: "What if . . . if they shoot him?"

The German who walks in front of us apparently understands English: he says loudly to his neighbor[sic], "The only thing to do is to shoot the stragglers. One cannot leave them here to starve to death and let the jackals gnaw off their ears."

The padre becomes quiet and looks intently to right and left. It is pitch dark, impossible to tell a stone from a bush.⁶²

Falk wrote: "It fell to my sad duty as chaplain to bury nearly one hundred soldiers of the Jewish Battalions; their graves are to be found in every military cemetery up and down the Holy Land from Deir el-Beileh to Mount Scopus."⁶³

In July 1918 Lieutenant B. Wolfe was supervising the loading of a wagon drawn by a team of horses. The horses were frightened by a sudden noise and charged. Wolfe tried to stop them and was dragged under their feet and wheels. He died in hospital on 20 July and was given a Jewish funeral.⁶⁴ A moving condolence letter from Falk to his sister, Mrs. Wiseman, concluded: "It is indeed cruel tidings, but I can assure you that his name will never fade away. He will take a place among those heroes whom we have produced. You will find consolation in the fact that he died for a

61 Horace B. Samuel, *Unholy Memories of the Holy Land* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930), 1, 7, 15, 19, cited in Alyson Pendlebury, *Portraying "the Jew" in First World War Britain* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 162–4.

62 Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 141–3.

63 Falk quoted in Gluck, "Tribute", 12.

64 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 68–9.

cause which was near and dear to his heart. He died on the soil of Eretz Yisrael, the land of his forefathers.”⁶⁵

The battalion had a very difficult march through the Jordan Valley to Jericho. The Valley was torrid and malaria-infested. As Patterson described it, the heat was intense and the dust was a foot deep, choking the men and sucking their feet down: “Those who did fall by the wayside were helped along by our Padre, the Rev L. A. Falk, who gave up his horse to the footsore and carried the pack and rifle of the weary, thus cheering them along into camp. This time it was the priest who proved the good Samaritan on the road to Jericho.”⁶⁶ Falk and Patterson explored together the ancient site of Gilgal, where Joshua had based his army, from which they rode on horseback into Jericho. On another occasion they explored an ancient ruin near Talaat ed Dumm (Adummin in the Book of Joshua).⁶⁷

Falk drew on biblical stories of the places in the Holy Land where they found themselves.⁶⁸ In a New Year sermon he likened the men to Abraham who, called on to sacrifice his son Isaac, responded “Hinneni” (“Here I am”). In a Hanukah service he likened their role in protecting both Judaism and England to that of the Maccabeans, endowed with a spirit worthy of their faith which at the same time strengthened their position among the surrounding nations:

The whole world were watching [and] were looking on us, but they see now the Maccabeans [sic] spirit revived, they see now that Israel is not only powerful with his voice, but he has also a mighty arm . . . The Jewish soldier upholds now the honour of our nation. The Jewish warrior saved our national honour which was at stake . . . A British army is standing at the gates of Gaza where our Samson performed his herculian [sic] exploits. There are great possibilities for the Jewish people which may never occur again. Possibilities to rescue the Holy land of our fathers from the hands of a cruel oppressor who lays now waste the new settlement of Judea.⁶⁹

As Michael Keren and Shlomit Keren have written: “In contrast to Patterson, the Irish Protestant commander of the Legions to whom the presence of Jewish soldiers in the Holy Land in itself meant the fulfilment of the Gospel’s promise, the Jewish chaplain tried to invigorate the soldiers by characterizing the unpleasant soldiering experiences as a

65 Rev. Falk to Mrs. Wiseman, 22 July 2018, quoted in Roman Freulich, *Soldiers in Judea: Stories and Vignettes of the Jewish Legion* (New York: Herzl Press, 1964), 89–91.

66 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 86–7; see also Watts, *Jewish Legion*, 186.

67 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 84, 88–9.

68 Keren 2008, 196.

69 *Ibid.*, 193.

journey to a Promised Land that had not yet been completed.”⁷⁰ Fighting as part of an all-Jewish unit raised profound religious questions on the nature and justifications of war. With little religious guidance, Falk had to develop his own responses.⁷¹ Facing the chaplain’s inevitable dilemma of justifying killing, he did so with the instinct of individual and national self-preservation and in the need to end all wars. In the same Hanukah sermon he said: “It is futile to deny or to forget the fact that by doing our duty we also shed the blood of our own brothers. This is the greatest tragedy of the War, it is the most cruel ordeal of our dispersion. But let us understand that the victory of the league of liberty over the league of darkness will make the recurrence of this tragedy an impossibility.”⁷²

The 39th and 40th Battalions

The anglicized Major Henry D. Myer (1892–after 1968), who had served in France since mid-1915 and been wounded at the Battle of Loos, was second in command of the 40th Fusiliers.⁷³ In September 1918 the battalion was in the Egyptian desert. Myer recorded in his memoir “Soldiering of Sorts” (c. 1979) the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) service on 15 September 1918. The evening of Yom Kippur begins in the synagogue with the haunting melody of Kol Nidrei. Myer wrote to his fiancée: “It is Yom Kippur. We have just had the Kol Nidrei service under the stars on the sand of the Desert. It was most impressive . . . a really solemn Yom Kippur, grand in its simplicity.” Soon afterwards some volunteers from Palestine arrived to join the unit. They included a number of Jewish former prisoners of war from Turkey. Myer wrote: “One of them acted as Chazan today. He had a beautiful voice.”⁷⁴

Also serving with the 40th Fusiliers was an American soldier called Benjamin Bronstein. He was present at the same Yom Kippur service as Myer in September 1918. In 1968, half a century later, he too wrote a memoir, based on notes which he had made during the war. Of that Yom Kippur service he recorded:

70 Keren 2010, 12.

71 Ibid., 116.

72 Keren 2008, 194; see also Keren 2010, 117.

73 See Mark Levene, “Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War (1914–1918)”, in *Forging Modern Jewish Identities*, ed. Michael Berkowitz, Susan L. Tananbaum, and Sam W. Bloom (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), ch. 4, 81–114.

74 Henry D. Myer, “Soldiering of Sorts” (typescript, c. 1979), 2, 120, 192; see also Keren 2010, 123, 127–8.

Every man not on duty would have to present himself for Shul Parade and Service, and all company kitchens would be closed from sundown the day before, to sundown on the day of Yom Kippur, and no food would be issued to anyone after we had had our meal before sundown the day before Yom Kippur. We had plenty of men who could chant and perform any kind of religious service so the Chaplain had no trouble in getting a chasen [hazan].

Our Shul had no walls and no roof as it was in the open desert in back of our camp. The blue sky, the moon, and stars were our roof. A table covered with a white cloth was the [reader's desk] and a wooden box housing a little Torah served as the Oren Hakodesh (or the Ark). Indeed it was awesome and inspiring. Here were 1500 Jewish soldiers who volunteered to fight for liberation of the promised land, stand assembled under the open sky to listen to the age old chant of Kol Nidrei on the most revered night of our calendar.

We were thousands of miles away from home and our families, having in mind what we may confront in the future, we were overwhelmed with sadness when the chasen began chanting the Kol Nidrei service, there was not a dry eye in the assembly.⁷⁵

The 39th Fusiliers included a soldier called Chaim Baruch Berezin. Originally from Ukraine, he studied in technical schools in Europe and reached the United States, where he sang as a tenor in a travelling band before in 1917 joining the 39th Battalion. He took part in Allenby's battle in the Jordan Valley and was a member of the battalion's band, called the Schnorrers (Beggars in Yiddish).

In 1918 an assault by the 39th Fusiliers on a strategically located village in the Jordan Valley began on the same evening of 15 September 1918, the start of Yom Kippur. Another soldier, Elias Gilner (an American who had enlisted in the Jewish Legion as Elias Ginsburg), recorded:

At sundown on September 15, 1918, the eve of the Day of Atonement, when Jews throughout the world gather to pray and to seek forgiveness for their transgressions, the 39th Royal Fusiliers was ordered to put on full pack and equipment and to march to the front. The men stepped out northward towards Wadi Aouja and were told to march in silence. But soon Turkish shells fell and exploded in the thick, soft dust.

Since the enemy was clearly aware of their presence there, Private Berezin, who had been a cantor in New Jersey, decided to ignore the order of silence and began to chant the Kol Nidrei, soon groups of Legionnaires joined in and the strangest Kol Nidrei service ever heard resounded through the valley of death. The mournful tune which the martyred

⁷⁵ Benjamin Bronstein, memoir, 1968, quoted in Keren 2010, 135, 139–40.

Marranos had surreptitiously intoned in subterranean synagogues was now chanted in the face of an oppressor; it mingled with the howls of jackals and was accompanied by the rhythmic tramp of marching feet. Some of the men wept quietly, smearing the desert dust over their faces as they tried to wipe their tears away.⁷⁶

Berezin himself remembered:

On Monday, the eve of Yom Kippur, we were told to be ready to move on, that is, to the trenches in the hills. That evening, precisely when the rest of the world was saying *Al Khet* [the Confessional Prayer] and *Kol Nidrei*, we marched bravely out. It was unusually dusty – over our knees. In a very short time, we were white as lime. Even when I had no strength I kept on singing our *Kol Nidrei*, as a cry for help to our Master of the Universe, to wake Him up from His ancient slumber and to let Him know that we were the first Jewish volunteers to spill their blood for the revival of the Jewish people.

It seems that He heard my cry for help!⁷⁷

Captain Redcliffe N. Salaman was the Regimental Medical Officer of the 39th Fusiliers with whom he served under Colonel Margolin from April 1918 until May 1919. A doctor and geneticist with health problems and a restless and unfulfilled personality, to whom the campaign was, his wife said, his great adventure, he had supported Patterson in the negotiations leading to the creation of the Jewish Legion.⁷⁸ On Rosh Hashanah of 1918 he attended a military service run by Norman Bentwich (later a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem). On Yom Kippur he participated in the same march as Gilner and Berezin. He wrote:

Kol Nidre Eve, 1918, will be one that the men of the 39th R.F. will long remember. We had been encamped for a couple of days [outside Tel-es-Sultan, by Jericho] when orders were received. The road, which was under fire, lay along the foothills and was deep in dust.

We marched in silence. The long column of the battalion had a ghost-like appearance as it wended its silent way over the white moonlit track. The muffled foot-treads of the men marching through the dust was scarcely audible. From time to time one would whisper to another as if afraid of his own voice – there was a dread expectancy in the air. Never surely had the Day of Atonement been so celebrated. Occasionally one heard the plaintive notes of *Kol Nidre* arising first from one group and then from another.

⁷⁶ Elias Gilner quoted in Keren 2010, 66.

⁷⁷ Chaim Baruch Berezin quoted in *ibid.*, 51, 66.

⁷⁸ Letters of Redcliffe Salaman, letter to his wife, 6 Aug. 1917.

As we marched along, the thought occurred to me again and again: a peculiar people, a peculiar battalion, and a most peculiar day on which to begin its active service . . .⁷⁹

An American Jewish soldier who served in a different battalion from Falk left a diary written in Yiddish. It does not contain the name of the diarist, who remains unknown. He records that in November 1918 he was training at Plymouth. On Saturday 5 October there was a synagogue service, half in Hebrew and half in English. Major William Shonfield, who was the deputy commander of the 42nd Holding Battalion at Plymouth, was an English Zionist and gave talks to the men about Zionism and the Balfour Declaration of November 1917. The diarist writes that Major Shonfield sang the prayers with a nice melody and read the Balfour Declaration. Another officer gave a short talk in Hebrew, and the proceedings concluded with *Hatikvah* and “the English hymn” (no doubt the British national anthem). On 27 November, while the volunteers including the diarist were awaiting orders to travel to Palestine, which they did in December, Reverend Major Lipski came from London, conducted the afternoon prayers, and gave a talk to the men, concluding with the singing of *Hatikvah*, the national anthem, and “the oath” (perhaps that of allegiance).⁸⁰

The 38th and 40th Battalions

By November 1918 Falk’s 38th Battalion was stationed in the desert city of Rafa just over the south-western border of Palestine. A Jewish soldier called Ira Jacob Liss recorded in the thirteen notebooks of his diary that in November the chaplain somewhat relieved the soldiers’ boredom and disenchantment by framing the experience in terms of the Children of Israel wandering in the desert, with the Promised Land still to be reached. On 1 December 1918 Liss attended a meeting called by the chaplain, who said that he would organize a choir because the members of the old choir were sick or had fallen in battle. He would organize lectures, classes, and a Hebrew club, and would try to provide the soldiers with spiritual nourishment. He discussed with them the question of settling in Palestine, saying that everything would be fine as long as they remembered that it was only a desert.⁸¹

79 Redcliffe N. Salaman, *Palestine Reclaimed: Letters from a Jewish Officer in Palestine* (London: George Routledge; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1920), 66–7.

80 Keren 2010, 25, 34–40.

81 Ira Jacob Liss, diary, cited in Keren 2010, 77, 97–8.

By the time of Passover in April 1919 the 38th Battalion, nearly two thousand strong, was still at Rafa. Unleavened bread, meat and wine, all strictly kosher, were provided, at considerable cost. Patterson recorded that Lieutenant Jabotinsky, Lieutenant Lazarus, and Reverend Falk did yeoman service providing for all the catering. This went some way to defusing the anger of the men at the grievous insult to them of the army high command having placed Jerusalem out of bounds to all Jewish (but not non-Jewish) soldiers during the whole of Passover from 14 to 22 April. "It was a wonderful sight when we all sat together and sang the Hagadah on the edge of the Sinai desert", Patterson wrote. As Rafa was just over the border of Palestine, even though only a matter of yards from the boundary, it was in the *Galuth* (outside the Land of Israel), so that the Feast of Passover had to be kept for eight days (rather than the seven days that it would have been within the Land of Israel). Some men hoped for leavened bread on the eighth day, "but", Patterson continued, "this I would not hear of, and from that day forth I was considered the strictest Jew in the Battalion".⁸²

Discipline within the 38th Battalion had implications for its chaplain. Passover prompted a response to Falk of 14 April 1919 from the Adjutant: "The Commanding Officer has decided that all Defaulters (i.e. punishment by (?) G.G.) may attend the 'Sedar' but that Field punishment prisoners and those for trial or awaiting trial by Field General Court Martial must have it in the Grand Tent."⁸³

The 40th Battalion fared less well in observing Passover in April 1919. Myer recorded that as tactfully as he could he refused almost all the requests of the local Grand Rabbin Baruch Marcus for Passover observance, insisting that they should not give the authorities unnecessary trouble while the Arabs were doing their best to make the soldiers of the Jewish Legion unpopular with them. "Matzos" were, however, baked, under the supervision of Yemenite Jews from Jerusalem. Looking after the kashrut for Passover was "dreadfully exhausting". In Haifa later in April, Myer was summoned by the Grand Rabbin: "His particular stunt is Kosher meat."⁸⁴

The 40th Battalion, comprising largely Palestinian Jews, was based at the desert village of Deir el Belah, ten miles south west of Gaza. A mutiny occurred in 1919, although there are widely differing accounts of it. The battalion had been kept in the desert and treated like "natives", while other

82 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 187–9; see also Watts, *Jewish Legion*, 219–20.

83 Jabotinsky Institute, at KI-14.

84 Myer, "Soldiering of Sorts", 172, 178, 184.

troops had been stationed near Jewish settlements. Part of the battalion was posted to Cyprus, where the military position was judged to require the presence of European troops to guard British communications to the Middle East. Some of the soldiers refused to leave Palestine to go there. Falk was summoned by Colonel Scott, whom he described as a gentleman and a lover of Israel. He narrated his attempts to defuse this mutiny, which was led by some of the Palestinian soldiers who later became leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine (the Yishuv) and of Israel. There were other accounts of the mutiny, which Falk dismissed as very wide of the mark. Some, published much later, had him intervening between the mutineers and the West Indian or Irish troops who had been ordered to arrest them, their guns trained on each other, begging the mutineers to surrender and later praying with them in jail in Cairo on the Day of Atonement in 1919. Gilner was one of the mutineers; he was convicted and sent to prison in 1920, went on hunger strike, was released, and with others fought his conviction through the courts in London in 1921 and had the sentences quashed.⁸⁵ Falk criticised the revisionism of some of the memoirs of the leaders of the mutineers, which accorded them roles which he knew they had not played.⁸⁶

Conscious that the battalion was the first Jewish military formation for nearly two thousand years, Falk in 1919 commissioned medals from the Bezalel Arts and Crafts School in Jerusalem which were engraved for members of the Jewish Legion. The medal was inscribed: "Judea Liberated. To those who willingly offered themselves among the people. 1849" (that is, 1,849 years from the expulsion of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel in 70 CE until 1919).⁸⁷

Repercussions in Britain

In Britain the *Jewish Chronicle* reported in May 1919 on a public meeting to consider the future of Jews' College and the training of ministers. The speakers included Major F. C. Stern, OBE, MC and Major Dr. Redcliffe Salaman. Stern said that he spoke as one who had mixed with young Jews serving in the Army in Egypt, Palestine, and elsewhere. They all complained of the lack of rabbis. In Gallipoli Stern never saw a rabbi. In Palestine he saw three, but never in the front-line trenches. Salaman

85 Gilner, *War and Hope*, 187, 310–19, 392–3, 419.

86 Falk, "Jewish Legion Reminiscences"; see also Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 195–6.

87 BJBH, 60–61, illus. 102, 337; Keren 2008, 194.

said that there were several Jewish regiments and to them were sent the worst chaplain possible. His Hebrew was impossible, his Yiddish was of the Russian variety, which German Yiddish speakers could not understand, his English was hopeless, his manners were impossible, and his appearance perfectly ridiculous. His very presence was abhorred by the men.⁸⁸

Neither Stern nor Salaman identified the chaplains to whom they were referring. The report prompted a spirited response. Salaman and Stern protested, and the *Jewish Chronicle* accepted, that what they had said had been misinterpreted as criticism of Falk. Jabotinsky replied in Falk's defence in July:

[T]he men come to him in trouble, and he is their confidant in all their sorrows. His sermons are always on a high level, permeated with a true spirit of Jewish patriotism; his religious conceptions are tolerant and broad-minded; these sermons contributed largely to the Jewish education of our soldiers, and some of them I would be glad to read in print. . . . We, officers and men of the first Jewish battalion, saw Mr Falk in the front line many a time, by day and by night, both on the Nablous Road and in the Jordan Valley – and during bombardments, too. Once he went by day to Abweru – a village between our lines and the Turkish, which was held by one of our detachments, but with which communication was only allowed after nightfall, because the road to it was in full view of the enemy batteries. I must add that Mr Falk's civic courage in upholding his opinions was by no means beneath the level of his soldierly pluck, and I have no doubt whatever that this will be confirmed by any officer or man who served with our "Padre" through this memorable campaign.⁸⁹

The matter also prompted, as it was headed, "An Ex-Judean's Testimony" from Mr J. Franks from Middlesbrough who wrote thus:

SIR, – As an ex-Judean who served with the 38th R.F. from the very early stages of its formation, to which battalion the Rev. L. A. Falk was attached as chaplain, I crave space in your esteemed organ to confirm Lieut. Jabotinsky's appreciation in the last number of the *JEWISH CHRONICLE* of Mr Falk's activities, as well as to pay an additional tribute to his character, scholarship, bravery, courage, and fortitude. It would be most unfair to the rev. gentleman were not one or more of the old Judeans who benefited by his presence in their midst to avail themselves of this opportunity afforded them of placing on record their gratitude and indebtedness to him – his stirring appeals to rouse the "Judeans" to full

⁸⁸ JC, 9 May 1919, 16.

⁸⁹ Jabotinsky, letter to JC, 11 July 1919, 13.

consciousness of Israel's traditional glories; his enthusiastic sermons, preached with eloquence as well as earnestness and profound feeling, having for their object the awakening in them the dormant spirit of Jewish Nationalism, and which, with Lieut. Jabotinsky, I should love to see in print were literally a [in Hebrew characters] Kol Kora Bemidbar – "A Voice Calling in the Desert". His travelling library, which provided the men with books in several languages to pass many a lonesome hour and which followed us on all our marches at no slight inconvenience to his own personal comfort, cost him no small amount of exertion and fatigue. As to his courage and soldierly pluck, I can testify that far from avoiding danger Mr Falk many times incurred the displeasure of our C.O. and risked his life in order to visit the boys – no matter what dangerous positions they held – to cheer and encourage them and to distribute comforts to them. I can picture him now in my mind's eye standing in the midst of a quadrangle formed by our four companies during "Shool Parade", with his hands upraised like the High Priest of old, close to the Ark containing the small but magnificent Scroll of the Law, offering up fervent prayers for our safety and for the triumph of our – the Jewish – cause. I tender him my warmest thanks and deepest gratitude, and say: [in Hebrew characters] Havo Olav Berachot – "May Blessings come upon him!"⁹⁰

After the war

Soldiers of the Jewish Legion began to be discharged from soon after the end of the war in November 1918. Those who remained were intended to form an all-Jewish militia commanded by Lt. Colonel Margolin (who commanded the 39th Royal Fusiliers) as one half of a joint Jewish and Arab military force to police British-controlled Palestine.⁹¹ In 1920 Josef Trumpeldor led a group of young Jews, including several former members of the Jewish Legion, to defend the isolated Jewish settlements of Metula and Tel Hai from bands of Arabs who were besieging them. In an encounter on 1 March Trumpeldor and some of his comrades were killed, and the settlements evacuated.⁹²

By 1920 only about three hundred members of the Jewish Legion remained undischarged. In that year disturbances occurred in Jerusalem.⁹³

90 J. Franks, letter, JC, 18 July 1919, 18.

91 Gouttman, "I saw it my Way", 272.

92 Keren 2010, 150; Roman Freulich in collaboration with Joan Abramson, *The Hill of Life: The Story of Joseph Trumpeldor* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1968).

93 Roberto Mazza, *Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British*, Library of Middle East History (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009); Hawad Halabi, *Palestinian Rituals of Identity: The Prophet Moses Festival in Jerusalem, 1850–1948* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2023).

Falk narrated that the Jewish soldiers, stationed at Sarafand near Ludd and Jaffa, were angry about being kept in camp and not being allowed to go and defend Jews in Jerusalem. A few who had been fortunate enough to obtain Passover leave went armed to Jerusalem. Some were arrested and some wounded. Falk learnt that a group of soldiers intended to march armed on Jerusalem. He realized that if they did so they would not reach Jerusalem and that the Jewish Regiment would inevitably be disbanded. The leaders were always shy of rabbis and especially of chaplains. Jabotinsky could have persuaded the men not to march on Jerusalem, but he was under arrest and facing a sentence of fifteen years' hard labour for daring to march at the head of the Haganah (the Jewish self-defence force) to defend the helpless men, women, and children in the Old City of Jerusalem. "Weitzman" (as Falk wrote) was in England. There was only one man who might be able to dissuade the soldiers, Pinchas (Phineas) Rutenberg (1878–1942), who was himself in Jerusalem. (Rutenberg had been the governor of Petrograd in 1917 in Kerensky's provisional government, and after the Bolshevik revolution had gone to Palestine, where he became responsible for developing the hydro-electricity system.) Falk asked his commanding officer to let him go to Jerusalem in his capacity as a chaplain; permission was granted.⁹⁴

Falk related how he travelled to Jerusalem and managed to find Rutenberg, a personality of extraordinary physical and mental strength with broad shoulders and a massive head who had reputedly played a part in the 1905 Russian Revolution. Rutenberg heard him out, sat silent for perhaps ten minutes, promised that by the following day he would be in the battalion, and left. With courage he kept his promise and went to the battalion even though under the surveillance of British Military Intelligence, who knew of his close relationship to Jabotinsky. The battalion soldiers did not march on Jerusalem.⁹⁵

Falk narrated how in 1920 he created an opportunity to visit Jabotinsky who was being detained in Acre Prison. Jabotinsky wrote a defiant message in Hebrew for the battalion, ending with the words in English "Stick it". Falk concluded:

STICK IT! In these two words, with which he ends his note to his Battalion from Acre Prison, can be summed up his whole conduct of life – and truly, he stuck to his sacred task to the very end, till his death at Betar Training

94 Falk, "Jewish Legion Reminiscences"; Keren 2010, 150; see also Watts, *Jewish Legion*, 3.

95 Falk, "Jewish Legion Reminiscences".

Camp in America in the midst of his struggles to raise, not a Jewish Legion this time, but a JEWISH ARMY OF 100,000 MEN.

We, his disciples, will continue to hold aloft the flag he entrusted to us, and we shall not rest until we see a redeemed Land of Israel in its historic boundaries, and a redeemed people of Israel in the true sense of the word.⁹⁶

Jabotinsky was forced to accept demobilization against his will. He was sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude. Colonel Patterson, by then demobilized, addressed a protest rally in London; in a letter to Falk he described it as a great meeting with thousands attending.⁹⁷ Jabotinsky's sentence was later annulled. He went to the United States, where he died in 1941.⁹⁸ As Patterson discussed throughout his book, the staff of the British military administration in Palestine were always hostile to the Jewish Legion, never attaching it permanently to any brigade so that it was always at the disposal of the staff without the protection of a brigade. Only after the Armistice did the military administration permit the Legion to change its official designation from the 38th Battalion Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) to the 38th Battalion Royal Fusiliers (1st Judaeans, or colloquially the Judaeans), and to wear the Menorah badge. The badge had been sanctioned by the king and the name granted by the War Office a year previously, but they had been withheld by the staff of the British military administration. Eventually the military administration in Palestine was removed and replaced by a civilian one.⁹⁹

Falk attributed the ultimate success of the concept of a Jewish Legion to Jabotinsky: "The success of this event, which thus created a notable landmark in Jewish History, must largely, if not entirely, be attributed to the unflagging zeal and energy of that remarkably great and fearless Jew, Mr. V. Jabotinsky. His granite-like determination, his ceaseless propaganda with gifted pen and inspiring oratory, were mostly responsible for breaking down the powerfully organised opposition of the Assimilationists, short-sighted Zionists, and a large, misguided element of peace-loving Russian Jewish subjects residing in England."¹⁰⁰

The authorities were satisfied with Falk's performance of his duties. On

96 Ibid.

97 Streeter, *Mad for Zion*, 132.

98 Joseph Schechtman, *The Life and Times of Vladimir Jabotinsky*, vol. 1: *Rebel and Statesman*, vol. 2: *Fighter and Prophet* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1956–61); Shmuel Katz, *Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky*, 2 vols. (New York: Barricade Books, 1996).

99 Patterson, *With the Judaeans*, 240–50, 258–63; Watts, *Jewish Legion*, 232–3.

100 Rosenberg, "Rabbi Falk's Four Years", 15; "Falk Memoirs", 22 Feb. 1929.

13 January 1919, after Falk had been in post for a year, the Principal Chaplain of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, E. R. Day, wrote in his report on him that "This Chaplain ministers to the 38th Royal Fusiliers and other Jewish battalions and I understand is diligent in his ministrations". On 15 June 1920, by which time Falk's two-year appointment had already expired, Day accepted Falk's formal offer to renew his contract for up to twelve months. That November Falk was in hospital in Lydd, whence on 6 November he was transferred to a hospital in Ismailia and thence to another in Kantara, on the Suez Canal, from which he was discharged on 19 November.¹⁰¹ It seems that he was suffering from pyrexia and clinical malaria (according to Forces War Records, Falk had been admitted for the same problems on 8 October 1918 to a hospital train).¹⁰²

On May Day 1921 unrest broke out in Jaffa and lasted for three days. Margolin defied an order to remain in camp in Sarafand, issued arms to thirty-four of his recently demobilized Jewish soldiers, and led them into Jaffa to intervene. In consequence he was given the options of a court-martial or of relinquishing his commission with an honourable discharge from the British Army and leaving Palestine; he accepted the latter. On 31 May 1921 the Jewish units were formally disbanded.¹⁰³

Falk's wife Fanny and their two sons joined him in Palestine, no doubt after the Armistice of November 1918. They lived partly with him in camp, probably at Sarafand, where there were three other officers' wives and no other children, and partly in the religiously Orthodox district of Mea Shearim in Jerusalem, where he visited them weekly. Fanny had several bouts of malaria. Falk attempted to remain in Palestine as part of the British military administration but, even with the support in a letter of 30 December 1920 of the Zionist Commission to Palestine, his request was refused.¹⁰⁴ Fanny's health impelled a return to Britain, and on 10 January 1921 the family embarked at Port Said for the UK, arriving on 25 January.

Falk was released from the army with effect from that day, which was

101 National Archives, Nationality and Naturalisation File, HO 144/1485/351707; Naturalisation Certificate A2978, HO 334/81/2978; War Office Officer's File, WO 374/23512; Medal Card WO/372/7/12700.

102 Ibid., MH 106/788, which includes medical records of no. 34 Combined Clearing Hospital, Jerusalem, 5 June 1918–25 Feb. 1919; however, the National Archives Discovery catalogue for this file does not show sub-file MH 106/788, and states that MH 106 comprises 2,389 vols.

103 BJBH, 60–61; Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 152–3; Keren 2010, 160; Watts, *Jewish Legion*, 160, 237–8.

104 Jabotinsky Institute, at KI-14.

three years to the day from when he had reported for duty. He had served from January 1918 until January 1921 as chaplain to the 38th and 40th Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers in Egypt and Palestine. For his service he was mentioned in dispatches. On 25 February 1921 he was appointed an Honorary Chaplain to the Forces 4th Class.¹⁰⁵

Most of the seven thousand soldiers of the Jewish Legion returned to their homes in England, the United States, and Canada. "The American Judeans" published "Brigade Songs", a collection of the Jewish songs that had been the most popular among them. Some of the soldiers confirmed in their memoirs Falk's vision that they would better integrate in those countries as a result of their Jewish national pride; the consistency between their Jewish identity and their English, American, or Canadian identity promoted their sense of belonging and security in those countries.¹⁰⁶

The 38th, predominantly British-born, Battalion lost 110 soldiers. Falk believed that its soldiers deserved to feel proud, not because of the approval of others but because they had been fighting for Great Britain, the protector of freedom, and for the redemption of the Jewish People.¹⁰⁷ He disagreed with Jabotinsky, who saw political Zionism as centred in Palestine, leaving little room for Jewish national existence elsewhere. He also disagreed with sections of English Jewry who feared that a Jewish military formation would make them seem disloyal. In his farewell speech to the soldiers, he compared the lower-class immigrants who had joined the 38th Fusiliers to liberated slaves:

At this great historical occasion, when a unique chapter in the glorious history of Israel is temporarily closed, to be reopened however in the near future . . . I feel that it is my duty to say to you a few words . . . that at this and only at this moment it is your duty according to the old traditional custom of our religion, to offer up now a prayer proper to the God of Israel, for having been liberated from slavery, transformed into free men and also risen from a sick bed and regained your strength and vigour.¹⁰⁸

Falk differed also from the Palestinian Zionists, whose road to national revival was devoid of religious faith and tradition. This led to strained relations with members of the predominantly Palestinian 40th Fusiliers. While in one sermon addressing them as "heroes of Israel", he was deeply

105 National Archives, Nationality and Naturalisation File, HO 144/1485/351707; Naturalisation Certificate A2978, HO 334/81/2978; War Office Officer's File, WO 374/23512; Medal Card WO/372/7/12700; Falk family papers.

106 Keren 2008, 197; JM, boxes 201, 202.

107 Keren 2008, 200.

108 Ibid., 198; Keren 2010, 121.

disappointed by their endless socialist agitation against the British military, their sense of despair and lack of military discipline, and their demands for better living conditions. He considered their behaviour to be a form of national betrayal, and accused them of sacrificing the honour of the nation for their trade unionist ideals, which he privately attributed to the abandonment of religious traditions.¹⁰⁹

Falk's postwar career

On his return Falk sought a ministerial position in London but, to his inevitable anxiety with a wife and two children, could not find one. He served briefly as a relief minister in a London community and in Doncaster. Partly because of his support for Zionism, he was approached in 1922 by Maurice Symonds, the President of the Great Synagogue in Sydney in Australia, and accepted a call to become the Second Reader to Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen in Sydney. He arrived there with his family in September 1922 in time for Rosh Hashanah and was within days inducted into office. Two more children were born, Balfour Amiel in October 1922 and Peninah in December 1924. Falk's memoirs, written in London in 1921, were serialized in a Jewish journal, *The Maccabean*, in Australia in 1929. He was to serve the Sydney congregation until his death.¹¹⁰ While Francis Cohen opposed Zionism, Falk supported it, leading to his being reprimanded in 1929 for "political" preaching.¹¹¹ Falk remained in contact with Jabotinsky, who wrote to him from Paris on 3 May 1932 urging him to raise funds for the Revisionist cause.¹¹² He had two leaves of absence, from December 1935 to June 1936, when he visited Palestine, studying in Jerusalem and receiving his rabbinical diploma from Rabbi Kook; and from February to August 1954 to mark the completion of his thirty years of service, when he and Fanny travelled to Israel and Europe. Falk recorded that in 1936 at a special conference of Jewish veterans in Eretz Israel he himself urged the re-establishment of a Jewish unit to secure the safety of the Jewish community in Palestine, the Yishuv.¹¹³

On 7 June 1935 Falk was commissioned as a chaplain to the Australian

109 Keren 2008, 198–9; Keren 2010, 122.

110 Dapin, *Jewish Anzacs*, 151; "Falk Memoirs"; Falk family correspondence; Gluck, "Tribute".

111 Suzanne D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Collins Australia, 2000), 171–2.

112 Jabotinsky Institute, at A1-2/22/1, 1552; Keren 2008.

113 Falk, "Jewish Legion Reminiscences"; Gluck, "Tribute".

Forces. At the end of 1939 he became the Jewish chaplain to the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) established for home defence. In 1942 he was appointed to the Eastern Command. In the Second World War his three sons all served in the Australian forces: David was a gunner in the Australian Imperial Force; Gerald was commissioned in the Armoured Division; Balfour volunteered for the Navy aged eighteen, served as a telegraphist in many theatres of war, and was twice wounded by bomb blasts. All survived the war. A family photograph of Falk and his sons, all in uniform, is captioned "The Fighting Falks".¹¹⁴

During the Second World War Falk also acted as chaplain to Jewish internees from Germany and Austria who from September 1940 were interned in Hay Camp in Australia. Although initially slow to visit them, he worked hard to secure their release. "I would personally vouch for these men who would be an acquisition to the progress and development of Australia." He was, however, criticized for a lack of sympathy for them, as he believed that they should integrate quickly and opposed the establishment of institutions which maintained their own culture.¹¹⁵

After the Second World War Falk acted as a chaplain to the New South Wales Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and became well known for his Anzac Day addresses. For twenty years he also served as a prison chaplain in New South Wales. He built a fine library, which was acquired after his death by the Great Synagogue and preserved as the Rabbi Leib Aisack Falk Memorial Library. He excelled as a bookbinder, cabinetmaker, Hebrew calligrapher, and silversmith, and fashioned the silver lamp which hangs in the Synagogue War Memorial Centre.

Falk suffered latterly from a heart complaint, and died on 6 May 1957, at the age of sixty-eight. A thousand people attended his funeral in Sydney. He was survived by his wife Fanny, their four children, and six grandchildren (three more grandchildren were born later). On 6 August 1967, the United Zionist Revisionist Organization in Australia honoured Falk's memory by selecting his graveside in Sydney as the site for their

114 A. Fabian, "The Jewish Chaplaincy in Australia", *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 6:6 (1969): 352–3; Raymond Apple, "The Jewish Military Chaplaincy in Australia", in *A Portion of Praise: A Festschrift to Honour John S. Levi* (Melbourne, 1997), 240; Dapin, *Jewish Anzacs*, 161, pls. 26, 28; Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle, eds., "Australian Chaplains in WW1", in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981); <http://www.chaplains.gravesecrets.net>; Gluck, "Tribute"; Falk family article (n.d.).

115 John S. Levi, *Rabbi Jacob Danglow: "The Uncrowned Monarch of Australian Jews"* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 228; see also Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 203; information about Hay Camp (undated).

Service of Dedication and Remembrance to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Jewish Legion.¹¹⁶ There is an annual lecture in his name, which I had the honour to deliver in 2023.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

In 1914 there was no model for British Jewish chaplaincy, which Michael Adler had intuitively to develop for himself. When each new Jewish chaplain arrived on the Western Front, Adler attached him to a serving chaplain for a week to observe and learn. For the chaplains who were appointed in the Middle East there was no such training. Nor was there for Falk, whose route to appointment bypassed Adler.

Adler, who remained Senior Jewish Chaplain until 1926, strove to memorialize the wartime contribution of British Jewry. He and other former chaplains reverted to their careers as the religious leaders of Jewish communities, who naturally knew of their wartime service. In his 1922 *British Jewry Book of Honour* Adler wrote of his wartime chaplaincy experiences. Falk also wrote of his experiences, but he did so in an Australian magazine, and his service had been in a theatre of war and a military unit which was outside the experience of all save those who had served in them. So even if anybody in Britain read Falk's memoirs they would not have been viewed as falling within the mainstream narrative of Jewish wartime chaplaincy experience. The Second World War brought its own chaplaincy challenges, including to the three Jewish chaplains who served with the Jewish Independent Infantry Brigade Group, a near all-Jewish unit which soldiered in Italy and Europe in 1944–5, who in all probability were unaware of Falk's analogous experiences a quarter of a century earlier. Falk's experiences therefore form a segment in the history of British Jewish chaplaincy, but one which is discrete and little known. However, there is a growing literature on Jewish military involvement and Jewish chaplaincy in relation to the combatant nations of the First World War.¹¹⁸

116 Jabotinsky Institute, at K1-28.

117 Jonathan M. Lewis, "Australian Jewish Chaplains of the First World War", Ms., 20 Aug. 2023.

118 See Penslar, *Jews and the Military*; Madigan and Reuveni, *Jewish Experience of the First World War*. On Britain see Adler, BJBH; Paula Kitching, *Britain's Jews in the First World War* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2019); Lewis, *Jewish Chaplaincy*. On Germany see Tim Grady, *The German Jewish Soldiers of the First World War in History and Memory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011); Grady, *A Deadly Legacy: German Jews and the Great War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017); Peter C. Appelbaum, *Loyalty Betrayed: Jewish*

In their own terms Falk's achievements were considerable. Without any guidance or instruction he intuited and discharged the duties of a Jewish chaplain in a Jewish unit. Doubtless through his own efforts he mastered the English language to a high and oratorical standard. He acquired a knowledge of English history and an understanding of English ways, and developed a versatility which enabled him to relate as effectively to upper-class British officers as to Russian-born immigrant soldiers. The Keren's conclude their 2008 study thus:

This then, is the tale of a young man who was called, at the age of 28, to serve as chaplain of the first Jewish military formation in the modern era and had to define almost single-handedly a political and ideological frame of reference that would apply to the task at hand: turning displaced Jewish immigrants who lacked not only a military tradition but also a clear sense of national consciousness into a vanguard of Jewish national revival. This frame of reference, derived from national-religious sources, as well as from modern notions of the enlightenment, diverged too much from notions prevailing among Jews in England and in Palestine at the time to be acknowledged and remembered. This study may thus serve as a reminder of an original thinker, scholar, and spiritual leader.¹¹⁹

Chaplains in the German Army during the First World War (London and Portland, OR Vallentine Mitchell, 2014); Appelbaum, *Loyal Sons: Jews in the German Army in the Great War* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2015). On Austro-Hungary and Central Europe see Gerald Lamprecht, Eleanore Lappin-Eppel, and Ulrich Wyrwa, eds., *Jewish Soldiers in the Collective Memory of Central Europe: The Remembrance of World War I from a Jewish Perspective* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2019); Jason Crouthamel et al., eds., *Beyond Inclusion and Exclusion: Jewish Experiences of the First World War in Central Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019). On Russia see Olga Litvak, *Conscription and the Search for Modern Russian Jewry* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006); Yohanan Petrovsky-Stern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted into Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On the USA see Louis Barish, *Rabbis in Uniform: The Story of the American Jewish Military Chaplain* (1962; Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, 2012); Philip S. Bernstein, *Rabbis at War; The CANRA Story* (Waltham, MA: American Jewish Historical Society, 1971); Albert Isaac Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military Chaplains and American History* (1998; New York and London: New York University Press, 2001). On Australia see Harold Boas, *The Australian Y.M.C.A. with the Jewish Soldier of the Australian Imperial Force, together with a General Survey of the Operation of the Australian Jewish Chaplaincy Department and the English Jewish War Services* (London: privately published, 1919); Dapin, *Jewish Anzacs*.

119 Keren 2008, 200.

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