

PALESTINE'S JEWISH WARRIORS

By ALBERT WEINER

ON THE map, Palestine is only a tiny pink spot—pink, because that is the color usually given by the map makers to Great Britain and her empire, though Palestine is, of course, not a British possession but a mandated territory. With its area of 10,429 square miles it is only slightly larger than Maryland, while its population of 1,600,000 is somewhat smaller than that of the Free State. Nevertheless it has been as important in this war for the Allied cause, strategically speaking, as such vast countries as Egypt or Iraq. For Palestine protects one flank of Britain's life-line, the Suez Canal, and the Haifa terminus of the oil line which transmits this war's most desired stuff from Mosul to the Mediterranean Sea. Palestine is the front door of the vital roads leading to the Russian Caucasus, via Turkey, Iraq, and Persia. Last but not least, the country is the link between Europe on the one hand and India and Australia on the other hand, the base for the organization of large-scale military campaigns, the center for the training of servicemen, and the storehouse for much-needed war material.

But geography is not all that counts. It is the people that decide the importance of a country. In this war, it is Palestine's half million Jews who make it an arsenal of democracy. For the Arab majority keeps aloof—excepting a comparatively small number actively aiding the Allies—and excepting the fraction of Arab chauvinist followers of the ex-Mufti, Haj Amin Effendi El Husseine, formerly of Jerusalem, now of Berlin. The presence of the watchful Jews probably foiled the Axis plans of turning Palestine into a second Iraq (where the Premier, Rashid Ali el-Gailani Bey, revolted with the help of the Luftwaffe against the British). And the Yishuv—the Hebrew term denotes the entire Jewish settlement in Palestine—stands in the front ranks among the United Nations as far as its proportional contribution to the war effort is concerned.

Let figures speak. According to the latest available statistics, of the 41,000 Palestine residents serving in the military, naval, and security forces, 30,000 are Jews, the remaining 11,000 being Arabs and members of other ethnic groups. Being twice as numerous as the

Jews, Palestine's Arabs would have had to put 60,000 soldiers in the field to match the Jewish contribution. A total of 23,324 Jewish men and women, and 8,745 Arabs, are with the British forces, 5,790 Jews and 3,818 Arabs with the local auxiliary police service. Of the 23,324 Jews in the British forces, the majority are in the army; 930 are in the Royal Navy, and 1,700 in the Royal Air Force. Three thousand Jewish women are in the Palestinian Auxiliary Territorial Service, the PATS, comparable to our WACS; and 450 in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). Those who are not impressed by these figures should remember that the British Expeditionary Forces in Greece numbered only 30,000, and that during the Libyan campaign there were never more than 45,000 men in action.

But these figures do not tell the entire story. It should be borne in mind that these 30,000 are *volunteers*, as conscription is not feasible in a mandated territory. In proportion to the Jewish population of Palestine, that number would be equivalent to a volunteer army of more than 8,000,000 in the United States! The number of Palestinian Jewish soldiers would be much greater had the Yishuv been permitted to raise a Jewish army serving under Jewish officers and a Jewish flag. Three days before the outbreak of the war Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, sent a letter to Prime Minister Chamberlain, pledging the full cooperation of the Yishuv and declaring that "the Jews stand by Great Britain and will fight on the side of the democracies." In September 1939, no fewer than 136,000 volunteers enrolled

for service at offices set up by the National Jewish Council of Palestine. That registration of people between the ages of eighteen and fifty included 50,000 women, and altogether about eighty-five percent of the adult population. But the British government, trying to appease the Arabs, declined the offer under the flimsy pretext of technical difficulties, such as lack of equipment. Instead, Jews and Arabs alike were permitted to enroll in the British army. Thereupon a peculiar problem developed: the army authorities were unable to cope with the volume of Jewish volunteers, and the young men and women had to wait for an opportunity to join up.

THESE volunteers distinguished themselves on various fronts hundreds or even thousands of miles away from their homeland. A contingent of Palestinians, mostly Jews, was shipped to France in February 1940. At first employed in transport work, they were later armed and were among the troops which covered the retreat of the Second British Expeditionary Force from St. Malo. Palestinian Jews participated in the campaigns in Greece, Crete, Egypt, Abyssinia, Eritrea, Syria, Libya, Tripoli, Tunisia, and Italy. There is no space to reveal more than a few episodes of what Pierre van Paassen ironically termed "the best-kept secret of the war." Of the 1,444 Palestinians who covered the retreat of the British in Greece and were captured by the Nazis, 1,023 were Jews. General Wavell praised his Palestinian units which "performed fine work, preeminently at Sidi Barrani, Soltum, Fort Capuzzo, Bardia, and Tobruk." A Jewish unit, under Commander Osterman-Averni, a Jewish officer, took Bardia and captured 9,000 prisoners. Five hundred Jewish engineers, commanded by Major Felix Liebmann of Tel Aviv, were laying down a minefield at Mechili, in a Libyan desert, when they were attacked by German and Italian tanks and bombers. Ordered by General Montgomery to finish their job and to hold the field at all costs, they repelled the attacks for four weeks. When they were relieved by Free French forces under General Koenig, only forty-three men were left. Twenty German-Jewish refugees were dressed in German uniforms and ordered to

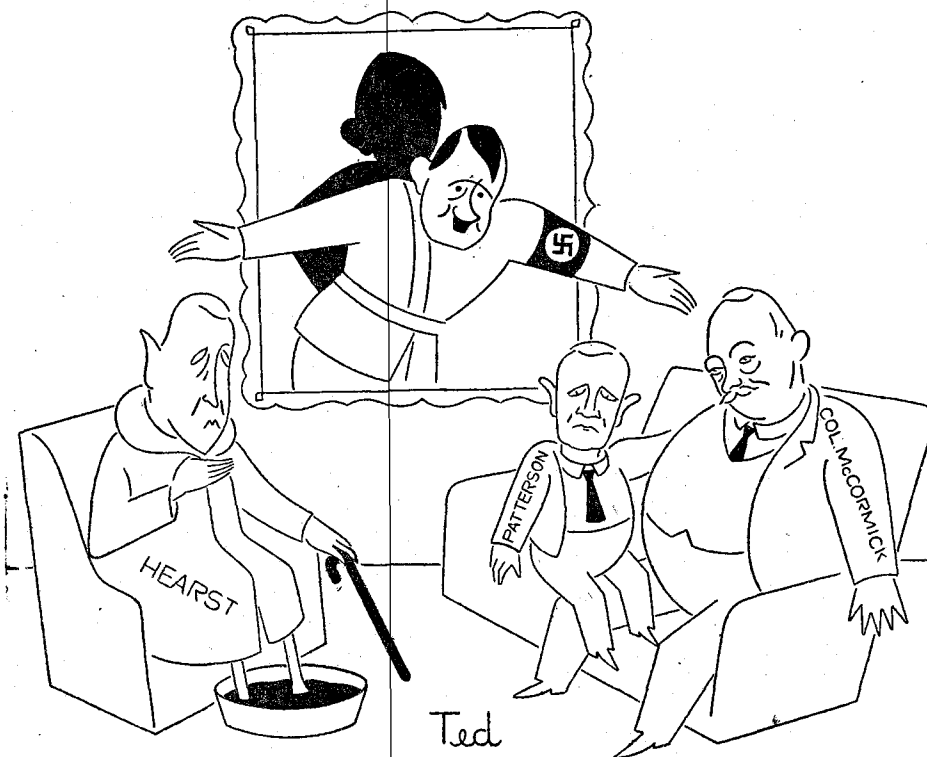
ON NOVEMBER 7 the people made their voices heard and won a great victory. They can win another great victory by raising their voices in behalf of Morris U. Schappes, still unjustly imprisoned. Write or wire Gov. Thomas E. Dewey, at Albany, N. Y. urging him to free Schappes now!

mix with soldiers of the Afrika Korps in order to find out the disposition of Rommel's troops at El Alamein; all but one were discovered and shot after having killed many Nazis themselves. A mixed unit of Jews and Australians saved the hard-pressed French soldiers under General Leclercq, under the blazing African sun. In Eritrea, Palestinians gallantly covered the left flank of the British advance to Keren. Most of the men who composed the "suicide squads" that demolished enemy fortifications night after night and brought back valuable information, thus contributing to the defeat of the Duke of Aosta, were Palestinian Jews.

One of the most colorful figures in this war was the Zionist leader, Frederick Hermann Kisch. Having been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel at the end of the first World War, he was reactivated with the rank of brigadier as chief engineer of Montgomery's Eighth Army. He was killed while leading a party which cleared away the land mines before Bizerte, enabling the Eighth to advance and take the city. Montgomery said of him: "No soldiers in this army served more faithfully and gallantly." During the British advance into Vichy-held Syria in 1941 fifty settlers from Hanita in Northern Palestine were chosen to accompany the Australian vanguard as scouts; they helped the Allies recapture Kuneitra, the key position on the main road from Safed to Damascus. Two Jewish units from Palestine were among the first Allied troops to land in Italy.

Palestinian Jews serve as engineers, officers, sailors, stokers, motor mechanics, and technicians in the Royal Navy. Jewish-owned vessels patrolled the Palestinian shores as minesweepers. When in August 1941, the *SS El Fath* caught fire in an enemy air attack near Famagusta, Cyprus, the four Jewish officers succeeded in saving the freighter. "The Palestinians working with the British Navy," declared Commander Mitchell, naval officer in charge of the Palestinian ports, "were so eager to come to grips with the enemy that one of the greatest difficulties was to impress upon them the importance of work on shore bases and depot ships."

Heroism and self-sacrifice can be shown also in noncombatant military services. After the collapse of France, the Jewish Agency, on British request, furnished 1,500 mechanics and specialists, including drivers, to the highly dangerous service in the Libyan desert.



"Cheer up, pals, I'm still running."

Young PATS handled heavy lorries that carried supplies to the Allied troops. Husky Jewish stevedores, trained in the ports of Tel Aviv and Haifa, unloaded the war material shipped to North Africa. "You are unloading history," Churchill said to them on his visit to Tobruk. Jews constructed roads across the deserts, and airdromes in Egypt. Jewish volunteers prevented the destruction of the oil refineries of Mosul when the Iraq government helped the Luftwaffe make the country a German *Gau*. Jews lugged oil and gasoline from Haifa and Mosul across Syria and Sinai to the sands where Monty's mechanized forces were waiting. The El Alamein defenses were constructed chiefly by Jewish engineering units.

THE story would be incomplete without mention of the hinterland's amazing activities. Working three shifts a day, Palestine's workers have increased the country's production by almost 300 percent since 1941. Over 75,000 workers are now contributing to the war effort in more than 2,000 factories and more than 5,000 handicraft establishments. Palestine's total industrial output for 1943 was valued at 120,000,000 pounds, nearly half of which consisted of strictly military supplies ordered by the British army. Highly skilled Jewish workers produce precision instruments, shoes, bandages, medical supplies,

ambulances, soap, cement, automobile parts, barbed wire, X-ray apparatus, trucks, buses, concrete ships, hand grenades, mines, and other indispensable articles. Their repair shops take care of disabled British and American tanks. Jews extract from the Dead Sea the rich deposits of bromine and potash essential to the manufacture of gunpowder and fertilizers, drugs and chemicals, soaps and glass. Palestinian Jewry presented the Red Army with two tons of bromine products extracted from the Dead Sea.

The heroic exploits of the Red Army have also aroused the deep sympathy of the Yishuv, which consists to a large extent of Russian-born Jews or the children and grandchildren of emigrants from Russia. In 1942 a check for £10,000, collected by the General Federation of Jewish Labor (Histadruth), which comprises more than 120,000 workers, was presented to the USSR. In the same year, organized Jewish labor founded the V-League which aims at "increasing the direct participation of Palestine in the aid given to Russia and the democracies in the common fight against fascism, and to enlist Russia's support for the national and social rehabilitation of the Jewish people in Palestine." More recently, the V-League gave to Russia a fleet of Palestine-built, well-equipped ambulances which were driven to Teheran by Jewish chauffeurs.

American Choice: Nov. 7, 1944

My people laugh, laugh deep in the sound of war.
My people breathe, breathe deep in the midst of grieving.
Sharp as the anguish, deep is the song at the core.

I tell you, I was among them, proud at the news.
I say this joy was a terrible sword at the enemy.
I learned: no matter the grief, my people choose
the life of their believing.

I learned: no matter the cost in song or blood,
no matter the crush in heart or the crash in wing,
my people choose, yes, yes, my people choose
tomorrows that sing.

Think deep. Think fast, America. We've taken
the wider blue of sky, broad rivers flowing
over a wedding of lands, and the earth child growing
tall by the song of this union. O My Land,

this is a choice to build a dream upon.
This is the freedom road. Hold on, Hold on.

LOLA PERGAMENT.

Behind the soldiers and industrial workers stand the men and women who feed them. Since the outbreak of the war, the Yishuv has doubled its agricultural output as well as the area under irrigation. All men and women not engaged in fighting joined the agricultural army. Since September 1939, more than forty new food producing settlements have been established. Prior to the war, Palestine depended largely on imports. But when shipping was curtailed on account of Axis U-boats, Palestine enormously increased the output of its wheat-fields and vegetable gardens, its fisheries, and poultry farms. Significantly, it was little Palestine that rushed to the aid of big Syria by sending her food supplies immediately after her occupation by the Allies. Experts believe that if Palestine continues expanding her agriculture, she might be able some day to export food to starving Europe—that is, if the restrictions on the sale of land to Jews, imposed by the infamous White Paper of 1939, are eliminated.

HIGHLY respectable too is Palestine's contribution to scientific warfare. Many of the preparations, including

mapping and surveying, which led to the Allied victory in North Africa, were made by Palestinian experts. The Hebrew University placed its entire medical and scientific staffs, as well as its marvelously-equipped laboratories, at the disposal of the British. Army courses are offered in tropical and subtropical diseases, army surgery, and camp sanitation. An important discovery—the use of animal tissue extract for the healing of wounds—was made in Palestine. The Sieff Institute of Industrial Chemical Research at Rehoboth produces acetone and butyl alcohol by applying fermentation to a part of Palestine's large unexported citrus crop. Palestine produces synthetic Vitamin C and much-needed drugs such as anti-malarials and hypnotics to replace the Dutch East Indies quinine, unavailable since the Japanese occupation.

In a sense the offer made by Weizmann five years ago was recently accepted by the British government. In a speech in the House of Commons on Sept. 28, 1944, Churchill declared: "The British army in Italy includes also Palestine units. Here I would mention the announcement that the government

has decided to accede to the request of the Jewish Agency for Palestine that the Jewish brigade groups should be formed to take part in the active operations. I know there is a vast number of Jews serving with our forces and the American forces throughout all the armies, but it seems to me indeed appropriate that a special Jewish unit of that race which has suffered indescribable torment from the Nazis should be represented as a distinct formation among the forces gathered for their final overthrow. I have no doubt that they will not only take part in the struggle but also in the occupation which will follow."

Palestine's importance will not be ended when this war is over. At the peace conference, it will have to be heard like other groups and nations that fought the fascist aggressors. Palestine will have to be opened to thousands of homeless men and women, unable or unwilling to return to their former homes, just as during the war the country received Polish-Jewish children, stranded at Teheran, and thousands of others who managed to make their way over the Black Sea or the Mediterranean Sea. Palestine's well-organized labor movement will undoubtedly be a leading factor in the progress of the Middle East and carry further that organization of Arab workers it has undertaken during the last few decades. Her numerically strong liberal and leftist elements will seek contact with similar groups in England and the United States, as well as closer ties with the Soviet Union. Needless to say, the Yishuv will fight unceasingly for the abolition of the ill-famed White Paper of 1939, that child of appeasement born during the Chamberlain regime, and in this fight it will have allies in all countries. In every phase of the work of building an enduring peace Palestine will want to play its part, striving to be a model state in slowly changing Asia. As a pamphlet, *After the Victory*, published by the American Zionist Emergency Council, summed it up: "The character of the Jewish homeland is the guarantee of its unique value in the creation of the network of democracy which must be woven about the world. Jewish Palestine belongs naturally to the brotherhood of progressive communities which must become the guarantors of our civilization. In this all-important respect the creation of the Jewish homeland unites the need of the Jewish people with the need of the world."